



Panorama NovaView Smart Reporting

Whitepaper

Simplifying Report Creation and Enhancing Analysis

The Evolution of Reporting

In its early years, Business Intelligence (BI) was commonly synonymous with reporting because it was the easiest way to consume data. Analysts evaluated business performance by generating relatively static but professionally formatted and easy to consume reports. They then took action based on the insight presented in the reports. As insight needs grew more sophisticated, reporting solutions flooded the market, but most approaches were plagued by usability issues.

Traditional reporting tools focus on two tiers of users – the analysts with specialized skills that sift through the data and create the reports and the users that need to consume the static information residing in the reports. The disparity between these two groups has widened to the point where disjointed processes are hampering the benefits that business intelligence can bring.

As BI becomes crucial in the decision making process, information workers are demanding more insight to make better decisions. A “one size fits all” reporting approach is not enough anymore.

With this type of approach, analysts and end users operate in two distinct environments. This disparity affects the strength of the report because the analyst determines the data to present independent of the user. Second, reports generated in this manner are fairly static. If the analyst invested the time, there may have been some filtering and sorting capabilities incorporated. But usually, users are left to view the report according to how the analyst structured it, with little capability of drilling into the data or exploring it to answer questions that arise from the initial analysis.

Analytics vs. reporting

Businesses embraced BI because of its promise to provide better data exploration and business insight. With insight came analysis and with analysis came action. Organizations could slice and dice data to generate insights about what was actually happening in the business and change course if it wasn't working or expand activities if it was effective.

Traditional analytics was not designed for easy sharing and consumption of data. It was a way to get to the insight, which is precisely what drove user frustration. Users knew the information was there, but they were reliant on analysts to filter and present the data. The push for change and analyst independence was mounting.

Users were pressuring the industry for solutions that would bridge the gap between analysis and reporting. After exploring and analyzing data, users wanted to create their own reports to present their insights and consume information in an intuitive way. Ultimately, they wanted to simplify report creation and enhance analysis, but have reporting and analysis leverage the same data and metadata. By eliminating the separation between reporting and analysis, users could uncover the context of the statistics they were viewing and understand the larger performance picture.

Supporting User-focused BI

Traditional reporting solutions aren't the most conducive to user-focused business intelligence. Relational reporting models require that analysts maintain a semantic layer. This means that they have to map data manually to every table. With this process, report creation remains complicated for end users and presents serious limitations in terms of flexibility and functionality.

Traditional methods of retrieving data from multiple data sources also pose their own unique challenges. The contents are hard to understand and not designed for average users. There are many different sources, making relevant data capture difficult and seriously impeding the ability to drill, slice and explore. In addition, accessing the data takes time and isn't intuitive. Users are usually left to interpret the data themselves without the advantage of exploring insights.

On Line Analytical Processing (OLAP) is a significant step forward for analysis, but it is not leveraged fully for the reporting. OLAP provides a way to store data that creates more possibilities for the everyday user. Databases configured for OLAP use a multidimensional data model, enabling users to complete queries quickly and conduct greater exploration into data presented in reports.

Panorama NovaView Smart Reporting - bridging the gap between reporting and analysis

Panorama NovaView Smart Reporting takes the capabilities enabled in OLAP and augments them to deliver one of the most comprehensive reporting solutions currently available.

First, the solution enables information workers to build attractive, easily understood and simply formatted reports, without IT or analyst intervention. Data is organized logically and is available in a multitude of formats that enables the sharing of the initial information and ongoing analysis. Users build their own reports with full formatting capabilities by simply dragging and dropping fields.

Going one step further, Smart Reporting takes reports and transforms them into fully interactive tools that can be changed on the fly. Pre-defined reports can be manipulated instantly to show different data views or angles, building and layering on the initial insight with new knowledge and discovery. Without ever leaving the report or doing other backend work, users can manipulate the data, slice and dice, add filters or sort. It's a replication of the capabilities of an analytical application, but maintains the simple to use environment that supports information sharing.

NovaView Smart Reporting uses the power of MDX, the standard query language for OLAP, to create reports and interact with data through a report view mode. It is the only MDX-based reporting available today, giving users the combined power of MDX with a reporting solution.

Why Smart Reporting Makes Sense

Many companies have already realized the potential of OLAP for improving how they evaluate, understand and alter business performance with analytical applications. Panorama NovaView Smart Reporting extends that investment by providing a solution that integrates with how leading companies are structuring their data warehousing offerings.

NovaView Smart Reporting provides the same robust capabilities on the SAP platform as it does on the Microsoft platform. SAP BW is the engine that drives BI in the SAP environment. SAP BW creates OLAP cubes automatically, making Smart Reporting an excellent fit for reporting on and analyzing data in a powerful and intuitive way.

Microsoft is leveraging the new unified dimensional model (UDM) to help companies access data from disparate sources more effectively. It comes as an out-of-the-box feature in SQL Server 2005. The UDM builds a bridge between the user and the data source(s) including relational databases, files or Web services. Using a front end solution, users can build full interactive reports against the UDM to access data that was once difficult and time consuming to retrieve.

Companies are taking advantage of the UDM to store data in a way that makes sense for how they intend to use it. The focus is now on the users and facilitating data consumption and sharing according to their requirements.

Removing the Boundaries in Reporting

Understanding the opportunity inherent in the widespread adoption of OLAP, Panorama NovaView Smart Reporting is uniquely positioned to empower users operating in both the Microsoft and/or SAP environments. By complementing and extending the BI capabilities of the two most commonly used platforms, Panorama NovaView Smart Reporting is changing the way companies interact with and share data, view performance and shape results.