

Sophisticated reporting and inter-country data integration

Overview

■ The Challenge

Abacus ALS was happy with its existing CRM and accounting operations packages, which were serving it capably. But, as an international company with over 50,000 product lines, its more complex reporting requirements were not being addressed and it had issues with reporting on data across its international operations with separate databases and multiple currencies.

■ Solution

Catapult BI implemented an integrated view of operational data that was stored in different systems and enhanced with business specific categorisations to provide the base for the introduction of IBM® Cognos® as the prime reporting tool. This solution replaced time- and labour-intensive Excel spreadsheets and the other systems used to bridge the gap between reporting facilities provided by the accounting system and the data required for strategic decision-making.

■ Benefit

Abacus ALS now has timely access to its data in all its complexity. The lead time on producing complex reports is reduced from days to minutes, and senior managers can run standard reports and create ad-hoc reports themselves, without requiring outside help. Abacus ALS is now better able to measure product and territory performance, adapt to changes in budgets and measure customer profitability.



Key Learnings

- Analyse the business benefits you will receive so that you can compare them against the costs incurred. Consider these costs as investment in business performance, not as investment in technology.
- Choose a partner who's interested in working with you to address your specific business problems, not just looking to sell you a technology.
- Look for skills transfer and longevity of any proposed solution.
- Work with everyone who requires data: from board level to factory floor, to ensure any solution will meet the full spectrum of requirements.
- Take the time to organise your data to enhance the effectiveness of an IBM® Cognos® implementation.

Abacus ALS

Abacus ALS is one of the largest privately owned providers of diagnostic health care products in Australia, serving the diagnostic pathology and research industries. As an ISO 9001:2008 accredited organisation with over 40 years' experience, Abacus ALS is dedicated to sourcing and supplying high quality products to meet its customers' needs in the areas of critical care, allergy and auto-immunity, bone and mineral testing, infectious serology, and other life science products.

Its mission is to positively contribute to the healthcare outcomes of millions of Australians and New Zealanders by supplying essential pathology and research solutions to a range of healthcare practitioners. Abacus ALS is a member of IVD Australia and the Medical Technology Association of New Zealand and has been acknowledged for its success by being included on the 2009 Queensland 400 list of the state's largest privately held companies.

“IBM’s Cognos BI is a flexible reporting solution enabling senior managers to run standard reports and ad-hoc reports themselves. This has provided Abacus ALS with immediate staff productivity benefits enabling managers to focus on business outcomes with accurate business data.”

Neville Bertwistle, Operations Manager, Abacus ALS

The Business Problem

With more than 50,000 product lines in increasingly complex categories and hierarchies, Abacus ALS's reporting capabilities were letting it down. The CEO and senior managers had to request key customer data days in advance of important meetings in order to ensure it could be collated in time. A part-manual, part-automated system of data collation was time- and labour-intensive, and prone to error.

The number and variety of customer types and needs, plus the need for geographical coverage across Australia and New Zealand, compounded the situation. There was no simple way of

analysing data such as the relationship between customer usage and product types.

Neville Bertwistle, Operations Manager at Abacus ALS, realised there was a better way. “We didn't want the business interruption and expense of changing the operational systems that were serving us well,” he says, “but we needed stronger reporting capabilities. Business intelligence seemed to be the answer.”

Solution – IBM and Catapult BI

Catapult BI was initially engaged to investigate Abacus ALS's enterprise reporting requirements. Catapult BI implemented an integrated view of the different operational data from the Australian and New Zealand accounting and budget systems, enhancing the data with additional supplier and product related classifications. Catapult BI then suggested introducing Cognos to leverage off this 'fit for purpose' data set. Cognos allows users to quickly create queries for one-off types of analysis – such as customer usage against product types – while also supporting the creation of standard reports that are run periodically.

Working collaboratively with users of the data, Catapult BI initially identified six key reports that were required. It developed the first of these in Cognos and, during this process,





trained Abacus ALS's own staff in the use of Cognos. Abacus ALS staff developed the remaining reports with assistance from Catapult BI as required. This skills transfer leaves Abacus ALS well placed to manage its own reporting requirements as they change over time. Catapult BI also conducted a 'train the trainer' program so that an Abacus ALS staff member can confidently train new staff when necessary.

Other key staff, including senior managers, were trained in the simple Cognos user interface so they are able to produce ad-hoc reports to meet their own data needs.

The result for Abacus ALS was improved staff productivity, decreased frustration, and vastly improved access to the key data needed for making business decisions. Abacus ALS's Managing Director, Bruce Evans, is pleased with the success of the project. "Catapult BI demonstrated great understanding of the steps required to deliver the analytical reporting solution for Abacus ALS, on time and on budget. By ensuring that our staff have gained a high level of knowledge in Cognos, we now have the skills to realise increased benefits for the business," he said.

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Bruce Evans, MD, Abacus ALS

Business Benefits for Abacus ALS

With Cognos and an organised view of their business data in place, Abacus ALS has:

- Faster access to more accurate business data
- The ability to aggregate data from Australian and New Zealand operations for analysis such as fast moving lines, fastest growing territories, unprofitable products and so on
- The flexibility to mine the data from different systems to perform different analyses in short timeframes and at low cost
- Improved staff productivity and satisfaction
- Skills and experience to expand available reports as business requirements change

There has been no need to retrain operations staff who use the CRM and the accounting systems, and for Abacus ALS staff, learning to generate ad-hoc reports is easy and fast. With the project such a resounding success to date, Abacus ALS is already looking ahead to the future. Neville Bertwistle says, "In the next phase of the project we will be looking to enhance reports for inventory management including scheduling and delivery of both incoming and outgoing goods, and later stages will concentrate on predictive analysis and forecasting."



About Catapult BI

Catapult BI is one of Australia's largest consulting firms specialising in the application of business intelligence, corporate performance management methods and the delivery of business intelligence solutions.

Catapult BI provides true vendor independent advice, across all private and public industry sectors and all lines of business, recommending innovative and appropriate business intelligence solutions to complement your existing technology investment.

Catapult BI also clearly outlines the journey of 'how' to arrive at the end result. Catapult BI consultants analyse your business information needs and define strategies to remove your information pain points. Catapult BI partners with clients for the duration to ensure that projects are delivered on time, on budget and that they realise the expected business benefits.
www.catapultbi.com

About IBM

IBM Australia is a leading supplier of information technology, software and services in Australia, helping customers of all sizes to adapt and prosper in the online world. More than 23,000 companies around the world use Cognos software for business intelligence and financial performance management. It supports better decision making to drive stronger performance.
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For further information on Catapult BI

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For further information on Abacus ALS

If you would like to speak with someone from Abacus ALS please call **1800 222 287** (in Australia) or **0800 222 170** (in New Zealand), email info@abacus-als.com or visit: <http://www.abacus-als.com/>



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