

database marketing

UK CHANGES FOR THE BETTER ONCE MORE

James Lawson gives latest software incarnation the thumbs up

KEEPING IT CLEAN

Data hygiene remains a major challenge for UK businesses

TIME TO OPEN UP?

Is it time marketers were more open about the data they gather and what they do with it?

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UKChanges for the better once again

Right at the forefront of online data cleansing and list purchase for the last decade, UKChanges Online is raising the bar once more with its latest incarnation, discovers **James Lawson**.

Over the last decade, online cleansing and list purchase have moved from curiosities to indispensable tools, and competition in this part of the marketing services sector is fierce. With UKChanges Online (UKCO) right at the forefront over the last decade, this month we cast a glance over a beta version of its latest incarnation. Could it nudge that online marketing services bar a little higher?

CONTINUE TO INNOVATE

The last main upgrade offered a superb new interface, revamped cleansing tools and the ability to select and buy data. The three years since our last review in 2007 have brought a number of other changes, chiefly in hosting but before we go into that, let's consider what the Clean and Supply services currently offer.

The cleansing tools first seen in 2007 wiped the floor with the competition when it came to

ease of use, and haven't yet been bettered. Slick graphics and excellent functions like the ability to set the hierarchy, running order and confidence levels of multiple suppression and enhancement runs still set it apart from the pack.

Cleaning work is set up and monitored from the Job Manager, and there is an abundance of wizards to aid users. Little has changed here this year apart from the availability of Experian's goneaway suppression file Absolute Movers.

Under the Supply tab, there's the Business Select business universe plus the Edited Electoral Roll, which will shortly be joined by the new LifeSketch database. Users can select from these using standard national selection criteria or employ geographic selection tools to find regional data. From June, it will also be possible to append emails plus lifestyle attributes from the LifeSketch database.

The main change in this beta version is the ability to host a database, though this bald

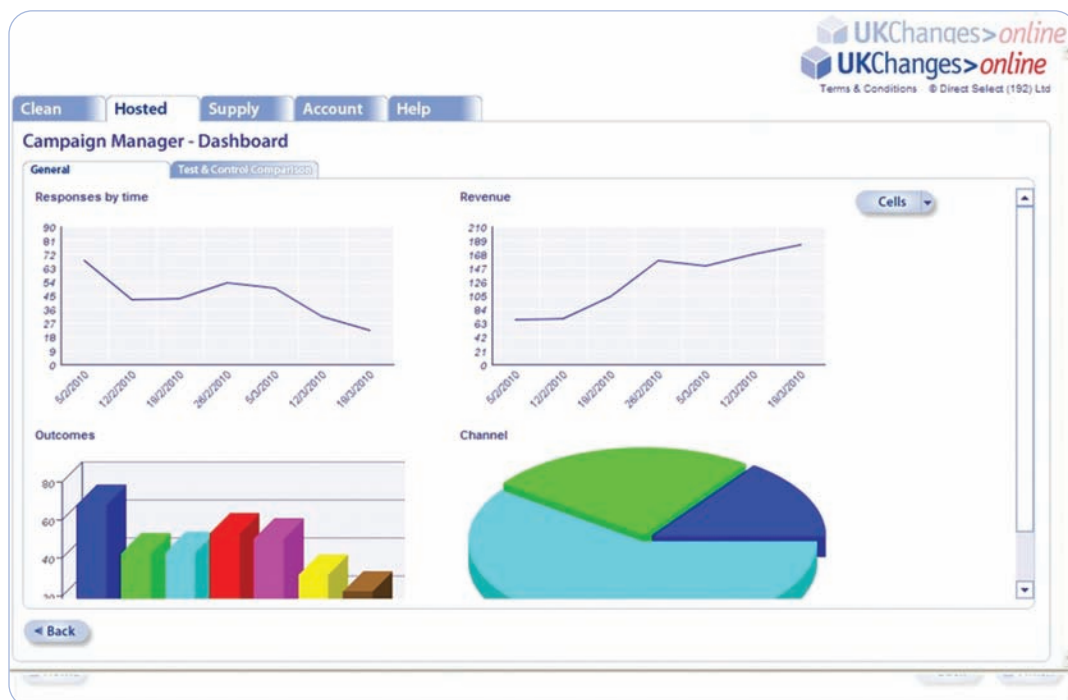
description rather underplays the range of what's now possible. The first task is to upload your own data to the site employing a slightly more advanced version of the simple autofield mapping used to bring in a file for cleansing. In the June release, the system will also be able to automatically recognise the Excel, Access and CSV file formats supported.

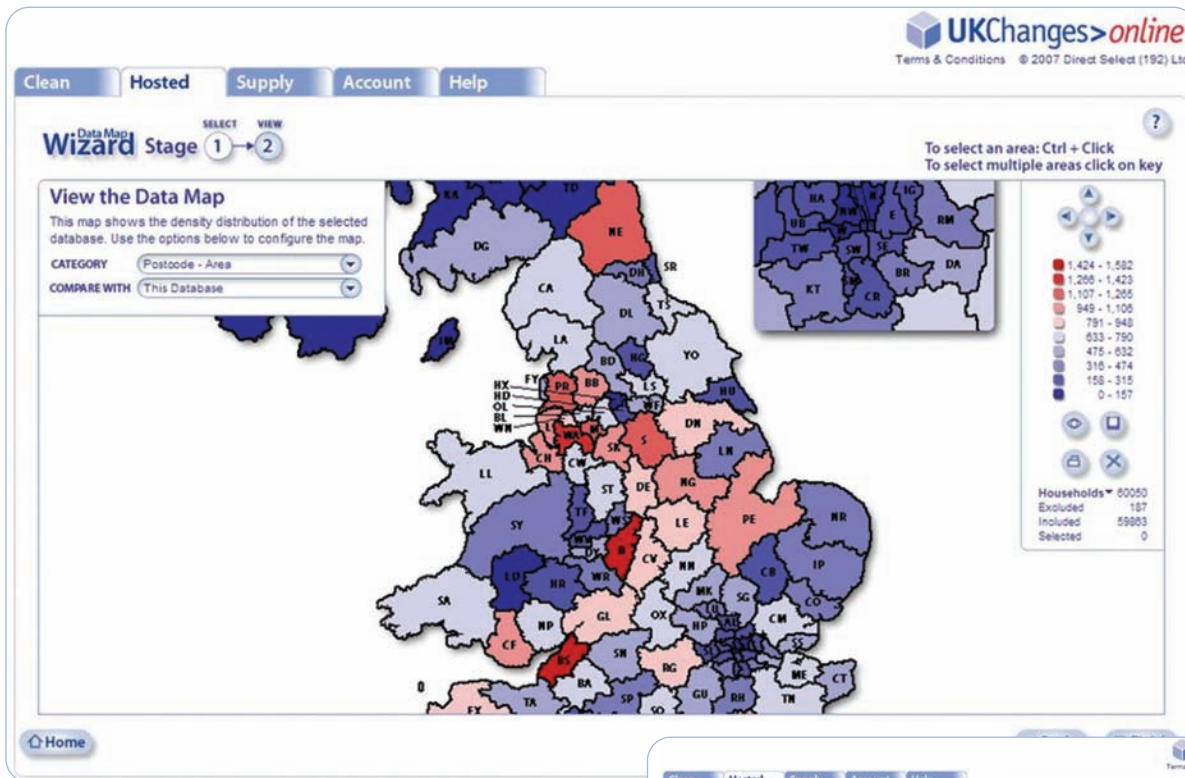
Once a database is in place, there are a number of options from running an initial data audit to jumping in to start viewing and interrogating the data. As a default, the system displays the first 15 or so records but this can quickly be changed using the simple controls provided, and you can quickly step through the fields to inspect your data. In the current version, it's not possible to go in and edit fields directly as you might do offline.

To build new views and extracts, simply fire up the Wizard then drag and drop to select the fields of interest. Then you move to the selection manager, or "restrict the database" as the vendors term it. There's reasonable scope and sufficient operators on offer to build your query in plain language, with no need to delve into the dreaded SQL. From there, you can begin to visualise and select the data extract you have defined. All views and extracts can be saved for future use.

STAR TURN

The RFV cube (or any other kind of 3D cross tabs in future versions) is the star turn, combining easy-to-use functions with superbly-realised interactive graphics. Dragging the cursor over each cell gives an instant count of the customers within each one as well as the criteria for the current cell. You can select and count multiple cells and then pull the data from them into





Wizard idea: the drag and drop wizard makes selecting and visualising your data easy and quick.

an extract.

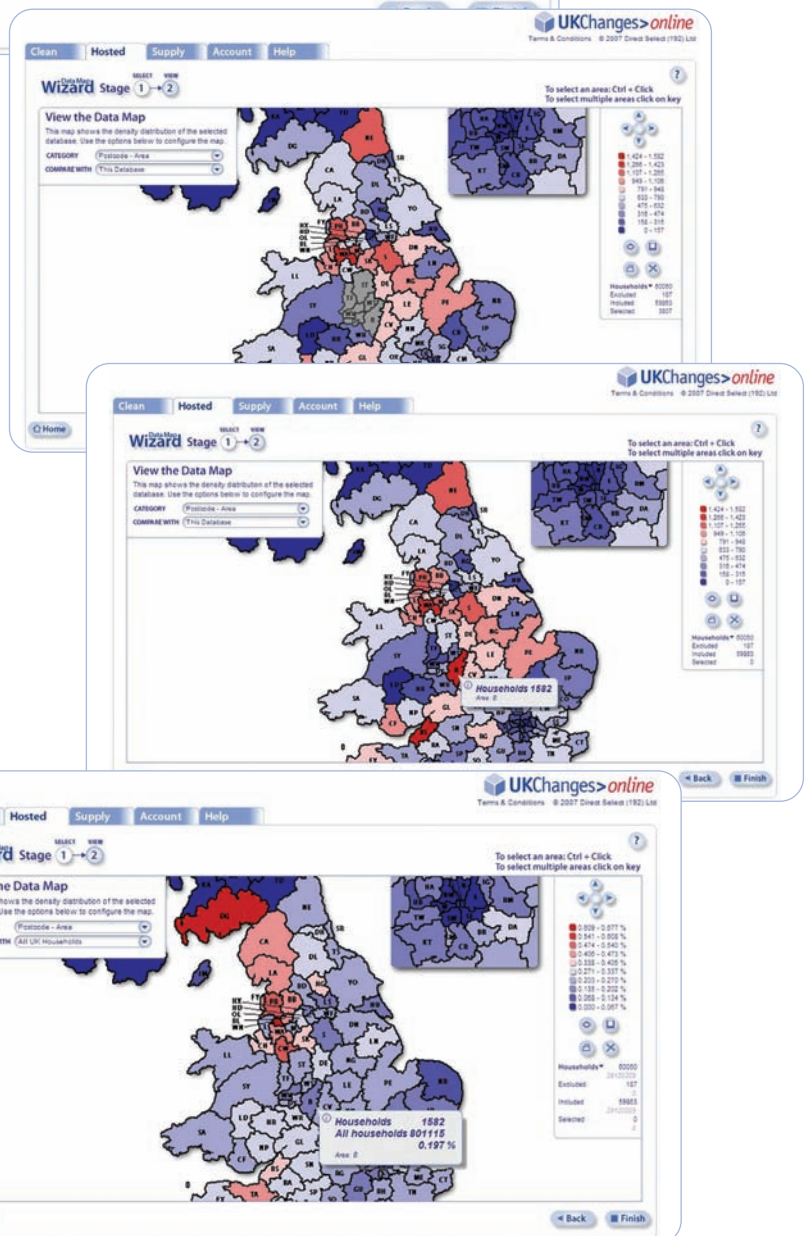
Users can also split the cube up into a series of 2D cross tabs, again beautifully visualised by the system, or into other configurations as desired. A key on the right links the cell colours to the bands of customer numbers they represent as well as an overview of the cube's stats, such as the total number of customers included; the band ranges can be edited if desired too. From here you can save out different views of the cube or, having selected the cells of interest, save or download the customer data within them.

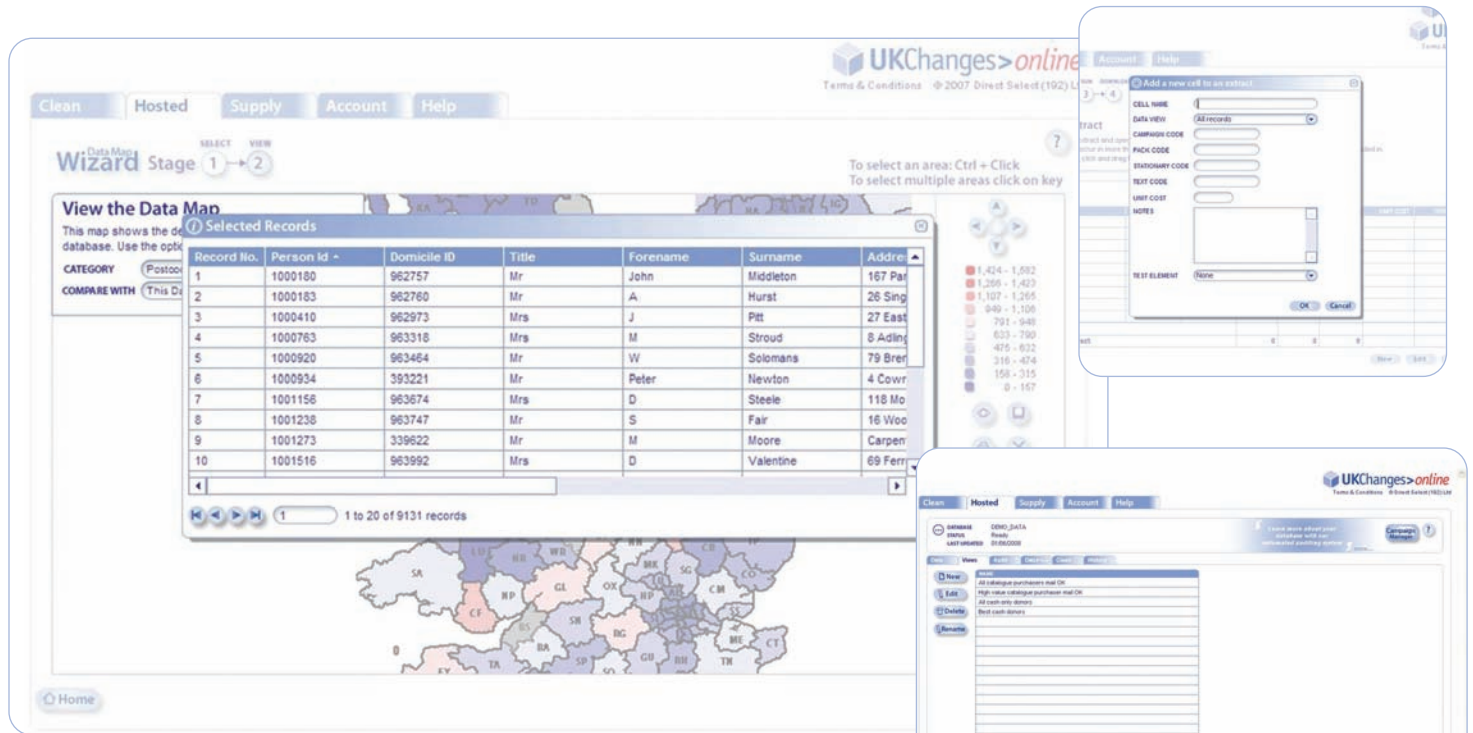
The mapping tool is also well thought-out, with a query and selection process similar to that described above. You can display groups down to postcode area level (more detailed maps are coming in future versions), and a handy inset screen provides a permanent zoom view of the zone around the cursor. You can view the density of a variable (for example, income or number of customers) and also compare it to the UK average figure for that area.

Just as with the cube image, mousing over each area on the map gives a count of the customers in that region, and it is possible to select multiple areas simultaneously. Once again, you can pull out the selected data as an extract. Other visualisation includes decent pie and bar charts, again with their own set-up wizard.

The other standout upgrade is the Campaign Manager. Within this, you can create and manage extracts taken from your main database using standard items like pack codes, stationary codes, control cells and so on. Campaign codes are written back to the database while all extracts and campaigns can be accessed via the list within the Campaign Manager. It's completely logical and straightforward with no extraneous functions.

Campaigns are stored and accessed hierarchically, and it's possible to enter and report on other campaign-related data such as cost, volumes and ROI. These can be tabulated and visualised just like any >>>





other data and displayed in the Campaign Manager dashboard.

It's also possible to submit an extract from the hosted database or the whole database itself for cleansing. Sadly, it's not possible quite yet to employ profiles taken from hosted data to use as a basis for lookalike selection and purchase in the Supply tab, but this is apparently top of the development list and may well appear in the June release.

Other upgrades for the June release not covered here include a new "LifeSketch" consumer lifestyle database to supplement the Edited ER, plus a range of tweaks that will be made to the Host and Campaign options following initial user evaluation and feedback. You will soon be able to upload and add records to a hosted database while multi-file dedupe is also a priority (you can already dupe out data purchases against a hosted file), plus email broadcasting and a digital printing option is to follow late this year.

REACHING NIRVANA

The vendors have always subscribed to the

"Clean, Host, Supply" ethic and this version of the site takes them very close to it. The services on offer are truly impressive and change the game for online services.

It's not just about pre-campaign cleansing anymore, it's an integrated database marketing tool now. The upgrades are obviously derived from user requests and all the developments appear to be have been designed by the sure hand of a long-time data user.

This site is not a direct competitor to the likes of Apteco and is not intended to be: it gives database marketers as much as they need to manage data-related processes within relatively straightforward campaigns with the minimum of fuss.

With Wizards helping them through every stage, even a beginner shouldn't be dissuaded as long as they have a pinch of data savvy about them. Looks like UKChanges just raised that bar a couple of feet higher.

