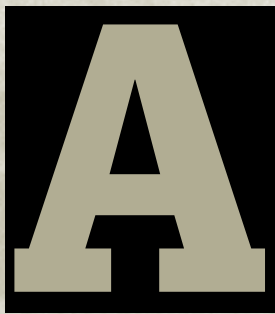


BY DAVID BAUM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD KELLY

US Filter Standardizes on WebFOCUS for Corporate BI Initiatives



As public corporations strive to comply with increasingly stringent financial reporting requirements, they must be prepared to provide timely and accurate information to many types of users. Financial professionals in particular—from CFOs to controllers to analysts—need to be able to access and analyze real-time information from multiple business units to obtain a complete picture of corporate performance.

The job of satisfying these reporting requirements often falls on the shoulders of information technology (IT) professionals, who typically rely on business intelligence software to lend cohesion to a diverse information landscape. The IT pros at US Filter are a prime example.

“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,” explains Michaeline Megahan, a project manager in the Business Systems Development and Integration Group at US Filter, a \$4 billion company with hundreds of offices, plants and factories throughout North America. “We selected Information Builders’ 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.”

Narrowing the Options

As North America’s largest water company, US Filter provides water services to commercial, industrial, municipal and residential customers—

Complex
ERP
Reporting
Made
Simple
with
WebFOCUS
Financial
Reporting
Platform

SNAPSHOT

ORGANIZATION: US Filter, a \$4 billion company with hundreds of offices, plants and factories throughout North America

THE CHALLENGE: Simplify financial reporting for users of JD Edwards accounting systems while building a common reporting platform for many types of users

THE STRATEGY: Create a user-friendly reporting environment that can access and analyze information from multiple General Ledgers in an efficient, straightforward manner

THE RESULTS: Dramatic boosts in productivity for financial professionals tasked with ad hoc and monthly reporting tasks

INFORMATION BUILDERS SOLUTION: WebFOCUS, Consulting



Standardizing on BI
Michaeline Megahan believes that WebFOCUS has all the capabilities US Filter needs to satisfy their data access, reporting and information-delivery requirements.

from residential bottled water services to industrial wastewater treatment systems. In the wake of numerous corporate acquisitions, the company depends on lots of different enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, including Oracle, JD Edwards, Baan, and SAP—comprising about 55 different General Ledgers. This complicates things for Megahan and the 15 other IT pros in her group, who are tasked with helping US Filter's business units with reporting, application development, and systems integration projects.

"We like WebFOCUS because of its comprehensive data-access architecture and its ability to easily create self-service reporting applications for the Web," explains David Spencer, a decision support analyst at US Filter. "We have many different business entities that rely on established tools and procedures for reporting. Going forward, we hope to simplify this situation by enforcing the use of WebFOCUS as our corporate reporting standard."

Boosting Productivity for Analysts

While most ERP systems come with their own embedded financial reporting tools, they are not always adequate for US Filter's needs. Soon after they selected WebFOCUS to develop standard operating reports, US Filter purchased the WebFOCUS Financial Reporting Platform to help them with specific reporting needs related to their JD Edwards financial systems. "Financial users in my division have a lot of trouble with the JD Edwards reporting tool, which is not very user-friendly and not a robust financial reporting tool," Megahan says.

"It used to take several analysts 10 hours or more to create the required reports at the end of each month," Megahan recalls. "Now the entire data capture and reporting process is automated with the WebFOCUS Financial Reporting Platform."

The WebFOCUS Financial Reporting Platform empowers users to generate complex financial reports, maintain budgets, track financial performance, and comply with regulatory requirements. Because it creates a dynamic Chart of Accounts there is no need to create a separate database each time a new set of reports is created. This simplifies the entire process and preserves server resources.

"WebFOCUS can access the various JD Edwards tables and combine the data on the fly," says Megahan. "This saves the business unit about two weeks worth of work whenever they go through budgeting exercises. Our analysts can not only create their monthly reports more easily, but they can obtain point-in-time General Ledgers from the individual JD Edwards systems whenever they wish."

Working with the Pros

Information Builders Consulting handled the lion's share of the development work to create this new reporting environment, using WebFOCUS Developer Studio in conjunction with the WebFOCUS Financial Reporting Platform. "The consultants did a great job," says Spencer. "They

accomplished everything we asked them to, then transferred their knowledge to our in-house developers. The engagement went very smoothly."

US Filter is getting ready to go live with several other reports created by Information Builders Consulting. The Profit and Loss Summary report pulls information from multiple business units and combines it into a single report using the Post and Pickup capabilities of WebFOCUS. Formerly, analysts had to use native JD Edwards tools to manually pull information into spreadsheets, which took days of effort. "By automating this process we are saving time and improving accuracy," says Megahan. "WebFOCUS



creates a series of reports for each business unit, which are automatically combined to create the final summary report." The Post and Pickup capabilities of the tool could even be used to read data from different ERP systems, and then combine the answer set to create one common report.

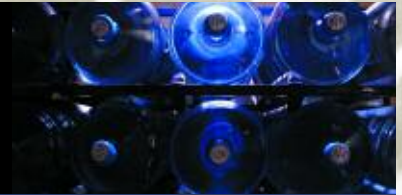
Information Builders Consulting also created an Income Statement and associated Balance Sheet that calculates retained earnings. Previously, US Filter analysts printed standard Income Statements and Balance Sheets from JD Edwards—which often yielded more information than they needed. With WebFOCUS, they can choose to display only those lines for which there is data, generating concise presentations. "What used to be a 15-page Balance Sheet can now be summarized in a page or two, and users can determine how many levels to display in each report," says Megahan. "WebFOCUS is much more flexible and easier

to work with than what we had before.”

The consultants also created a Variance Report that allows financial officers to review budgets based on pre-selected time-periods. Users can select monthly, quarterly, and year-to-date summaries from the JD Edwards data, with budgeted and actual costs shown at whatever levels they desire. These users can view information in a variety of common business formats, including Excel, HTML, and PDF. Additionally, reports can be “pushed” to designated users via e-mail, either on a scheduled basis or as alerts when critical business conditions arise—such as when expenditures exceed budgeted items. A single report can

for other uses. For example, he recently completed a new application that uses WebFOCUS to track and analyze travel expenses for employees throughout the company. Another application, called P-Card ensures that employees are using the correct accounts for travel purchases so the company can take advantage of pertinent offers and discounts. A third WebFOCUS application tracks key projects under way throughout the company.

“Information Builders support staff is excellent,” says Megahan. “They are very helpful, whether we are modifying an installation or upgrading software, and they are always available when we need them. We work with a lot of



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**-Michaeline Megahan,
Project Manager, Business Systems Development
and Integration Group, US Filter**

be automatically bursted into multiple sections, and then delivered simultaneously to many different users, allowing department managers, for example, to receive customized profit and loss reports.

“As we get more familiar with the WebFOCUS Financial Reporting Platform, we plan to expand its use to accommodate other types of financial reports, especially as more and more of our business units get rolled into JD Edwards,” says Megahan. “This tool enhances the capabilities of WebFOCUS and allows us to standardize our financial reporting activities.”

A World of Reporting Options

While Megahan is concerned primarily with financial reporting in the context of the JD Edwards financial applications, Spencer is busy creating WebFOCUS applications

software vendors and I believe that Information Builders provides the best support we have seen so far.”

Moving forward, US Filter is encouraging the use of WebFOCUS for all new reporting initiatives. “Eventually we hope it will replace several other reporting tools,” adds Megahan. “For example, many Cognos reports and cubes are being replaced by reports from WebFOCUS, as we attempt to standardize on one comprehensive business intelligence environment. WebFOCUS will also help us eliminate some of our data warehouses through real-time connections to our production data sources. It has all the capabilities we need to satisfy our data access, reporting, and information-delivery requirements.”

David Baum is a freelance business and technology writer residing in Santa Barbara, Calif.