

BI Innovations for Consumers

The theme of many business intelligence (BI) conferences in 2007 was “Consumer BI” or “Tailored BI,” because the industry’s focus has shifted from BI producers, who need complex tools to create and manage content, to BI consumers, who simply want to access and customize BI content in intuitive ways.



Mobile browsers, such as Safari, now allow users to view and navigate interactive dashboards.

Consumerization, which spreads the benefits of a technology to many more users and applications, is a natural phase in the evolution of any technology. Large business computers evolved into personal desktops, then into laptops, and now they are becoming hybrid devices such as smartphones. This process tends to be disruptive for BI vendors because it introduces so much variety in user preferences, technology, and distribution methods. The ability to deliver useful BI content to mobile users, for example,

will require a BI platform that can work with any device, both online and offline.

IDC projects that by 2008 laptops will eclipse desktops. While smartphones account for only 10 percent of today’s 1.2 billion handsets, sales are growing by 70 percent each year. By 2011, 50 percent of all 3.2 billion phones are expected to be smartphones. Meanwhile, mobile browsers are getting better, making laptops and mobile phones interchangeable for many applications. With its advanced zoom features, the Safari browser, for example, makes it easy to view and navigate interactive dashboards on mobile phones.

Information Builders is well positioned to respond to these trends. We have made our BI technology extremely portable, allowing mobile workers to analyze and share data without a network connection or special applications.



WebFOCUS Active Dashboards can be e-mailed and saved locally on PCs and mobile devices.

But this is only a first step; WebFOCUS will continue to grow to meet the demands of being a good citizen in the evolving world of Web 2.0 applications.

BI for Mobile Workers

WebFOCUS Active Technologies has evolved into a portable analytic platform that has its own API, interactive engine, security, and caching capabilities to support online and offline data analysis. By packaging data and interactive features into a self-contained file, WebFOCUS Active Dashboards can be e-mailed and saved locally on personal computers and mobile devices.

These active BI applications are also extremely scalable. Since all interactions take place in the browser, they can support an unlimited number of concurrent users. We have architected our mobile BI platform using JavaScript and HTML, so our mobile applications don't require any unique software, servers, or plug-ins. Other Rich Internet Applications (RIAs), such as Flex and Flash, require browser plug-ins that some enterprises don't allow for security reasons.

Of course, Flex and Flash have an aesthetic appeal for certain types of applications, so we give users a choice between Active Technologies and Flex. We also offer a plug-in for Flex Builder so WebFOCUS developers can create applications in the Flex IDE. This plug-in manages connections to the report server and handles all data manipulation functions, which makes dashboard development very easy.

Flex development options are also available in WebFOCUS Developer Studio, so Active Reports can be output either in

HTML or SWF format. In the near future, we will also give developers the ability to create Flex dashboards in the HTML layout tool as well.

WebFOCUS Mobile Favorites allows every remote worker with a mobile device, not just those on a laptop, to access BI content. Using the standard BI dashboard, users can determine what content they would like to receive on their mobile device, and in what format. As a browser-based, thin-client solution, Mobile Favorites is device-agnostic – it does not need any additional servers or applications to deliver content. Users and administrators can easily manage content through WebFOCUS dashboards, and that content can be tailored based on the capabilities of the devices.

Leading the Charge to Web 2.0

Information Builders is also well positioned to take advantage of Web 2.0 technologies such as AJAX, which makes Web pages more responsive and engaging. Gartner predicts that by 2010, 80 percent of software applications will be AJAX-enabled and 30 percent of applications will have the features and functionality of traditional desktop applications. These applications typically transfer the processing necessary for the user interface to the browser or Web client, such as the Flash player.

In 2006, Information Builders introduced its first AJAX technology, Power Painter, and its first RIA, WebFOCUS Active Reports. In 2008, we plan to introduce an enhanced AJAX

product called InfoAssist. This ad hoc analysis and report-development tool is as intuitive as any Microsoft Office application and can access content from anywhere. It is also the first BI report writer to comply with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act,



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which helps people with disabilities access and use information.

So, while the consumerization of BI is a disruptive trend, Information Builders is meeting the challenge head-on. Consumers want consistency, device independence, and uninterrupted access to content. IT wants solutions that work with existing hardware, software, and networking standards. Meeting these needs requires a robust BI platform that can deliver tailored solutions. Some BI vendors are developing unique, device-specific software to respond to these demands. We have created a flexible BI platform that uses standard Web technologies to deliver and display information. It is ideal for the evolving world of consumer BI. 🌐

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