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Randy Johnston • Apr. 20, 2017



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We use technology tools to solve client problems and our own problems. Whether these are generic tools like Microsoft Office, Citrix ShareFile, or Square, or specific

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historically tools like Crystal Reports, FRx, and F9 were used to generate reports that were not included in the system. As our needs became more sophisticated, we turned to business analytics and business intelligence tools like Cognos, Hyperion, InfoBuilder and others at the high end. Tools like QCube, Sage Intelligence and the like are in the low to medium size markets.

Specialized tools like Forecast 5 were developed for special markets like the not-for-profit segment or MyBusinessManager to solve the packaging and delivery problem. Today we see players like Tableau, Domo and others trying to solve this problem. There are approximately 100 reporting tools offered in the market. Nevertheless, you already know what most of us use: Excel.

Why Excel?

Larger, more complex systems provide reporting that is structured and repeatable. Once you can define what a report should contain, you can create an automated, repetitive output. However, to develop a report, it is often easier to model this in Excel. Further, even if a business analyst understands the problems you describe, and they build what they believe you want, they frequently miss the key management information that you are looking for.

In larger companies, there are frequently many demands on the business analyst's time, and there are delays getting the information needed. Also common is the need for adhoc reporting. These one-off reports, frequently for special projects or circumstances, can be difficult to define, extract or produce from any built-in reporting mechanism. Since our task is often to solve a pressing problem, we resort to the tools we have at hand: download the data, format the report in Excel, and keeping playing with the data until we are able to achieve the result desired. You also know the downsides of this scenario: it can take a lot of time, the process is error

prone, it is hard to repeat this in the future if needed, and sometimes you have

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manually extract data for repetitive or one-time reporting. A few new features also caught my attention when I reflected on how to solve this recurring reporting problem.

One of the new features was PackNGo. The product can compress approximately 2 million cells from Excel into one megabyte of file size. This allows a spreadsheet model to work detached from the original system and to answer other questions beyond the original model.

Another feature of interest was the ability to hook to QuickBooks exports and other Excel files natively. This decision allowed both entry-level users and ANY system that could produce an Excel output to be hooked in for automatic reporting in addition to the 20+ integrated systems.

A third feature of interest that contributed to performance of the product was in-memory processing. Graphics, financial functions, and general ease of use round out a winning combination to do all of your reporting in Excel.

It does not matter what system you have, you can report in Excel using BizNet's BizInsight. One final thing that pushed me over the top on this Excel reporting tool was the subscription pricing at \$30/user/month. If you have any Excel model that is used repeatedly, the latest version of Biznet's BizInsight will allow you to connect to the system of record, and automate the reporting in a consistent, reproducible way. How much is your time worth? Do you have any Excel sheets that you use every month? You can see how this works at: <http://info.biznetsoftware.com/accounting>.

If The Tools Are Good, Can We Leverage Them?

After reviewing dozens of reporting tools from the high end to the low end, one consistent conclusion recurs. Most tools are too hard for most users to use. Typically,

the final deliverable is created in Excel. While using Excel has all of the issues cited

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formatting it – most tend to use the opposite ratio of 80% of the time formatting data, and only 20% of the time analyzing the results.

3) Excel is a renegade system. That is to say, Excel is a reporting system outside the system and is very hard to control. Vendors have built whole businesses trying to control Excel.

4) Over 95% of all spreadsheets have errors. Authoritative sources claim that 99.6% of all spreadsheets have errors.

What To Do?

While greatly admiring Business Analytics and Business Intelligence tools for 25+ years, it is clear that most of them are hard to use, have many end-user restrictions, are expensive and often do not produce the results desired. While some newer tools, like PowerBI, are greatly improving the situation, end-user skills have to be high to gain efficiency and effectiveness. Built in reports frequently do not produce the information desired or present the information in a way that can be readily comprehended.

Even the smallest business owner and the largest publically held corporations have questions that are just more readily answered in Excel. I'm thinking that BizNet BizInsight is an Excel accelerator. Is it time you pushed on the gas for yourself and your clients?

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