

# Enhancing the return on your investment

There is no abating in the world of Business Intelligence as the main vendors, Business Objects & Cognos continue to drive additional functionality into their respective product stacks, through enhanced software developments, additional product partnerships and technology acquisitions. From a client perspective, this only enhances the value which you'll be able to derive from your strategic investment into these mainstream BI vendors, giving you greater functionality and comfort that there are well defined product roadmaps.

These products now expand the functionality to all business and technical user levels within the demands of the lifecycle of BI-based projects. A key area of focus for 2006, which

**visualmetrics** highlighted in 2005, is Data Quality, and this is a corner stone of project success, as "One Version of the Truth" and user confidence in the fact that "the numbers" are correct, are critical to project adoption.

We feature, in this publication, updates on new technical developments from Business Objects, Cognos & Microsoft specifically, as components in the delivery of projects. In the next issue, we will feature more technical case studies, on implementations which **visualmetrics** has undertaken with clients. We hope you enjoy the read.



## Business Objects XI Redux - New features and enhancements extend a robust BI platform

Business Objects XI Release 2 both enhances existing products and adds several new ones. It improves query capabilities and streamlines administration and development, among other benefits. New user interfaces enhance BO's value for users unfamiliar with business intelligence (BI) and for managers seeking improved visualization of their businesses.

This new release is significant because it delivers the last phase of integration between its Crystal and Business Objects software lines; it also includes an updated Windows client, now named Business Objects Desktop Intelligence. A maturation of the previous version, Release 2 adds new features for interactivity and administration. The suite also includes two new options: Intelligent Question, a simplified, question-based user query interface, and Crystal Xcelsius, a visual animation tool that supports what-if data analysis.

Intelligent Question allows users to assemble queries as text questions by using a structured sequence of pull-down menus. The purpose of this interface is to provide access to data for users who lack the skills, aptitude or interest in learning a Business Objects or other BI interface.

Xcelsius enhances the analytic functionality of XI. This tool allows users to import tabular data and associated calculation formulas to create animated charts and controls for them. They can use controls to change inputs while viewing the resulting changes to the charts. Xcelsius provides a compelling way to gain insight from data, although currently it is limited to data from Excel.

Queries built within Release 2 are significantly more flexible than before. Users can combine result sets from multiple independent data sources into a single table or chart. They

also can build query results from unions, intersections and differences between two queries. These capabilities will help organizations build comprehensive customer or product dashboards and reports. They can use queries to filter subsequent queries, which allows market basket and product affinity analyses. Queries assembled from universe metadata also can be edited manually to accommodate customizations not represented in the universe. Release 2 also enables queries of SAP, Essbase and Microsoft Analysis Services OLAP data sources and offers support for Unicode.

This new release aids business metadata availability for users via the BO Encyclopedia; with this release they can view data lineage (data sources) and other descriptive information within Web Intelligence.

For administrators and developers, new tools have been added to aid the transition from development to test and production. A system-auditing universe and a set of audit reports aid analysis of user activity, session data and system usage. A new administration tool, Metadata Manager, provides reports on BI, extraction, transformation and loading (ETL) and other third-party data.

## COGNOS LINKS UP WITH DATA-QUALITY FIRM

Cognos has struck a partnership with Similarity Systems, a maker of software designed to let companies manage the quality of the data they feed into analytics engines.

It will be possible to view Similarity Systems' data quality metrics via Cognos 8, the Business Intelligence vendor's flagship

software. The tool Similarity Systems lends to the partnership, known as "Athanor," is designed to let users monitor data quality within data warehouses, and tackle data problems at their source.

Athanor enables data-source profiling and analysis, data cleaning, the eradication of duplicate data, and data consolidation.

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# Microsoft ties up loose ends in server products

## SQL Server 2005 is ready for mission critical enterprise applications.

Quoting benchmarks showing tripling SAP workloads and other stats that beat IBM WebSphere on Linux using IBM's own metrics, Microsoft is saying that SQL Server has reached parity with Oracle and DB2.

Naturally, there is room for argument when you consider Oracle 10g's highly distributed, grid-focused features.

But in other respects, SQL Server 2005 fills in some useful blanks. For instance, it provides full support for the .NET Framework and web services for the first time. Although that came as a minor shock to some observers, since the .NET framework has been out nearly five years and is now in version 2, until now, SQL Server could only execute its own TSQL calls natively.

In SQL Server 2005, you can now write stored procedures and user-defined functions in any .NET language or as WSDL (Web Services Definition Language). You can also make calls using .NET languages or SOAP web services requests straight to the database. In turn, SQL Server's security features will also support WS-Security to authenticate calls to the database.

Additionally, SQL Server 2005 has added several other web services friendly features, including XQuery support (XML query). Also, with XML recognized as another data type, it could be indexed separately, using path commands to accelerate querying. Or you can merge XML and conventional data stored separately into a common index.

Integration with office applications is streamlined through new under the hood features, enabling the forthcoming Office 12 suite to

connect directly with live SQL Server databases, without requiring writing of SQL commands or parsing of large data strings. For instance, a new data bar in Excel 12 demonstrated to the audience was able to retrieve live data from a SQL Server production database.

SQL Server's scalability was improved through a series of tweaks, and a new table partitioning features that enables developers or DBAs to physically split off different parts of a huge table among multiple servers, while still presenting a single logical view.

While SQL Server 2005 adds improved features analyzing BI data and building reports, it's the back-end capabilities for defining and managing data integration processes that really shine. The DTS (data transformation services) component has been more or less rewritten from scratch and renamed as SSIS (SQL Server Integration Service).

SSIS provides a better performing and easier to manage version of the core DTS extract, transform and load (ETL) tools. Performance outstrips that of SQL Server 2000 by a significant order of magnitude. The revamped interface also means that defining processing tasks - like transforms, sorting, groupings - can now be accomplished much quicker, using point-and-click, rather than writing lines of code.

## Cognos Technical Watch

### Cognos Delivers Single 'BI Platform'

Cognos 8 will let users apply BI functionality:- reporting, analysis, dashboarding, scorecarding and event management, and let that functionality be performed against any data, including both relational and OLAP sources. The platform also presents a single metadata layer and a single query engine.

This blurs the lines between OLAP and Reporting, which have long been separate in Cognos. That's somewhat in response to the success of Microsoft Analysis Services, and a trend in the industry that OLAP data storage belongs more with the database vendors. Yet it's also very customer driven: Users shouldn't have to care where the data is or whether it's relational or OLAP to be able to analyze or report off it.

Cognos 8 has built-in support for real-time dashboards as "just another report type" rather than a separate product or module. It highlights a new business event management feature, and integrations with business process management vendors including FileNet, IBM and EMC Documentum.

## Cognos and MapInfo jointly market location intelligence

Cognos is partnering with geographic information systems (GIS) vendor, MapInfo, to bundle location-based intelligence capabilities into its latest business intelligence platform.

Under the terms of the partnership, both companies will jointly engage in marketing and selling MapInfo's location intelligence software as an optional component to the Cognos 8 BI platform. MapInfo's technology will augment the core query, analysis and reporting capabilities of Cognos 8 with advanced mapping capabilities. MapInfo will also provide industry-focused, geographic data sets.

The technology blends an array of geographical, demographic information with analytic data visualization techniques, to provide business insights based on location, addressing, for example, business questions like "which regional markets are most profitable" or "driving business growth"?

Another GIS vendor, ESRI, has also forged similar partnerships with SAS Institute, Business Objects and Information Builders.

# Business Objects and Cognos focus on Data Integration

Business Objects recently announced it has acquired all assets of Medience SA, a startup software vendor that has developed technology for enterprise information integration (EII). The name Medience is a contraction of “mediator and intelligence,” an appropriate name for EII middleware that supports business intelligence (BI).

## There are three key technology pieces of EII:

- **Tool for designing views:** This is where a technical user defines custom views of distributed data, making it all look as if it resides in a single database. Applications or business intelligence tools access data through a view (which is also a run-time platform, not just a design-time tool), greatly simplifying the querying and joining of distributed data.
- **Data Integration engine:** The engine handles connections to data sources (usually through ODBC or JDBC, less often through native gateways or APIs), as well as data transformation and data quality functions.
- **Optimizer for distributed queries:** The engine must include a query optimizer that specializes in distributed queries. For the sake of performance, optimization may push processing into source databases, cache data in server memory, or persist data to disk. Due to optimization, most EII products can return a joined result set in near real-time.

## How is EII related to BI?

EII's focus on simplifying and optimizing distributed queries makes it a good fit with solutions for Business Intelligence. In fact, certain types of reports are the “killer apps” of EII.

Two use cases stand out:

- **Operational reporting.** Most companies still run operational reports overnight, so that each morning managers see what the company did yesterday. But the trend is toward refreshed reports at noon and close of business, too, which EII's real-time performance can enable.
- **Dashboard reporting.** Via EII's on-demand capabilities, managers can refresh a dashboard or scorecard multiple times daily, to exercise a granular form of business performance management (BPM).

Considering the useful combination of EII and time-sensitive reports, it's no wonder that BI and EII vendors have struck partnerships. IBM, of course, has relationships with almost all BI vendors to show that its WebSphere Information Integrator product works with them all.

Then there's Composite Software. Owners of Cognos' ReportNet can download a limited-use license of Composite's EII product at no additional charge. And Composite's EII kernel will soon be embedded in Informatica's PowerCenter, a leading tool for extract, transform, and load (ETL). After all, both ETL and EII are forms of data integration; yet they are complementary, because the former handles bulk data in batch, while the latter handles smaller datasets in real-time.

## Where is EII going?

EII solves very specific problems around modeling data views and optimizing distributed queries. While the solutions are highly useful, they amount to a very short list. Therefore, it's likely that EII will eventually be a specialized collection of functions within larger platforms for integration, database management, and/or BI. In other words, the future of EII as a self-standing product type is unlikely. In fact, the market is already well on its way to folding EII into BI and other platforms.

## Business Objects Transforms Excel Data Into Interactive Output

Business Objects debuted Crystal Xcelsius, a software package that's designed to let users transform Microsoft Excel spreadsheets into interactive analytics and share them via a variety of formats.

Based on technology Business Objects obtained from its buyout of data visualization firm Infommersion, the new product will let Excel users interact with data and share reports. For instance, a sales manager using the tool could transform an Excel spreadsheet containing results for a particular region into an interactive presentation. The presentation can then be shared in PowerPoint, PDF, Outlook or Web-based formats.

“We just launched BusinessObjects Intelligent Question, which brings BI to every worker,” said Business Objects chief marketing officer Rene Bonvanie in a statement. “With Crystal Xcelsius, Business Objects arms any Excel user with a powerful and easy-to-use BI solution.”

**Business Objects Intelligent Question**, an element of Business Objects XI Release 2, lets report writers use drop-down menus of words and phrases to assemble queries such as, “Who were my top five customers based on net sales quarter before last?”

Integration between Business Intelligence products and Excel is critical for BI vendors, most of which recognize that the spreadsheet tool is the data interface of choice for non-technical workers.

## Business Objects hooks up with Red Hat

Business Objects SA and Red Hat Inc have entered into a technology partnership, in order to respond to increased demand for BI on the Linux platform.

Each company will join the other's technology partner program, and they will take part in co-marketing and co-selling programs based on running BO's BI technology on the Red Hat Enterprise Linux platform. BO has been optimized for Red Hat.

# Business Objects Technical Watch

## Business Objects beefs up developer support

**BusinessObjects SA underscored its developer-friendly stance by quickly integrating its popular Crystal Reports tool with Microsoft Corp's newest IDE (integrated development environment) and announcing embedded reporting software for the Eclipse Foundation, one of the fastest growing development environments for Java developers.**

Continuing a long-standing OEM integration with Microsoft's Visual Studio, which enables developers to create new reports or use existing Crystal Reports documents, and integrate them directly into their applications, Business Objects has now carried this over to Visual Studio 2005 Professional Edition, the latest version of its IDE which the company launched this week. A special edition of Crystal Reports is now being included as the "default" install for Visual Studio 2005. It will let developers take advantage of new capabilities like smart tags, code snippets, and click-once deployment.

Business Objects added that customers upgrading to Visual Studio 2005 will be able to import their existing Crystal

reports directly into the new IDE. Also, developers can expose their reports as Web services for consumption by any development environment using a simple right-click.

Crystal Reports for Eclipse takes advantage of the Eclipse user interface, which includes dockable panes and context sensitive menus, to customize the reports directly within the Eclipse environment

Business Objects is also providing a "development and test license" of the embedded reporting engine to let developers build report viewing directly into client-server and Web applications.

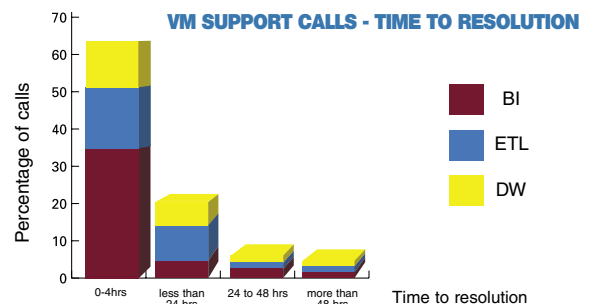
## Business Objects keeps finger on open source pulse

Business Objects is expanding an existing partnership with Swedish open source database firm MySQL AB. Under the terms of a revised OEM referral agreement, both companies will work together to develop and sell integrated BI solutions built on the MySQL Network database subscription service, and Business Objects' BI technologies. MySQL Network represents a comprehensive set of certified software and support services that are geared around the core open source database code.

Business Objects says it has already crafted new bundled offerings for reporting and data integration for the MySQL database, through MySQL Network. The new bundles, which include Crystal Reports for reporting and BusinessObjects Data Integrator have been tested and certified by both partners. The move follows an agreement signed between the two companies in April 2005, to embed the MySQL database into BusinessObjects XI platform running on Linux and Unix systems.

## scores on the doors (as at 31/01/2006)

The performance of **visualmetrics** in call handling and problem resolution is a corner stone to the Support Services which we offer to our clients. Measuring this against our contracted Service Level Agreements (SLAs) is an important element of this service. We continually track these measures to ensure we are fulfilling and exceeding the contracted SLAs and expectations of our clients.



## "our business partners"

To achieve the business objectives of being a premier organisation in the delivery of Analytical Applications, which derive business value for its clients, **visualmetrics** recognises the need to have a range of business partners who fall into three distinct categories:

○ **Product partners** who develop industry leading BI tools & BI suites. These are core components of the applications which **visualmetrics** already has, or will develop for custom specific reasons.



○ **Application partners** who have market leading operational applications, in chosen business sectors & operational areas. Their clients have requirements for information analysis, which is satisfied by the applications and consulting services of **visualmetrics**.



○ **Service partners** who are recognised industry experts in management consulting, and technical consulting areas.



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