

Performance Management Comes of Age

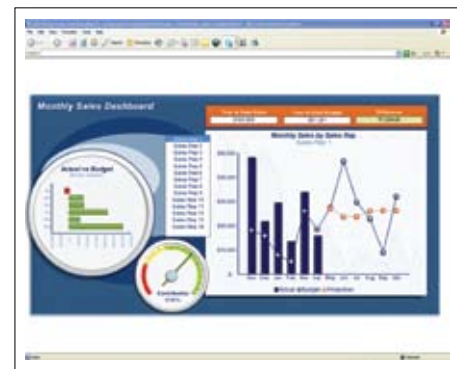
Editor's Letter

Not only have we seen a market convergence and consolidation of BI vendors and products, but now we are seeing the convergence of "pure play BI" and "visualization, scorecards and dashboards". **visualmetrics** recently attended the Gartner BI Summit in Amsterdam, where these facts were confirmed by industry research. Visually designed and deployed applications are the new gender of BI trends. Technologies such as Crystal Xcelsius, and Cognos Metrics Manager all have rich functionality, and are well integrated into the core BI platform.

The greatest challenge in visual performance management applications, is the alignment of users functional needs, visual design aspirations and how they can most effectively be specified and developed. **visualmetrics**



have many years of project experience in these applied technology best practices, assisting clients and prospective new clients to "get it right first time".



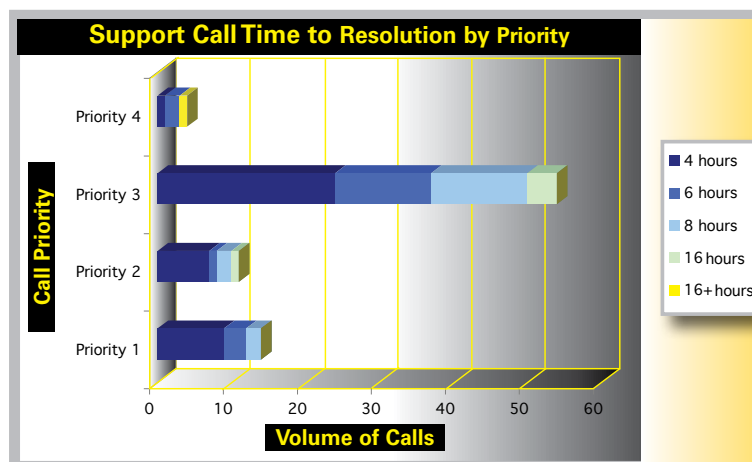
To discuss how latest generation visual analysis tools could benefit your organisation please email sales@visualmetrics.co.uk

visualassurance – business continuity & future proofing investment

The substantial investment in time and resources that a business intelligence solution necessitates in turn demands that it not only meets business functional and technical requirements set out during project scoping, but that its architecture and functionality are dynamic and able to evolve with changes in the organisation's structure and processes. Whilst the application can be prepared for anticipated future evolutions, and scope for enhancements can be encompassed, the expertise to administer those changes and maintain the application are just as fundamentally important to future proofing investment.

visualmetrics visualassurance tailored support service offers our customers fast and efficient reactive solutions to technical issues encountered, timely communication and implementation of component product upgrades and bug-fixes, regular technical updates, and the continuing optimisation of the solution through changing business conditions thereby maximising our clients return on investment and future proofing the solution and the business processes it enables.

The performance of **visualmetrics** in call handling and problem resolution is the 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.

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Cognos 8.3

New year, new owners, new product, new packaging. 2008's instalment of the Cognos BI legacy, impeccably groomed and exquisitely presented, has been painstakingly developed and glitz showcased, and then rolled out to the world. At this point though there remains two crucial questions; what new features are there that make it worth upgrading to, and does it work?

The answer to the second of these questions is simple, yes! Cognos 8.3 has been ruthlessly tested and interrogated with the meticulous attention to detail we have come to expect from Cognos, overseen by proud new parents IBM. A thorough bench test reveals no hidden nasties.

The answer to the dilemma of whether or not to migrate is obviously intrinsic to each organisation's requirements, and lies in the answer to the question; what can't we do now that we want to need to, and can we do it with Cognos 8.3? Clearly this has to be done on a case by case basis, but our 'New Features & Functions' below may provide some food for thought on just some of the benefits.



New Features & Functions

Administration

- Advanced monitor of activities/usage including server scheduling for regulating server load
- System metrics including indicators of 'system health'
- Set alerts thresholds on performance

Cognos Connection

- Report alerts - users can set up report update alerts
- New portlet type - open entire folder of reports in to dashboard
- Global filters on Dashboards - allows users to edit one filter selection and update multiple analytics on a dashboard

Cognos Transformer

- Use cog8 report or package as source - allows users to quickly create olap cubes
- Enhanced security views integrated with cog8
- Publish cubes to portal without using Framework mgr

Express Authoring Mode

- New report studio template (for financials)

Report Studio

- Table of contents (briefing book) - hyperlinked contents page
- Custom data type for 'zero data' - define text, data or even remove report/page when no data exists
- Can add independent data (singleton object) - one off data items not linked to main query(s)

Framework Manager

- Improved model analysis - Model Advisor wizards assist users in model creation

Metrics Studio

- Set notification ranges on metrics, i.e. users can set their own thresholds
- Improved diagrams
- Improved organisation of metrics and watchlists

Summary

The conclusion is simple, 8.3 is a floorless evolution in the Cognos BI platform. Its new functions, particularly for server administrators, give undeniable benefits to the IT department and user alike. If you would like to know about these benefits, or how Cognos 8.3 may be able to resolve the pains of your current solution please contact:

sales@visualmetrics.co.uk

COGNOS ANALYSIS FOR EXCEL (CAFE)

Microsoft's Excel is the mainstay of every business, and has enjoyed unprecedented longevity resulting from its rich functionality, robust nature and ease of use. The ingrained knowledge we all have means if a task can be done in Excel, we will do it in Excel. Long time patrons of Cognos may remember Powerplay for Excel, now as part of the Cognos 8 Go! Office suite it has been redesigned and redeveloped into Cognos Analysis for Excel (CAFE).

CAFE gives analysts the ability to 'slice and dice' an OLAP cube within the Excel environment offering much of the functionality of Analysis Studio, but with the added benefits of Excel.

Features & Functions

- Ability to write Excel formulas that include OLAP data – Refreshed when the cube is updated
- Advanced Excel charting and formatting functionality for turning analysis data in to distributed information
- Integrate Cognos OLAP cube with other external data sources
- Fully secured environment offering the same comprehensive user level security filtering as with Cognos 8
- Ease of use – anyone with knowledge of Excel can use CAFE

- Self sufficiency – users will be less reliant on IT for ad-hoc developments
- Integrates with other Cognos Go! Office applications to allow users to create fully comprehensive reports (MS Word) or presentations (MS Powerpoint) using trusted Cognos datasources



Summary

CAFE offers the power of the Cognos 8 platform with the added flexibility of Microsoft Excel. A valuable addition to the Cognos 8 suite, if you're happiest working in Excel why work in anything else?



Since news leaked out that Business Objects was planning to launch a new release of its XI platform, the web has become a litany of developer speculation. Despite the rumours in the forums, the press releases and roadshows you never know what a product will do until you get it up and running. You'll be pleased to know we've had our first copy, installed and tested it, and as we expected it doesn't disappoint!

New Features & Functions Here's a list of the highlights from XI 3.0 that we particularly like:

- Web Intelligence Rich Client - allows users to take all of the capabilities of the Web Intelligence Java Report Panel offline to the desktop. The client also has a very neat new feature called track changes, similar to track changes in MS Word, changes in a report (increases, decreases, addition and deletion of data) are custom highlighted.
- Personal Data Providers - The rich client allows for another new innovation to Web Intelligence called the Personal data provider. This allows users to combine Universe data with personal data in a single report using Excel, CSV and Text files as the personal datasources.
- Publishing - XI 3.0 now provides publishing support for Crystal Reports, Web Intelligence, and Desktop Intelligence reports, to enable administrators to share a single personalised report with multiple recipients both inside and outside the organisation.
- BI Widgets - Formerly the BI Desktop project in the Labs, BI Widgets allows users to drag and drop live widgets containing Xcelsius and Web Intelligence content onto their Desktop, making data more accessible and easier to locate.
- Xcelsius 2008 - This release of Xcelsius works with both BusinessObjects XI Release 2 and XI 3.0, and delivers an even better data visualisation along several fronts. (Please see our Xcelsius 2008 review for details)

Summary

As we all expected, an impeccable release with as yet not a single fault. Worth the wait and certain not to disappoint, we challenge anyone to not be impressed by 'BI widgets' the first time they see them!

Xcelsius 2008

In 2006 Business Objects launched the first edition of Crystal Xcelsius, heralding a new age of visualising static data gathered from Excel spreadsheets, databases or BO XI, into flash based dashboarding and dynamic graphic presentations (charts, graphs, dials etc). Despite both its obvious potential and clear competitive edge a number of technical inconveniences and a few limitations in functionality left Xcelsius seeming to many a square peg in a round hole, sitting slightly out of kilter with BO's XI toolset. Thankfully Xcelsius has been redeveloped with infinitely enhanced functionality and has been realigned and integrated with the rest of XI's architecture.



New Features & Functions

Here are a number of the features/improvements that we feel will get any Xcelsius developer (or sceptic) interested:

- GUI facelift with embedded spreadsheet - The Xcelsius interface has been re-designed using Adobe Flash and Adobe Flex technologies. The object browser, property windows, menus and toolbars have all been redesigned. The Excel data mapping process is now fully integrated into Xcelsius, so there is no longer the need to continually switch between Excel and Xcelsius and re-import your Excel sheet over and over again.
- Copy and Paste - You can now re-use your objects by copying and pasting components between different instances of Xcelsius by simply copying and pasting.
- Alerts in Selectors - This is a great little feature. It allows users to use existing alerting functionality to configure selectors to display alert icons for each label. What better way to give your users an idea of what to click on!
- Data Manager - There is now no need for managing multiple data connection buttons. The Data Manager is a central location for managing and configuring all the connectivity options including flash variables and XML maps.
- Connection refresh button - With the click of a button you can now simultaneously refresh all external data connections and retrieve the latest data directly from the data source.
- Print Button - Your Xcelsius Dashboards can even look great on paper now.
- One Click Export - You can now enjoy trouble-free management of your Xcelsius models by saving and exporting your models to the Business Objects Enterprise Platform with the click of a button.

Summary

No one would contest the potential of Xcelsius when first launched, only its practicality. Xcelsius 2008 however is a fully functioning, XI integrated, dashboarding dream.

Looking Ahead

Microsoft – SQL Server 2008

The third quarter of 2008 will see the release of Microsoft's latest database management system, currently named SQL Server 2008. Whilst the finished product and its capabilities are unconfirmed pre-release, plenty of information through white papers, demos, developer evaluation editions and press media is available, and our consultants are busy 'kicking the tyres' to see what it could mean for our customers.

Features & Functions

There are numerous changes, too many to begin to mention in fact, but a few BI related ones caught our eye:

- New Date and Time data types, including a Date only and a Time only data types.
- Star Join Query Optimisation, which optimises query response time by recognising data warehouse design patterns.
- Change Data Capture, which makes it easier to identify new and changed records for updates and inserts into the Data Warehouse.
- MERGE SQL Statement, which makes it easier to deal with common data warehousing scenarios like checking whether a row exists and then executing an insert or update.
- SSIS Persistent Lookups. Lookups for swapping business keys with surrogate keys is an important process in an ETL routine. SSIS has been improved to increase the performance of lookups against large tables.



Summary

For those who can't wait for the release, and with some time to kill, you can download the CTP (Community Technology Preview) version on a 180 day evaluation license:

<http://www.microsoft.com/sqlserver/2008/>

"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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