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One program to read them all

WebFocus reporting tool can handle practically any format

BY CARLOS A. SOTO | SPECIAL TO GCN

REPORTING AND ANALYSIS tools are like fingerprints — no two are the same. WebFocus 7 is a unique Web-ready data access and reporting system that connects users to data more easily and comprehensively than most analytic tools we've reviewed. The strength of WebFocus 7 is versatility. It can access and process information located in any format on any platform. We tried 50 different formats for data, from standard Word documents to not-so-standard database save files, and WebFocus 7 was able to detect and read them all.

Likewise, it displays all information through a logically constructed Web browser. This way, the information you've grabbed from multiple platforms can be displayed on almost any platform and in formats such as PDF, Excel or PostScript.

Although Information Builders did not participate in the GCN Lab's recent business intelligence tools roundup [GCN, March 5, p. 32], we did not want to leave them out of the loop entirely. As such, they were asked to submit the latest version of their enterprise business intelligence platform, WebFocus 7, to undergo the exact same set of tests that we used for the March roundup.

The two tests that matter most when reviewing a BI tool are performance and functionality. Because the government can often be a hodgepodge of different data and networks, we judged WebFocus 7 based on its capabilities to work with mixed datasets and multiple environments.

In those tests, WebFocus 7 scored an A, mostly because of three features. With more than 300 packaged software adapters, the program provides connectivity to all enterprise information assets, including 85 databases, 150 different real-time applications, messages, transactions and document services. We were quite surprised at the different formats it could pick up, even some unusual ones produced by less-popular programs the lab has reviewed in the past.

The second important feature with WebFocus 7 is the

ability to integrate, edit and convert assets to meet agency reporting and analytic requirements. WebFocus 7 can help augment and standardize your agency's data for a multitude of integration platforms, including service-oriented architectures, enterprise application integration (EAI), or business-to-business. This makes WebFocus versatile enough to operate in multiple industries, such as financial services, supply chain or health care. We have seen government agency operations modeled after some of these areas, depending on the agency, so it is nice to see that WebFocus can be just as valuable to people working in a B2B — although it is really more government-to-business — type of environment as those in SOA or EAI.

The third important feature in WebFocus 7 is its ability to support seven types of data integration for performing business intelligence. This lets users employ WebFocus 7 in their data warehouse or even in a real-time data warehouse. This feature also opens the software to agencies that need to make use of enterprise in-

formation integration, operational data access, Web services, enterprise search services and process-driven metrics such as business activity monitoring or alters. WebFocus 7 runs on all major platforms, including Windows, all Linux, all Unix, IBM i-Series and IBM z-Series, and provides a four to 16 times scalability advantage, which allows it to support millions of users. In our testing, we only scaled up to 10 clients, but these were all different types of platforms, and there were no glitches or even hiccups. Moreover, the program suite comes with self-service reporting and analysis tools, executive and analytical dashboards and analytical tools such as location intelligence using geographic information systems, which was tested with a Global Positioning System-enabled laptop and mapping software. WebFocus also can use performance visualization, integrates with Microsoft Office, and has electronic publishing capabilities, in addition to support for disconnected and mobile users.

Some advanced analytic features that come with the software include innovative advances in thin-client graphical report development known as Power Painter and integration with SPSS software that lets users perform regression models and other advanced Six Sigma analytics using location intelligence and predictive analytic tools. Six Sigma analysis is a favorite of ours

in the lab, and WebFocus passed all our homemade testing in this area, too.

If you are thinking that these are some pretty advanced features that take time to learn and use, you are correct. We received extensive training from the company, and it still took more than a week to become fairly proficient with the software. It might be a good idea to assign a few people in an agency to learn the WebFocus software and let them pull back on some other duties while they work through the learning curve.

Another consideration is that, with a starting price of \$28,000 to run the program on a single-processor machine, we recommend that you do your homework before committing the time and money to WebFocus 7. There are a lot of business intelligence tools out there that might suit your agency's needs, though probably without the functionality of WebFocus 7. Still, WebFocus 7 combines most of the features of the others we have studied. If you need a lot of features, WebFocus 7 will certainly get the job done. Just expect to spend a lot of time learning how to do everything the software offers. ■

WEBFOCUS 7.1.3

PERFORMANCE: A
FUNCTIONALITY: A
EASE OF USE: B-
VALUE: B
PRICE: \$28,000 for a single-processor machine

REVIEWER'S COMMENTS:
 With more than 300 packaged software adapters, WebFocus 7 provides connectivity to all enterprise information assets, including 85 databases, 150 different real-time applications, messages, transactions and document services.

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CRIME SEEN: This Law Enforcement GIS map shows how WebFocus 7 can display pertinent data, in this case weapons-related arrests, in a cognitive manner by showing red firemaps where an arrest took place against a map of the city.

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