



Information Builders Adds to Its Stack

New features target operational BI

by Mark Smith | 6/20/06 | Article ID: M06-28 | Article Type: Monitor | © 2006 Ventana Research

Summary

At its annual user summit in April 2006, Information Builders announced several new WebFOCUS capabilities that differentiate the product suite and improve its value for operational business intelligence (BI) application deployment. The company introduced Power Painter, a report creation tool for power users, as well as announcing the integration of WebFOCUS, its BI platform, and iWay, its service-oriented architecture (SOA) middleware. It also discussed WebFOCUS integration with Google's enterprise search appliances and with Microsoft PowerPoint and introduced Active Reports, a new report type that supports interactive analysis while disconnected from the WebFOCUS server. Ventana Research believes these technologies should prove valuable for Information Builders' customers and will help position it in future battles with the other leading BI vendors.

Assessment

At its 2006 user summit, Information Builders announced a number of new technologies and capabilities intended to increase the value it can offer to organizations intending to deploy business intelligence capabilities for operations. The company showcased Active Reports, a Web page-based technology for disconnected analysis, improved integration with Microsoft PowerPoint, integration with Google's enterprise search products, further integration between WebFOCUS and iWay to support business processes, and Power Painter, a new report development tool.

Now part of WebFOCUS 7.1.3, Active Reports enables end users to analyze report data while working offline. Users can perform sort, rank, filter, aggregate, subtotal, chart, export and other functions without being connected to a WebFOCUS server. Ventana Research believes that to the extent Active Reports extends WebFOCUS's capability to serve as an extranet business intelligence platform, it will be valuable in making reports and report analysis available to infrequent users of BI technology.

WebFOCUS 7.1.3 also provides new levels of integration with Microsoft Office. As with Actuate's e.Spreadsheet, users can generate reports as spreadsheet files that include data, formulas and formatting. WebFOCUS also now can generate reports as PowerPoint files. PowerPoint pages can include tables, charts and images as well as text. Charts also can be changed and reformatted later. Using WebFOCUS, a user can not only create new PowerPoint files but also embed additional pages into pre-existing files. Ventana Research believes this capability will prove valuable for information workers who create, modify and use PowerPoint files as a key medium of communication.

At the summit, Information Builders also reported further on its efforts to integrate WebFOCUS with Google's corporate search appliances. The Intelligence Search capability indexes not only existing WebFOCUS reports but also any data accessible through iWay data adapters. By way of iWay, the Google search engine will update its indexes to include transactions as they occur and other transient data passed through an organization's information infrastructure. No other BI vendor currently provides such real-time search indexing capability. Ventana Research believes that enterprise search of BI reports will offer value but could impose challenges as well, since organizations will need to ensure that invalid or obsolete documents and reports are not indexed to prevent the basing of decisions on invalid data.

Information Builders also introduced its version of BI and business process management (BPM) integration at the summit. Named Process-Driven Business Intelligence, the integration feature can generate WebFOCUS BI objects as part of a process defined and run within the iWay SOA middleware. Reports, report components such as tables and charts, and analytic interaction controls can be imbedded into screens generated by the process. Screens can include data entry forms also, and WebFOCUS handles the data capture. Alerts in the form of reports can be e-mailed. With this integration, organizations can create rich operational BI applications that manage both information and task flows.

Available in June as part of WebFOCUS 7.6, the Power Painter report development tool is intended to simplify for WebFOCUS power users the creation of static, parameterized and WebFOCUS Active reports. It uses a graphical drag-and-drop report layout and query assembly. It runs as a browser-based application, was designed using Asynchronous JavaScript and XML (AJAX) and requires no ActiveX or Java objects. Since Power Painter runs in the Firefox and Internet Explorer Web browsers, it makes WebFOCUS accessible to users who aren't skilled in programming or BI development.

Market Impact

Each of these new capabilities will help organizations deploy operationally targeted business intelligence. However, Information Builders will need to articulate the value of these recently added features in business terms if it is to grow in a maturing BI market against several larger competitors. It will be especially challenging to convince organizations that have purchased one of the leading BI platforms as their internal BI technology standard. However, for specific operational BI applications where these unique features are required and a standard platform fails to deliver them, IBI can provide significant value. We expect IBI to continue to grow its business by focusing on industrial-strength operational BI application deployments.

Recommendation

Operational BI application projects that require significant programmability, extranet deployment or support of large-scale user communities should invite Information Builders to conduct proof-of-concept demonstrations. Ventana Research recommends Information Builders' technology for organizations looking to integrate Microsoft Office and business process-driven approaches where interacting with data split across the enterprise is a critical requirement.

Related Research Notes:

[Information Builders Announces WebFocus 7](#)

Integration of iWay Technology Tightens BI Suite and Targets Operational BI

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