# Struggling to define a corporate SAP based reporting strategy?

Organisations over the last 5 years have been focusing on harmonising their reporting processes within Strategy, Finance and Operations. Within the SAP portfolio there are different options available for reporting - each addressing specific organisational requirements. Often customers wishing to improve their reporting solutions struggle to understand which products are most effective for them and how they fit into their current systems and processes.

Here we provide a practical guide to the relative pros and cons of SAP Enterprise Management Performance (EPM) reporting solutions and SAP Business Objects BI Suite.

## SAP EPM Add-In for Microsoft Office

The EPM add-in is a user interface that SAP have designed to integrate with MS Office products (Excel, Word and PowerPoint).  It is the front end reporting solution for all SAP products included within the EPM suite (mainly Business Planning and Consolidation 10.0 and 10.1, but also Profitability and Cost Management, and Strategy Management). It can also be used to analyse BW InfoCubes and HANA analytic views.  As a reporting tool, its strengths are as follows:-

- The UI is very simple and intuitive – far more so than BEx Analyser for example.  The integration with Excel in particular provides finance users with a familiar environment
- The Report Designer allows simple drag and drop of dimensions to rows and columns, and custom filters can be applied as pre-sets or in-sheet
- Graphics can easily be added within the Excel environment
- Navigation is easy, for example double clicking on a dimension within a report will provide immediate drilldown
- Business users are able to create their own reports without needing to involve the IT function
- A big advantage is the ability for users to be able to enter, save and retrieve commentary at any point where the data intersects (for example, the variance between Budget and Actual for GL code X for Profit Centre Y in Month Z)
- Plan data is immediately available for reporting once entered and saved
- It can be used to monitor the status of processes in progress and provide data validation checks
- It contains financial intelligence – it understands the difference between debits and credits for example

However, there are some limitations of the tool in terms of its reporting functionalities:-

- Graphical output is limited to standard Excel functionality – it will do the job, but is it good enough as a corporate solution?
- Excel based reports are not designed to be consumed on a mobile device
- The EPM add-in for BPC is generally regarded as a finance tool, rather than being a tool for executives or middle managers

## SAP Business Objects BI Suite 4.0+

The Business Objects BI Suite is *the* SAP business analytics solution according to their roadmap. It comprises a number of different tools which can be broadly classified in 3 areas:-

- Agile visualisation: enabling the user to analyse trends, outliers and other areas of interest; combine, enrich and manipulate data; enable self-service visualisation and analytics; predict future outcomes
- Dashboards: providing interactive, visual analytics with multiple controls including dropdowns, radio buttons, charts, speed dials and list tables
- Reporting: enabling users to quickly build formatted reports, distribute information securely and minimise IT support costs

Business Objects is best used as a reporting solution where:-

- There is a need for a corporate dashboard type application to be used as the "one version of the truth"
- There is a high expectation for mobility – most Business Objects products can easily be deployed to tablets and Smartphones via free downloadable apps
- Reports are broadly published to different functions of the organisation, for example finance, HR, sales and operations
- There is a need to use "Big Data" to help predict future outcomes for the organisation



There are however some considerations when thinking about deploying a Business Objects reporting solution:-

- There are a significant number of products contained within the BI Suite, which can cause further confusion. To be fair, SAP are streamlining them and we can recommend which products are best suited to each requirement
- Development of an effective corporate dashboard solution requires a range of different skills. From a technical perspective this is unlikely to be fulfilled by finance resources
- If BPC is used as the planning solution, how Business Objects connects with the data needs to be carefully considered. Not only do Business Objects and BW have a different data structure, but there can be other technical complications. It is advised to retract BPC data back into BW for reporting in Business Objects

## Conclusion



The reality is that leading practice organisations require reporting solutions that allow for interactive visualisation, mobile usage, real time reporting of plan and actual data, ad hoc analyses of trusted data, input of commentary, and analysis of historical trends to provide insight into future performance. The answer then is that there is a place for both products within the reporting suite. The trick is knowing which one to use for what purpose.

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