

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES GARY

# Setting Enterprise Standards

**I**n an era of increasing scrutiny into information technology investments, business leaders are continually challenged to eliminate overlapping functionality and reduce the amount of money spent on vendor licenses and training. CIOs want to consolidate their software assets, a trend that is encouraging the adoption of corporate standards throughout nearly every sector of the industry.

Business intelligence (BI) software is a good example. Until recently, activities such as reporting and online analytical processing (OLAP) were treated in a decentralized manner. Each department figured out



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its own way of doing things, leading to a great variety of reporting products within most organizations. Today's CIOs are working to change this situation as they drive a uniform BI strategy throughout the enterprise. As Gartner analyst Howard Dresner points out, rather than supporting many discrete tools and technologies and inconsistent approaches to reporting, these companies are pursuing consolidation and standardization of tools.<sup>1</sup>

When properly deployed, enterprise business intelligence and reporting tools can deliver information in a variety of ways to many types of people, both inside and outside the enterprise. Unfortunately, not all business

**Consolidation  
Tops the CIO  
Agenda for  
Reporting  
and Business  
Intelligence  
Deployments**



intelligence environments can deliver. For example, some products can't work with many data sources, or they require developers to populate local data marts and cubes before users can analyze information. These tools are acceptable for small numbers of users, but become unwieldy as the user base grows, both in terms of the required hardware and the necessary support personnel.

"BI is becoming a standard category, just like CRM and ERP," says Gerald D. Cohen, Information Builders president and CEO. "The requests for proposals we're seeing verify this trend. CIOs don't let users go out and buy whatever ERP or CRM tools they need. They enforce standards. They are starting to do the same for BI."

There are an endless number of architectural approaches to BI, and each approach could be considered correct if it delivers important information to a segment of the business community. However, some architectures, designs and topologies deliver significantly greater value and more efficiency, despite constant changes in business needs.

According to Cohen, an effective BI environment must support broad data access, enterprise-scale reporting, ad hoc queries, pixel-perfect publishing and real-time information delivery, together with portal integration—and all of this has to be manageable with tools to automate these activities.

Gartner recommends that companies establish a Business Intelligence Competency Center to help set the enterprise agenda—a cross-functional team that addresses the reporting needs of each department as well as the enterprise as a whole. Through this approach, business users not only define and prioritize their strategy for BI applications, but also better understand the need for a robust IT infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>



Learning from the Pioneers

**Lockheed Martin** standardized on Information

## Measuring Success

Success with BI initiatives is predicated on the fast and efficient exchange of information. How will you know when you get there?

1. Employees will be self-sufficient in asking and answering difficult questions.
2. Managers will be able to understand where the business stands and manage it proactively, not reactively.
3. Business partners will be able to perform as if they were internal employees.
4. Customers will find new value through direct access to information about your products and services.

Builders' WebFOCUS for its potential to deliver self-service reports to a large and diverse user base. According to Lockheed's Pam Hunt, WebFOCUS is easy to use, architecturally efficient, and cost-effective for wide-scale deployment. Users throughout Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control are taking advantage of the comprehensive WebFOCUS reporting capabilities (see cover story).

**Ameritas** Acacia Companies chose WebFOCUS as its corporate standard based on the software's comprehensive capabilities for data mining, analysis, information delivery, and self-service presentation to internal and external users. "We wanted to obtain easier access to information about our operation, our products, and our customers and make that information accessible not only to IT professionals, but to business users," says Paul Huebner, senior vice president and chief information officer at this insurance and financial services firm. "We also wanted a tool that could extract vital business information from various data sources and either load it into data marts or present it directly. Thirdly, we wanted to create an efficient and secure information architecture to share information with partners and customers over the Web. WebFOCUS offered strong capabilities in all three of these areas."

Ameritas also considered business intelligence technology from Business Objects, Cognos and Crystal Reports, but these reporting environments did not have the breadth of capabilities the company needed for data access and information delivery. "WebFOCUS appeared to be a great way to improve productivity for our reporting, data queries and other business intelligence activities, especially given our multitude of data sources," Huebner adds.

Today, Ameritas is using WebFOCUS to create several reporting applications for internal and external users, such as a self-service application that streamlines billing, enrollment and reconciliation processes for its group insurance customers and an intranet application for comparing monthly budgets with actual expenditures.

**US Filter**, a \$4 billion company with hundreds of offices, plants and factories throughout North America, chose Information Builders as its corporate standard because of its ability to create a user-friendly reporting environment that can access and analyze information from multiple data sources in an efficient, straightforward manner. According to Michaeline Megahan, a project manager in the Business Systems Development and Integration Group at US Filter, the company's initial motivation was to simplify financial reporting for users of JD Edwards accounting systems.

"In order to satisfy our financial reporting requirements, we need software tools that can pull data from multiple business centers, integrate it into a common format, and send it to many different recipients," says Megahan. "We selected WebFOCUS because it has excellent financial reporting capabilities and can work with many different data types. It is more flexible than the other report writers on the market, and it's so easy to use that our business users can create their own reports. It has all the capabilities we need to satisfy our data access, reporting, and information-delivery requirements." WebFOCUS is delivering dramatic

productivity boosts for US Filter financial professionals tasked with ad hoc and monthly reporting tasks.

WebFOCUS helps product managers and business analysts at **Verizon** easily analyze budget, forecast and revenue information about the company's services, from basic phone service to 3-Way Calling to Caller ID. "After merging with GTE, we had product line managers all over the country who needed to access our Product Data Management System (PDMS)," says Diane Benedict, PDMS systems administrator. "WebFOCUS made the job much easier by providing a complete BI toolset that addresses our need for complex reporting and analysis. Our financial users get their reports much faster—and they have a great deal of flexibility at their disposal. They can specify input parameters, pick the output format, and choose among lots of options for the kinds of data they wish to see, and how they wish to see it."

### Adopting an Enterprise View

As these innovative customers have learned, it is important to understand how the technology components of a BI and data warehouse architecture fit together to provide enduring value and agility. Gartner analysts believe enterprises can increase their probability of success by treating BI and data warehousing as strategic issues. This requires a focus that goes beyond the technology. Methodology, organization, skills and architecture issues must come to the forefront.<sup>3</sup>

What features top the wish lists of the companies that are defining BI standards?

- Support for many types of reporting, including ad hoc reporting, structured reporting, parametric reporting, scheduled reporting and financial reporting
- Embedded OLAP tools
- Direct support for external users
- A thin-client desktop that provides full-client reporting functionality
- Broad database access
- A high degree of scalability
- Cost effective licensing options

IT decision makers should not be distracted by flashy features and narrow functionality. "Although criteria may vary from one enterprise to another, it's important to adopt a well-rounded approach," Dresner says. "Using business and user requirements as a compass, you should consider not only BI features and functions, but also architecture and design, the complement to existing/planned investments, available technical support, global coverage, vendor financial health, and licensing and pricing."<sup>4</sup>

On the surface, most business intelligence products look the same. Vendor demonstrations reveal showy portals, colorful reports, integrated spreadsheets, and the latest data visualization techniques. But take a closer look at these BI tools and you will discover significant differences under the covers.

"All of the BI products on the market can create basic

reports very easily," admits Cohen. "But once you move up the complexity curve, the differences become apparent. Few tools are powerful enough to handle those applications at the higher end of the complexity scale." Cohen believes that's where WebFOCUS shines, since it allows users at all levels to easily and rapidly generate even the most complex reports.

### 3D Scalability

Enterprise-scale BI tools must be able to scale effectively to minimize hardware and administrative requirements. This is a product of the architecture. While most BI vendors boast about their thin-client orientation, they can't

## Key Business Drivers: The "Three Cs" of Business Intelligence

Three key factors are driving today's organizations to adopt strategic Business Intelligence applications:

**Competitive Advantage** – The effective use of crucial corporate information can deliver a significant competitive advantage. For example, companies can leverage their data to provide value-added services that can improve customer satisfaction and retention. Additionally, they can generate revenue and boost profits by offering fee-based information services.

**Compliance** – New legislation such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act has brought financial reporting and forecasting to the forefront. At the same time, industry-specific regulations are imposing unique demands for reporting in just about every sector. For example, financial institutions must comply with an ever-increasing number of regulatory mandates that impact both customer and capital information – such as the USA Patriot Act requirement to gather customer information, and the Basel II directive to track capital adequacy across the enterprise.

**Cost** – there are compelling monetary reasons for consolidating information systems. At most large companies, different business units own different BI tools, and each product was acquired in response to individual needs. Corporate mergers and acquisitions result in even greater overlapping functionality, which is why many large companies have multiple reporting products and thousands of applications. It's expensive to maintain all these different business intelligence products. Each type of application generally requires its own server, along with all the associated costs for hardware, maintenance and updates.

always hold up under the duress of wide-scale deployments. The best BI tools use a Java-based approach with non-persistent connections. This way, additional users don't add to the memory footprint, and concurrency is not impacted if somebody forgets to turn off their browser.

Cohen believes an enterprise-caliber business Intelligence tool must be scalable along three dimensions:

- The number of users supported by a single application
- The number of user types (i.e. developers, power users, analysts, business users, etc.) whose needs can be met by the solution
- The number of types of applications that can be created with the BI environment and supported by a single server



Gartner's Howard Dresner concurs. "As BI filters through all levels of these enterprises, BI solutions will have to scale efficiently and

effectively to very large communities, with extreme ease-of-use, supporting many users with varying levels of sophistication," he says.

### Independent Verification

Ventana Research conducted a six-month study to determine the total cost of ownership (TCO) for scaling various business intelligence environments, as deployed in real-world situations. Information Builders beat all participants in the categories of predefined reporting and parameterized reporting on both Windows and UNIX platforms. The Ventana Research study also underscored Information Builders' affordability and ability to scale across a broad range of scenarios, from 1,000 to 10,000 users.<sup>5</sup>

"Information Builders scored first in three of the 10,000-user scenarios and second in six of the 10,000-user scenarios," says Cohen. "If you're going to choose a standard, you want a product that is technically superior and that is cost-effective. You also need a product with a lot of depth. We have customers who have created thousands of applications, and applications that support hundreds of thousands of users."

### Leveraging Existing Assets

To be considered as a corporate standard, a BI product must enable casual business users to access and analyze information using familiar tools such as e-mail, search engines, Web browsers and spreadsheets. Not only does this ensure that hardware and administrative costs are kept to a minimum, but it reduces training costs as well, since users don't need to contend with a unique client-side software environment.

Additionally, with the right data-access technology, users can establish real-time links to production data sources and avoid the costly process of extracting, modeling, and loading data into separate reporting databases.

Finally, the BI vendor should have a consulting organization that can provide direction regarding initial deployment, ongoing maintenance and expansion of applications and systems. This includes analyzing each customer's business objectives and helping them meet their stated objectives—on time and within budget.

"Doing more with less has been a hallmark of enterprise strategies during the recent economic downturn," concludes Dresner. "Enterprises have attempted to meet their BI needs with fewer products from fewer vendors. As enterprises limit their use of tools to a manageable few, broad-scale deployment of BI capabilities will become more feasible. As such, large enterprises will likely deploy many enterprise BI suites and reporting tools to a growing number of constituents during 2004."<sup>6</sup>

## WebFOCUS The Corporate Standard

Information Builders sets the standard for enterprise Business Intelligence and reporting. The WebFOCUS product is a fully integrated suite that enables customers to make fast decisions based on complete information. Information Builders provides more access to more data sources and runs on more platforms than any other BI vendor.

**Ease of migration** – WebFOCUS is optimized for native deployment in dozens of different operating environments.

**Resource efficiency** – With WebFOCUS, no client-side software is required, simply a standard Web browser with no plug-ins.

**No license fee surprises** – WebFOCUS server software is licensed on the designated CPU. Additional user licenses are only required for domain-based reporting or individual security.

**More effective user capabilities** – A parameter-driven reporting environment allows the bulk of the user population to easily generate complex reports while power users create customized, ad hoc reports.

**Ability to leverage existing knowledge and investments** – WebFOCUS customers can take advantage of a worldwide service organization for local technical support, training classes, and sales support.

1 Dresner, Howard J. et al., "The Business Intelligence Competency Center: An Essential Business Strategy," (107134, 29 May 2002).

2 Ibid.

3 Strange, Kevin and Friedman, Ted, "Making BI and Data Warehousing Strategic: The Key Issues," (LE-19-4691, 6 March 2003).

4 Dresner, Howard J., "Client Issues for Enterprise Business Intelligence Suites," (K-21-0534, 16 October 2003).

5 "Business Intelligence Total Cost of Ownership Benchmark," Ventana Research, September 2003.

6 Dresner, Howard J., "Client Issues for Enterprise Business Intelligence Suites," (K-21-0534, 16 October 2003).