



Buy the BI: A closer look at the market leaders in FP&A software

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Assessing the business intelligence software market

With the current realities of the marketplace, focus on cost control, and desire for real-time information, the buzz lately seems to be all about financial planning and analysis. Every major software corporation understands this and wants a portion of the multi-billion dollar business intelligence (BI) market. Their quest for market share has fueled a round of acquisitions, which make the ever-changing software landscape more difficult than ever to navigate.

The challenge for the corporate buyer is to understand the full range of BI products available today and be aware of the ideal time to make a significant capital investment. So, who are the major players and what should you know about them?

Oracle

What others are saying: "Oracle is recognized by IDC as the #1 vendor in business analytics and is positioned as a Leader in Gartner's BI Platform Magic Quadrant."—IDC.

The skinny: Oracle has worked hard to position itself as a leader in the BI space through internal growth and acquisitions. Oracle's strategic BI offering, Oracle Business Intelligence, comes in three sizes:

- Oracle Business Intelligence Standard Edition 1 (OBISE1): Designed for small to medium enterprises (SME). It includes Oracle's Answers, Dashboards, Briefing Books, and BI Publisher. This offering is restricted to 50 users or less.
- Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition Plus (OBIEE): Oracle's flagship offering is designed for large corporations. It includes everything from OBISE1 (Answers, Dashboards, Briefing Books, BI Publisher), plus Delivers, Office disconnected BI and some Hyperion products (Essbase). It starts with a minimum of 50 users or 1 CPU.
- Oracle Business Intelligence Standard Edition (OBISE): This is the low-cost solution and was Oracle's BI offering before it acquired Siebel and Hyperion. It contains Discoverer and Oracle reports.

The core of the OBI platform is the Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition Server (OBI EE

Server), which plays the role of a fully functional BI server. This centralized BI server is designed to be highly scalable for handling large numbers of users while providing the flexibility to deliver a secure customizable user interface. The OBI EE Server seamlessly integrates the tools that have corporate leadership buzzing across the country: OLAP, dashboards, ad-hoc queries, alerting, and reporting.

- OLAP: For true online analytical processing (OLAP), Oracle's Essbase offers a cutting edge interface which allows for rapid development and simplified management of analytical applications. It is designed to be highly scalable with the ability to access large database sets from multiple sources. Those power users that need to answer "what-if" questions will find this product indispensable.
- Dashboards: OBI Dashboards provides the end user with a flashy, Web-based dashboard containing all the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) needed to manage, monitor and pro-actively guide a business. The polished graphs, charts and tables allow a user to drill into the details and view data in real-time.
- Ad-hoc queries: OBI Answers+ provides an ad hoc Web interface that empowers users to find their own data. The tool ingeniously hides the complexities of the data source and structures, enabling the audience to work with the logical view of the information when creating reports and graphs. The end results can be saved, shared and embedded into a dashboard.
- Alerting: OBI Delivers is a Web-based monitoring system that can reach users via e-mail, dashboards and mobile devices when critical KPIs hit certain thresholds.
- Reporting: BI Publisher satisfies the need for polished, pixel-perfect enterprise reporting. Users can create complex, multi-source reports with Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat and then distribute them to the enterprise.

SAP

What others are saying: "SAP has been named the market share leader in business intelligence (BI), analytics and performance management software"—2009 market share report by Gartner, Inc.

The skinny: In the world of BI acquisitions and mergers, SAP moved to the top of the heap by acquiring Business Objects, which offered an end-to-end BI solution. SAP is phasing out its Business Explorer (BEx) product over the next five years (by 2016). The re-branded SAP BusinessObjects comes in three sizes:

- BI: SAP BusinessObject's flagship product that offers Explorer, Crystal Reports, Web Intelligence, Xcelsius and Pioneer.
- Edge BI: This mid-sized product provides most of the flagship functionality excluding the high visualization (Xcelsius) and OLAP (Pioneer).
- BI OnDemand: This software-as-a-service (SaaS) offering allows for data exploration, reporting and dashboards.

The SAP BusinessObjects Enterprise server provides the core of the SAP BO BI solution. It provides integration, security and deployment for the SAP BO production line with the ability to scale for

companies that need high availability and cutting – edge performance.

- If you need enterprise reports, then look no further than the time-tested Crystal Reports. For years, Crystal Reports has been the most popular reporting tool used by most companies and incorporated into numerous applications.
- Web Intelligence provides the online ability to give your end users ad-hoc reporting. With the ability to query data, drill down, and create charts, the user population can find most of their own answers.
- Management KPIs and visualization is accomplished through the implementation of Xcelsius. It provides the business key information needed to make decisions and keep things moving forward.
- Pioneer (formally Voyager) allows power users to forecast, slice and mind data until the critical answers that management requires are found.

IBM

What others are saying: "The benefits were immediately clear, providing accurate figures in a much shorter space of time. Once the finance team started using the IBM Cognos solution word got around. Now you can find the technology being used across many areas of the business including operations, HR and the actuarial team."—Sherain Veale, IBM Cognos Competency Centre Manager at Hiscox.

Bottom Line: Not to be outdone, IBM acquired Cognos to give it an end-to-end BI solution and SPSS to gain a statistical package. IBM and Cognos did not have product overlap, which made the integration of the two tools straightforward and simple. The newly branded IBM Cognos BI product line comes in two sizes:

- Cognos BI: IBM's flagship product offers the complete line of Cognos tools to meet any BI need a corporate might face.
- Cognos Express: Offers all the BI needs for a midsize company up to 100 users with Reporter, Advisor and Xcelerator, which are comparable to the Report, Query and Metric studio found in Cognos BI.

Like the competition, the Cognos BI server provides the core functionality to integrate and deliver the necessary products on-demand. Cognos does differentiate itself by nicely naming its tools for the purpose they serve.

- Report Studio provides formatted enterprise reports.
- Query Studio offer ad hoc reporting capabilities.
- Analysis Studio allows users to explore multi-dimensional cubes, while PowerPlay Studio provides the power user all the tools to mine critical data.
- Event Studio alerts users when KPIs and events occur.
- Metric Studio allows for scorecarding and KPIs. Cognos does offer a dashboard accessing the BI data.

Just remember that no matter what BI company and product(s) you choose, it is important to search for a solution that meets your company's current business needs. When planning for your BI solution, analyze network bandwidth and do not skimp on the BI server hardware.

This article is the first of a multi-part series on understanding the BI product landscape, navigating the selection process, reviewing the common BI implementation pitfalls, and scoping, planning and implementing a BI solution. Next, we will explore how you can navigate the selection process to ensure your company is not blinded by the bells and whistles and instead remains focused on needs.

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