

Enterprise Reporting and Dashboard Assessment: Part 2 — Vendor Scoring Summary

Enterprise Analytics Strategies

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FOCAL POINT

Selecting a standard toolset continues to be the biggest trend in the business intelligence (BI) market. To assist organizations in the vendor selection process, META Group will publish a series of Practices that evaluate the various segments of the BI market (e.g. enterprise reporting and dashboards, query and analysis, suites and platforms). This Practice is the second of a two-part series that evaluates the capabilities of the nine leading enterprise reporting and dashboard vendors. In Part 1, we provided an overview of the market, described key market trends, and explained the evaluation methodology used in rating the vendors. In Part 2, we will provide a high-level analysis followed by some detailed comments about each vendor.

CONTEXT

Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation is much more focused on the technical capabilities of each toolset versus the METASpectrumSM methodology, which essentially rates market performance (e.g., product features, services) and presence (e.g., market share, partnerships) equally. Seven of the nine criteria used in this analysis evaluate the technical features of each toolset. Only two criteria, presence and pricing, rate the tools on non-technical attributes. We found that there were certain criteria (e.g., parameterization, usability) where all the vendors demonstrated relative parity, though there were other criteria — connectivity, distribution, and presence — where certain vendors showed a clear lead. To emphasize this differentiation in the overall score, we gave these three criteria a slightly higher weighting. All other criteria are weighted evenly. When making product selection decisions, customers may want to weigh certain criteria more heavily based on their requirements. To produce such ratings, META Group evaluated each toolset based on 47 subcriteria (see Delta 2358). The vast majority of these subcriteria either are true/false questions about whether a particular feature exists or provide a list of features where a tool can score a point for each one it offers. As a result, the most of the input for the vendor scores is based on objective attributes as opposed to subjective opinions.

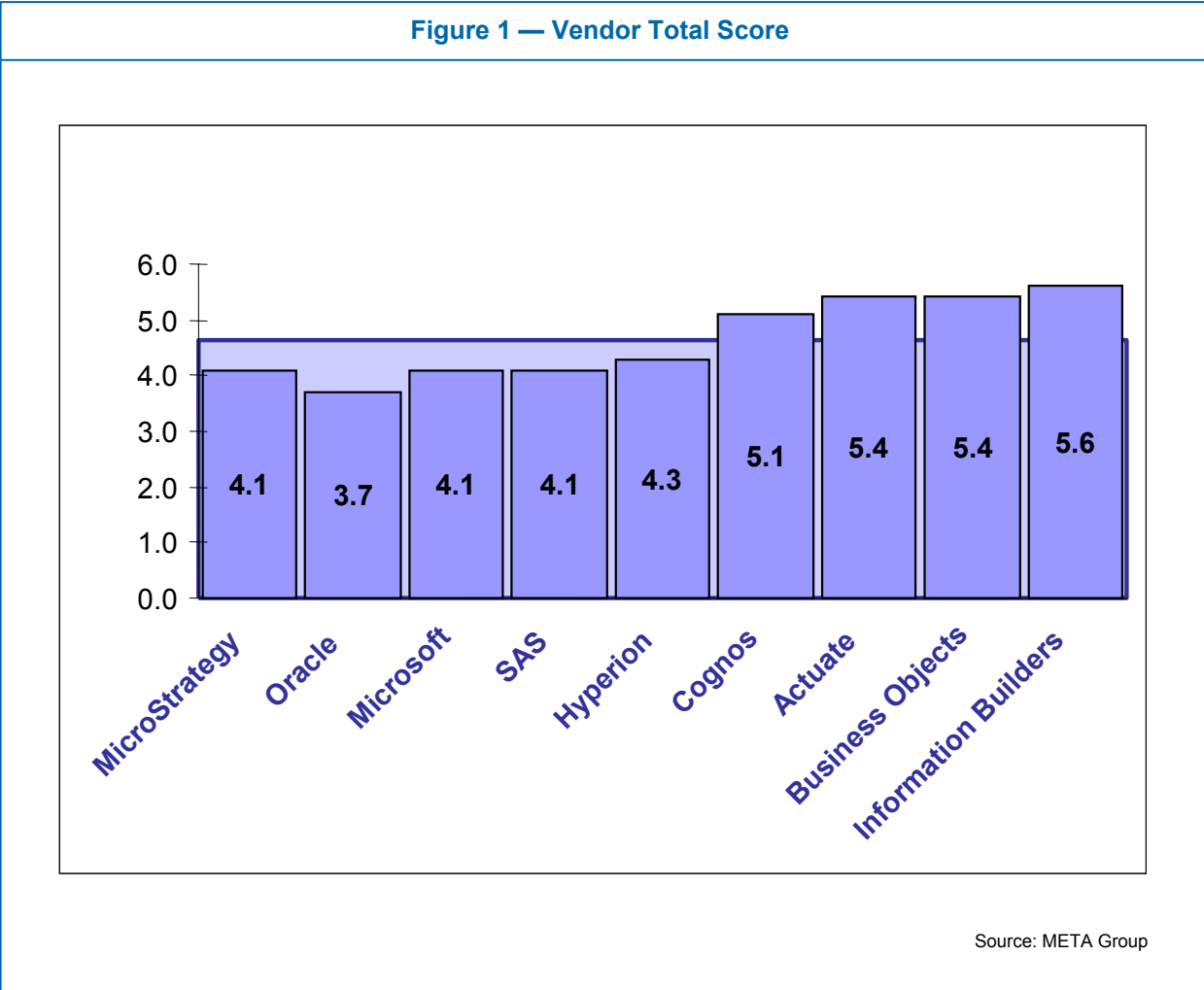
Although there are hundreds of technical capabilities that could have been included in this study, we chose these 47 subcriteria based on the frequency with which they are found in customer requirements. Furthermore, we view many low-level features (e.g. ODBC support) as “table stakes” to enter the market. Instead, the subcriteria were carefully selected as differentiating features.

And the Winner Is ...

With a score of 5.6, Information Builders was the overall winner of the enterprise reporting and dashboard evaluation. Actuate and Business Objects came in second, each with a score of 5.4, followed by Cognos with a score of 5.1. The remaining five vendors — Hyperion, MicroStrategy, Microsoft, Oracle, and SAS — all scored below the market average (see Figure 1). Presence is the most noteworthy of the nine criteria, because it is the one criterion that most correlates to a vendor’s overall ranking. The leading four vendors all scored higher

META Trend: In 2005/06, the business intelligence standardization wars will continue as large organizations choose their standards. However, organizations will struggle to replace incumbent tools from existing implementations. Therefore, many organizations will still be managing legacy tools through 2008/09. Leading organizations will standardize on one integrated toolset for reporting, analysis, and performance management. During 2005/06, parameterized reporting and dashboards will emerge as the most prominent business intelligence technology, with numerous enterprise and customer-facing deployments scaling to hundreds of thousands of users. Behind the firewall, dashboards will offer a lower-cost alternative to more expensive specialized scorecard applications, with acceptable functionality.

than the market average for presence. Moreover, the five trailing vendors all scored significantly below average for this criterion.



Due to the wide variability in the scores, Connectivity also stood out as a noteworthy criterion (see Figure 2). Two vendors, SAS and Information Builders, scored well above the mean with scores of 5.0. Their exemplary scores were due to the native data integration these vendors have developed with a long list of databases, legacy data sources, and applications vendors. Hyperion, Cognos, Actuate, and Business Objects all scored close to average for this criterion. Although these vendors have respectable support for OLAP, relational, and some non-relational data sources, all lacked the long list of native data adaptors claimed by SAS and Information Builders. In particular, Cognos was helped significantly by its recent investment in Composite Software, a leading enterprise information integration (EII) vendor. MicroStrategy, Oracle, and Microsoft all scored significantly below average for this criterion. All three of these vendors lacked extensive OLAP and non-relational support. Moreover, all three had minimal native data adaptors created, instead opting for open standard support (e.g. ODBC, OLE DB). In addition, despite the variability of scores, Connectivity was not a clear predictor of success for the overall ranking.

The two leading vendors, Actuate and Information Builders, both scored exceptionally well in the scalability and performance criterion. No other vendor was able to demonstrate the number of large deployments in the field. We were surprised to see a high degree of parity across all vendors for parameterized reporting and the usability criteria. For the parameterized criterion, in particular, most of the vendors were able to provide cascading prompts and support for both mandatory and optional parameters. As for usability, most of the vendors demonstrated similar capabilities with respect to search, navigation, and hyperlinking.

With certain exceptions, scores for the distribution, development, and administration criteria were also clustered around the mean. Pricing is the only other criterion that displayed a wide variance across all nine vendors evaluated. Buyers should conclude that there are technical differences between the leading reporting and dashboard tools. However, a large amount of the difference stems from two market-based criteria (e.g. presence and pricing). Scores for the remaining seven criteria we evaluated, all technical differentiators, were clustered much closer to the average.

Figure 2 — Scoring Summary Table

Criterion	Average	Best in Class	Micro-Strategy	Oracle	Microsoft	SAS	Hyperion	Cognos	Actuate	Business Objects	Information Builders
Presence	2.8	4.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	2	4.5	4.3	4.5	4
Connectivity	3.4	5	2.8	1.3	1.9	5	3.8	3.4	3.8	3.4	5
Distribution	4.4	5	4.8	4	4.4	4.4	3.8	4.4	5	4.5	4.9
Scalability and Performance	3.8	5	3	3.5	3.5	3	4	3.5	5	4.5	4.5
Parameterized	4.8	5	5	4.6	3.9	4.3	5	5	5	5	5
Usability	4.7	5	4.5	4.5	5	4	4.5	5	5	5	5
Development	4.1	4.5	4.5	4	3.9	3.7	3.7	4.2	4.4	4	4.2
Administration	3.8	4.7	3.5	2.4	3.6	3.4	3.8	4.1	4.5	4.7	4.2
Pricing	3.3	5	1.7	3.3	4.4	1.7	2.8	3.3	3.3	4.4	5
WEIGHTED AVERAGE	4.6	5.6	4.1	3.7	4.1	4.1	4.3	5.1	5.4	5.4	5.6
Yellow = Above average											
Green = Best in class											

Source: META Group

Vendor Commentary

MicroStrategy 8: Report Services, NarrowCast, and MicroStrategy Office

MicroStrategy has greatly improved its enterprise reporting and dashboard offering with the 8.0 release of Report Services. Improvements include the support of multiple output formats, much improved reporting and developer interfaces, SAP BW integration and the addition of data mining support. Report Services is integrated seamlessly into the overall MicroStrategy 8 product suite. Holding MicroStrategy back in the overall ranking is the relative newness of the Report Services product.

Strengths

- Strong Web-based developer and end-user environments
- Integration of reporting and analysis within the same interface
- Best-in-class developer environment and support for parameters
- Above-average distribution capabilities
- Strong integration with multiple portal products

Limitations

- Low presence and scalability ratings due to relative newness of product
- No check in/check out or versioning support for multiple developers
- Administration is not Web-based
- Report Services pricing is high, and MicroStrategy is difficult to negotiate with; this makes standardizing on Report Services for all reporting needs (simple to complex) difficult

Oracle Reports 9.0.4

Oracle Reports is a strong product for Oracle database reporting requirements. However, it is rarely considered for reporting needs beyond an Oracle environment. This is reflected in the low scores for presence and connectivity.

Strengths

- Strong Excel support with a common add-in used between Oracle Reports and Discoverer
- Check in/check out and versioning support for multiple developers provided with Oracle SCM
- Reasonable pricing and flexible in negotiations

Limitations

- Connectivity to heterogeneous sources requires DBA setup of database connectors
- No access to non-relational legacy data sources
- Scheduling of reports based on periodicity and events requires custom coding
- No out-of-the-box security integration with non-Oracle solutions

Microsoft Reporting Services 1.0 SP2

Microsoft Reporting Services is a new entrant to the enterprise reporting and dashboards market space. Reporting Services is not sold as a separate product. Rather, it is bundled with the SQL/Server database product. This has resulted in Reporting Services being widely distributed in a short period of time, though the actual use of the product is not known. The integration of Reporting Services with Visual Studio offers developers a familiar environment for development. However, Reporting Services lacks native data connectivity to most other applications (e.g. typically ODBC or OLE DB connectivity support). In addition, despite market awareness and attractive price point, we have not seen many large enterprises standardize on it for enterprise reporting.

Strengths

- Connecting to Oracle natively supported out of the box
- All reports available as a Web services
- Best-in-class usability
- Above-average score in pricing; Microsoft offers one of lowest-cost enterprise reporting solutions

Limitations

- Minimal (formatting and limited formulas support) integration with Excel
- No support of non-relational legacy data sources
- No support of heterogeneous joins
- No support for sharing of parameters across a series of reports or reuse of parameters

SAS WebReportStudio (Part of BI Server Version 9.1 Product)

SAS WebReportStudio is an effective enterprise reporting and dashboard product that is delivered as part of the BI Server product. WebReportStudio is not sold as a separate product. With the release of SAS 9, WebReportStudio has improved. In addition to very strong data connectivity, SAS can embed and reuse analytical stored processes.

Strengths

- Best-in-class connectivity with out-of-the-box support for more than 70 data sources
- WYSIWYG report design environment that renders real data in design mode
- Strong support of multiple languages and international requirements
- Good support of Excel with add-in component

Limitations

- Low presence and scalability and performance scores due to WebReportStudio being a relatively new product
- No support for cascading parameters, though scheduled to be addressed during 2005
- No support of content caching, though this is expected to be supported during 2005
- Pricing limited to per CPU and enterprise options and is based on a subscription model

Hyperion Performance Suite 8.3 (Intelligence and SQR)

Hyperion offers a solid enterprise reporting and dashboard product, and it finished in the middle of the overall ranking. Hyperion acquired SQR and other intelligence components through the acquisition of Brio during 2003. Such products are OEMed by numerous other software vendors, most notably PeopleSoft. Although Hyperion scored well in most areas of the evaluation, it scored last in the area of development environment.

Strengths

- Best-in-class support for parameters
- Above-average support for connectivity and scalability and performance
- Strong security integration capabilities out of the box

Limitations

- No out-of-the-box alerting capabilities
- Minimal (formatting and limited formulas support) integration with Excel; this will be addressed during 2005
- No WYSIWYG report design in SQR
- Separate desktop tool for creating connections and connection pooling

Cognos ReportNet 1.1 and NoticeCast

Since its release in July 2003, ReportNet has made considerable penetration in the enterprise reporting and dashboards market with more than \$130 million in sales. This high penetration is confirmed in its strong presence score, and is attributed to the large Cognos user base to sell into and strong OEM and SI partner relationships. As a new product, there is no track record of large deployments. This was reflected in the scalability and performance score for ReportNet. Nonetheless, Cognos finishes in the top four within a half point of the overall leader.

Strengths

- Embedding of Composite for enterprise information integration capabilities makes ReportNet well suited for real-time reporting needs
- Best-in-class presence — one of two most often shortlisted products
- Best-in-class scores for support of parameters and end-user usability
- Above-average scores in development environment and administration capabilities.

Limitations

- No out-of-the-box support for Hyperion, Oracle, and SQL/Server OLAP sources until later in 2005
- Minimal (formatting and pivot tables support) integration with Excel
- Few large reference deployments; current largest install is approximately 5,000 users

Actuate I-Server 8.0 and e.Spreadsheet

Actuate I-Server 8 and e.Spreadsheet server are a powerful combination for addressing enterprise reporting and dashboard requirements. A mature product, Actuate has numerous customers with deployments of more than 50,000 users. Actuate is only one of two vendors to score above average or best in class in all evaluation categories. Actuate finishes tied for second in the overall vendor, ranking within one-fifth of a point of the leader.

Strengths

- Strong Excel integration support meeting all five criteria; upcoming matrix capabilities will add a third dimension to data in an Excel environment
- Best in class in distribution, scalability and performance, parameter processing, and usability
- Above-average scores in presence, connectivity, development, administration, and pricing
- Strong EII capabilities for real-time reporting needs

Limitations

- Real data not represented in WYSIWYG report formatting interface
- No check in/check out or versioning support for multiple developers
- Difficult to get concessions in pricing; tendency to sell add-on products (e.g. e.Spreadsheet) instead of bundling in the suite

Business Objects XI; Crystal Enterprise and Live Office

The Business Objects XI release of Crystal Enterprise and Live Office is the most widely deployed enterprise reporting and dashboard product in the industry. With the XI release, the Crystal Enterprise product is now integrated with the entire Business Objects product suite. Business Objects maintains a leading presence in the market through a large OEM and partner ecosystem. Business Objects finishes tied for second in the overall vendor ranking, within one-fifth of a point of the leader.

Strengths

- Best-in-class presence; one of two most often shortlisted products
- Best-in-class parameter processing, usability, and administration
- Above-average scores in distribution, scalability and performance, and pricing
- The BI Encyclopedia introduced in the XI release improves the metadata for end users

Limitations

- Connectivity to non-relational legacy data sources requires support through Data Direct at an additional cost
- No real-time data access support or EII capability
- No check in/check out or versioning support for multiple developers

Information Builders WebFocus 5.3

Information Builders finishes as the overall leader in the enterprise reporting and dashboards vendor evaluation. Information Builders is only one of two vendors to score above average or best in class in all evaluation categories. A longstanding product, WebFocus delivers enterprise reporting and dashboard capabilities to more than 11,000 customer sites with deployments in excess of more than two million users.

Strengths

- Best-in-class distribution, parameter processing, usability, and pricing
- Above-average scores in presence, distribution, scalability and performance, development, and administration
- Support of real-time and native data access through an extensive offering of more than 180 data adapters
- Good Excel support with cell locking becoming available in the next release
- Strong visualization capabilities through ownership of Advizor source code

Limitations

- Real data not represented in WYSIWYG report formatting interface
- Support of report caching only; additional caching features planned for future releases
- No check in/check out or versioning support for multiple developers

Bottom Line

The vendor analysis provided in this Practice is one of many inputs to be considered when standardizing or purchasing an enterprise reporting and dashboards solution.

Business Impact: The requirements of multiple types of users must be taken into account when considering the various vendor product offerings.