

CUSTOMERS

Wilbert Plastics Updates Reporting System With BI

“All our transactional reporting is now done with Business Objects. Instead of nine duplicate reporting solutions for nine plants, we have one. Instead of 400 reports, we now have 50. More people are accessing more transactional data at less cost to the company.”
Paul Stubitsch, Corporate Director of IT, Wilbert, Inc.



Industry

Heavy-gauge thermoform plastics

Business Pain

Wilbert Plastics needed to update its inefficient, costly, and time-consuming business reporting system.

Why Business Objects?

Business Objects provided the solutions Wilbert Plastics required: integration with the company's ERP system, standardization of operational reporting, and improved IT productivity.

Business Objects Products and Services

Business Objects Enterprise XI

Business View Manager

Crystal Reports

Challenge

Wilbert Plastic Services (WPS) is the world's largest heavy-gauge thermoform plastics supplier, and a leading provider of large-part, injection-molded plastic solutions and custom material handling and packaging solutions. Based in Chicago, WPS manufactures, assembles, and engineers plastic solutions for a world-class customer base.

Because a shared service IT model was developed after the company began a number of acquisitions, WPS faced the challenge of having to rationalize and standardize numerous reporting systems across its plants. With nine plants running various enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, many reports had been duplicated, and various versions of the same reports existed between plants. To establish more effective business reporting and a more efficient shared service model, WPS needed to deliver a common set of reports, along with the underlying technology that would support it. With an existing investment in Crystal Reports® at the desktop, WPS looked to Business Objects for a solution.

When Paul Stubitsch, corporate director of IT at WPS, joined WPS in 2004, he found more than 400 Crystal Reports had been created separately for WPS's different plants, to augment existing SyteLine ERP reports. Stubitsch notes that every time a plant needed a new report or a new way to look at the data that came with SyteLine, WPS used Crystal Reports. "Because SyteLine creates a Progress database for each plant, sharing this report required copying it nine times – one for each plant," Stubitsch recalls. "There wasn't a lot of communication going on. We would write very similar reports for different plants, when we should have been able to share one between them." Copying nine instances of hundreds of reports was inefficient, costly, and time-consuming.

Only one or two licensed Crystal Reports users per department were able to run reports, and widespread access to the valuable transactional information delivered through these Crystal reports didn't exist. Those few who had Crystal Reports on their desktops had to access reports from a shared folder on the network, which presented an additional interface to deal with.

WPS decided to redefine business processes from an organizational level. The company sought a standardized, scalable reporting solution that would better serve employees, giving them widespread access to information and reducing IT's time-consuming involvement in managing reports and Crystal Reports desktops. Says Stubitsch, "We had very limited development capabilities at the time, and we needed someone to help us deliver a scalable reporting solution that would allow us to use a

single instance of a report across all our plants – and to provide all ERP users with access to that information.”

Approach

WPS turned to technology partner CFS Consulting, a Business Objects Silver Consulting Partner, to help build a solution based on BusinessObjects™ Enterprise XI, Business View Manager, and Crystal Reports. “We thought about other solutions for about three minutes,” says Stubitsch. “I was comfortable that a Business Objects business intelligence (BI) solution could handle our transactional reporting requirements going forward.”

CFS began its engagement by consolidating and culling reports. Working with WPS staffers, it reduced the number of reports from 400 down to 50. Using dynamic data connections to simulate the ability to have any one report connect to multiple databases, CFS completed a proof of concept, where users could execute a Crystal report directly from SyteLine and have it connect to any one of the plants’ databases chosen at runtime.

“CFS has two strong attributes,” says Stubitsch. “The first is their strong relationship with Business Objects, which helped CFS through some technical issues – like writing custom code to deliver the reports through our ERP system. The second is that CFS quickly developed a strong understanding of our business, and it focused on building a BI solution that answered our business needs as well as our technical requirements. It’s a very professional group who shared its knowledge with us so we could manage the solution moving forward.”

Results

WPS is already benefiting from its Business Objects transactional reporting solution. By deploying a scalable, high-performance BI solution for the enterprise, the IT department at WPS was able to comply with corporate directives to implement model business processes that are standardized across the organization. “All our extended transactional reporting is now done with BusinessObjects and Crystal Reports,” says Stubitsch. “Instead of replicating and maintaining reports for each plant, we now have one report that serves all plants. Instead of 400 reports, we now have 50. More people are accessing more transactional data at less cost to the company.”

CFS designed the solution so all employees can access Crystal Reports directly from the SyteLine interface. WPS can also assign different levels of access to different employee roles, allowing them to drill down and view details according to their BI requirements. “Now that Crystal reports are embedded right into our ERP system, folks don’t even know they’re using a new solution – it just looks like fancy reporting out of SyteLine,” says Stubitsch. The transparent interface went a long way to speeding user adoption and meant the new solution required virtually no training. Adds Stubitsch, “We’ve reduced the number of interfaces that people need to learn by doing away with the file structure navigation system we had before.”

With Crystal Reports readily available within the ERP system, instead of residing in folders on the network, employees access them on-demand. The introduction of self-serve, real-time reporting unlocks the data in SyteLine to make it available across all plants. So WPS is getting more mileage out of its ERP investment.

For WPS, standardizing on a single operational reporting solution has many benefits. WPS can take advantage of the inherent similarity of each of its nine plants

to develop a single set of reports that cover the company's collective operational reporting requirements and that can run against all nine databases. For management, this consolidated reporting provides better visibility into global operations. At the plant level, the solution equalizes everyone's access to information, and in many cases delivers more reports than were previously available. Before the new solution, some of the larger, more complex plants had amassed more reports with greater detail, but these were not available generally. "When we culled the reports, we standardized operating report content based upon the most advanced plants," explains Stubitsch. "Now we have a suite of premium reports available to all the plants – which means some of the smaller ones have better information than before. Going forward, we design reports to meet all plant requirements. Once it's deemed to be a corporate level report, it goes into all instances of our ERP system at the same time. From a business standpoint, that's the biggest benefit of our Business Objects reporting platform."

Now when WPS acquires a new company, it's a simple matter to bring the new plant online with a ready-made suite of reports. In a period of expansion, this dramatically reduces the upheaval of bringing a new business into the fold and ensures better compliance with corporate processes right from the start. "The fact that we can walk in with an entire suite of reports is a huge benefit to the company as a whole, as well as to IT," says Stubitsch. "We're confident that when we go into a new plant, our core set of reports will provide employees with the data they need to hit the ground running."

The IT department is also enjoying increased productivity, as well as an improved ability to comply with corporate directives. "We've gone a long way to supporting the new Wilbert Plastics Services vision of deploying a common operating model across our plants," says Stubitsch. "We're not wasting time copying reports for individual plants. Now we have a process in place – when a report is developed, it automatically goes into every instance of our database. We no longer have to manage Crystal Reports on numerous desktops, and we don't worry about the platform's reliability. We're able to focus our resources on more important projects. At the end of the day, Business Objects has helped us serve our employees with better access to more information – and save money."

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