

A fine drop

A rapid implementation of SAP BusinessObjects has provided The Wine Society with the solution to problems in access to and use of sophisticated reporting. **Freya Purnell** reports.

Background

Established in 1946, The Wine Society is Australia's oldest independent wine club. With over 55,000 members nation-wide, the society has a commitment to distributing Australian wine, and also offers wine education, events and corporate services such as private tastings.

The Wine Society has been a long-term user of SAP, first implementing the system in July 1998, and upgrading to 4.7 in 2006.

As a small business, the Wine Society has not been able to invest significantly in its SAP solution outside of the core business functionality, according to Nick Perrin, information systems manager, The Wine Society.

"This meant the business had no integrated reporting solution, and was reliant on a combination of LIS, custom ABAPs and exports. In addition to SAP, the business required reports from our various standalone retail point of sale (POS) systems, from our email marketing system, and from our inbound and outbound contact systems (currently separate)," Perrin says.

Data from these disparate sources needed to be manually extracted and consolidated in Excel.

"A consequence of this was the business was heavily reliant on the availability of certain key users to generate these reports manually, and access to timely and relevant insight was limited at best," Perrin says.

In addition to these system challenges, The Wine Society operates in an incredibly competitive market, due to an influx of online wine merchants and the high Australian dollar presenting challenges around competing with cheaper imports. In this environment, having better business insights provides an advantage.

"We had already been working on a home-grown solution for this issue using SSAS and consolidating the large variety of existing exports developed over the time since implementation, but we were held up at the last stage trying to resolve performance and usability issues for the end users," says Perrin.

SAP services provider Icon Integration, which had been working with The Wine Society on maintaining and supporting its SAP environment, suggested SAP BusinessObjects as a solution that could be rapidly deployed to resolve these issues.

Peter Collett, director, Icon Integration, says, "We knew that they had created a SQL server datamart that they weren't getting much from. In the end, we said give us a

box, we will install BusinessObjects and connect it to your datamart, and we will show you what it can do."

Implementation and challenges

In undertaking this implementation, Perrin says the main aim was to provide the business with timely and accurate reports, which they were unable to do effectively with the existing manual processes.

"By automating all our key reports, as well as our list segmentation and generation, our aim was also to free resources to focus on more in-depth reporting and analysis, rather than wasting time on daily and monthly recurring requirements," Perrin says.

The solution used SAP Business Intelligence Edge 4.0 SP4 over a SQL Server datamart to provide quick, specific access to information needed by the business – such as sales, membership and product information – in a very simple and easily maintainable deployment.

The implementation was very successful, with Icon installing the new solution rapidly so The Wine Society could get up and running with its new reporting processes.

"Given the work we had already done on the data extraction and consolidation, in just a handful of consulting days Icon had deployed the system and trained the key IT and business users," Perrin says.

While a challenge for The Wine Society with this project



was making resources available to develop the required reports and manage the incorporation of new data into the BusinessObjects universe, Perrin says Icon was able to make a resource available quite flexibly to assist with additional training and insight.

To date, the key user within The Wine Society of the new BusinessObjects solution has been its marketing data analyst. There are now a significant number of previously manually generated weekly and monthly reports scheduled and running daily. Perrin says the business has also recently automated the generation of basic lists for its email marketing campaigns, and has currently incorporated data from its POS system and email marketing system, and working on the integration of its outbound and inbound contact systems data.

“In the three months since we implemented BusinessObjects, we have already scheduled around 14 weekly/monthly reports, meaning results that were usually reported on once a month after the sales have been completed are now being reported every day, significantly improving responsiveness,” Perrin says.

Collett says the feedback from the marketing analyst is that the solution saves her hours each day, compared to the previous processes of extracting data manually and manipulating in Excel.

“That’s probably one of the reasons why this small project has proven so successful – they have someone who really has a vested interest in this solution and she is just flying with it.”

Business benefits

Perrin says BusinessObjects is providing a new level of visibility and analytic capability to the business.

“As we hoped, the new solution is already providing daily insight into business performance in a way that was not possible previously with our reporting and resourcing limitations,” he says. “Key anticipated benefits include significantly improved customer segmentation, enhanced stock forecasting, improved channel analysis and opportunity identification, along with the general expectation of significantly improved decision-making. Our experience so far indicates that it will allow us to deliver on those expectations in spite of our very limited budget and resources.”

Collett says this project shows that achieving results such as these doesn’t require a six-month or 12-month project.

“You can deploy it in a matter of days, and you can have real business benefits in a matter of days,” he says.

The BusinessObjects solution also provides a platform to make the facts needed for good decision-making, and even predicting customer desires, available for the business to act on.

“When your facts are so hidden within SAP, you need to have a sensible way of getting the facts out to the right people at the right time. The Wine Society has to know who is buying what, and almost be able to predict what their customers will want to buy,” Collett says. “BusinessObjects lets them make informed decisions as opposed to guesses.” 