

Brinker

Features WebFOCUS on Its Enterprise Reporting Menu

Worldwide Restaurant Chain Uses BI to Help Thousands of Users Build a More Profitable Organization

Margins are slim in the restaurant industry, forcing food-service companies to constantly scrutinize labor, food, and other operating costs. Yet guests demand high quality and prompt service, so they are quick to notice when a dining establishment cuts its overhead too severely.

Kenny Sullivan, senior director of business intelligence for Brinker International, Inc., admits that pleasing customers while maintaining a profitable operation is a constant balancing act. Restaurant managers often find themselves on a tightrope, and that's why Brinker uses the WebFOCUS business intelligence (BI) platform from Information Builders to help its organization move steadily forward.

"Managers at all levels of our organization depend on business intelligence technology to plan, manage, and control many aspects of our business," says Sullivan. "It's a worthwhile endeavor – not only for our guests but for our balance sheet. We're in a low-margin, high-volume business where a single percentage point increase in productivity will drive a million dollars to the bottom line."

To achieve these returns on its BI investments, Sullivan and his colleagues are immersed in an enterprise-wide reporting project that includes new dashboards, a new data warehouse, and an automated system for delivering information throughout Brinker's vast, worldwide operation. As one of the world's leading casual dining restaurant companies, Brinker owns or

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Snapshot

Organization

Brinker International is the premier casual dining company in the world. Its brands include Chili's Grill & Bar, Romano's Macaroni Grill, On The Border Mexican Grill & Cantina, and Maggiano's Little Italy.

Challenge

Brinker wanted to gain tighter control of food and labor costs and replace cumbersome manual processes with a reporting environment that serves both managers and analysts.

Strategy

IT used WebFOCUS to create a system that reveals sales figures for the previous day as well as historical data via dashboards and parameterized reports.

Results

Analysts can now obtain precise labor metrics to drive more efficient scheduling and labor management. Executives have insight into new business initiatives.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS.

franchises more than 1,800 restaurants in 24 countries and employs more than 120,000 people.

Selecting Fresh BI Ingredients

Brinker's BI odyssey was driven by necessity: to remain competitive, managers wanted to be able to easily analyze food and labor costs, minimize overhead, and help each restaurant achieve best practices through peer group comparison.

While Brinker had the management savvy it needed to achieve this vision, it was hampered by outdated technology. The company's former data warehouse and BI dashboard weren't scalable enough to handle a growing volume of point of sale (POS) data from all of its



restaurants. Nightly backup took up to eight hours to process and the database quickly became unmanageable.

Meanwhile, on the front end, the dashboard was difficult to navigate and it didn't reveal a clear operational picture to store managers or top management.

As a result, analysts couldn't obtain the financial, sales, and operational information they needed, forcing them to rely on the IT department to gather data. "Even relatively simple matters such as database queries took too long," says Stacy Hall, business intelligence manager at Brinker. "Some users waited up to four hours to receive responses to their queries."



representatives from each of its restaurant chains as well as from the finance department to gather requirements for the new system.

Consultants from Information Builders and its partner, ResiliEnt Systems, worked closely with Brinker to complete the RPM project. "Information Builders and ResiliEnt helped us build a versatile team with a diverse set of skills," says Sullivan. "They worked together really well."

Creating a New Menu of Reports

The primary role of WebFOCUS is to provide flexible front-end reporting and analysis tools for the data warehouse. Brinker has a custom point-of-sale system in each restaurant, which collects data on sales transactions, cook times, employee time cards, and other information. Each night an ETL



system polls the restaurants to gather this detailed information, along with data on labor requirements.

"Every single check issued to a customer is recorded, including what was purchased, how much it cost, and how much tip was included," says Sullivan.

Brand analysts at each restaurant chain continually review this data to fine-tune their operations. It is also valuable to store managers.

For example, managers can run a Daily Sales and Guests Report that compares the current day's metrics to the same day a year ago. They can quickly examine sales volume in any time period and drill down to sort the data by categories such as food, liquor, beer, wine, banquet, and to-go.

"Restaurant managers don't have a lot of time to run reports or analyze data," says Sullivan. "Now they can drill down into these categories just by pushing buttons in a dashboard."

"Our WebFOCUS BI dashboard lets managers find the data they need with one or two clicks."





Stacy Hall
Business Intelligence Manager
Brinker International

Brinker created a dashboard so store managers and supervisors could view sales figures for the previous day as well as historical data going back three years. Analysts can now obtain results in seconds rather than the days or even weeks they spent with their former BI environment.

“Our WebFOCUS BI dashboard lets managers find the data they need with one or two clicks,” says Hall. “Using WebFOCUS, anyone from top management to restaurant supervisors can locate all the sales data they need. Analysts can access standard reports or request ad hoc reports on the fly and see immediate results.”

Users log in via standard Web browsers to run reports on the corporate intranet. So far, 10 reports are available, including the Kitchen Display System Cook Time Report, Daily Average Cook Time Report, Cook Station Report, Guest Check Times, and Check Times by Restaurant. Each report can be sorted by brand, date, store, and other parameters.

Enjoying Fresh Information at Every Level of the Organization

Brinker also used WebFOCUS to create financial reports from its Essbase database, replacing a cumbersome manual process of compiling spreadsheets. Standard reports include daily and monthly extracts of financial data and weekly feeds of franchise sales and P&L data. According to Sullivan, the WebFOCUS Essbase adapter offers fast, native access to this financial data.

“Next in line is a financial dashboard for Essbase using WebFOCUS,” says Hall. “Our sales and marketing departments also want automated reports to improve sales analysis, as well as reports based on guest surveys and reward-card points.

As the BI deployment gets under way, Brinker is already seeing tighter controls around food costs and labor costs, thanks to theoretical food-cost algorithms that let people manage by exception.

Sullivan’s team uses WebFOCUS ReportCaster to schedule and deliver new information whenever it is available, helping Brinker hold managers

accountable for agreed-upon milestones. Brinker plans to use the WebFOCUS Excel adapter to replace many Excel spreadsheets with WebFOCUS reports. This will enforce consistency among common spreadsheet users as well.

“We have very tangible goals for this BI implementation,” Sullivan concludes. “If we reach these goals, the Restaurant Performance Management system will pay for itself in a matter of months. With 1,800 restaurants, even small changes can make a huge difference.”



Other reports compare theoretical and actual labor costs to help each restaurant achieve best practices by comparing its costs and performance with others in its region or brand. Brinker also collects cook-time information for each dish as an indication of kitchen efficiency. This helps the organization monitor efficiency by station as well as overall cook time to ensure guests aren’t waiting too long for their food.

Brinker is currently rolling out these capabilities to its entire organization. Ultimately, between 3,500 and 4,000 people will use the dashboards and parameterized reports, while another 100 to 200 analysts will create custom reports with the ad hoc reporting environment.

