

Using pre-built templates to reduce BI costs and implementation times

By John Sullivan

will give an overview of some simple ideas we have developed that can help you reduce the cost of buying, implementing and deploying your BI solution.

One of the things we have noticed is that a lot of the existing BI packages tend to be very expensive. They can start with five or six digit price tags, and can easily run into millions for enterprise wide deployments. Once you have bought the package, you might have to devote some time to training and expensive consulting just to get started. This is on top of the time that



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you will spend to implement your project. A lot of industry experts advocate OLAP tools, which frequently add unnecessary expense and complexity to your projects. Sometimes using a sledgehammer can be an expensive and time-consuming way of opening a nut.

Our experience with a vast number of BI projects, has convinced us that a lot of effort is consumed in reinventing the wheel. As an example, let's assume you would like to analyse your company's sales data.

With a lot of products, they inherently understand nothing about what a sales report actually is. You need to tell them, how to define sales volume, profit, and margin %. This can take a lot of time, and adds to the cost of implementation and

deployment. Once you have described this structure, you need to design report layouts. You need to build query screens and filters and charts. This adds time and complexity. However, when you realise, every company that analyses sales is essentially doing the same thing – reinventing the wheel.

What we have developed is an innovative two-stage approach to BI. The first stage is the **Template**, which represents the essence of what you are trying to analyse. It contains all the definitions on which your reports and analyses will be based. It allows you to query and interrogate out of the box, without having to design everything from scratch.

The second stage is the **Mapping**, which allows you to connect the abstract template into your own actual data. The mapping allows you to connect into any kind of database. We currently support Oracle, SQL Server, Informix, DB2, MySql, Access and Excel. The mapping can be used to connect to any kind of structure, you store your own data in. Because the templates are generalised, they can be used over and over again.

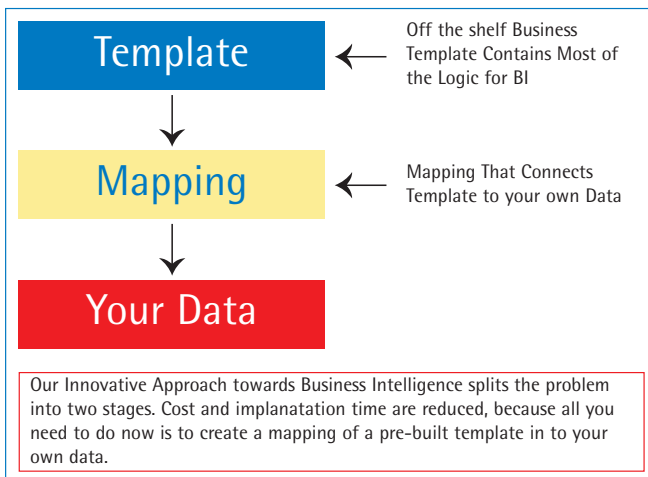
As an example, we have developed a sales template that inherently understands sales. It displays, qty sold, average cost,

average selling price, total costs, total sales, profit and margin %. It allows you to analyse these by category, item, rep, branch, by day, by week, by month, by quarter and by year, or any other custom field. You can drilldown, generate pivot reports, filter the data, render charts and do comparative analysis. For implementation, all you need to do is connect the template to your data. You don't have to spend a fortune on consulting on how to reinvent the wheel.

Our template based approach helps reduce the cost and deployment times of your BI projects. Deployment time is reduced because you only have to map the template into your own data. You do not need to develop the entire solution from scratch.

We have a web-based client, that executives find easy to use. There is no need to design query screens or report screens. Our web-client analyses your mapping, and automatically configures the interface of the template to match your own unique business requirements.

As an example, a large consumer electronics company wanted to understand what was going on in their supply chain. By using SAP as their ERP, they found that the SAP BI tools could not cope properly with



non SAP data. For minimal cost, they were able to use Interactive Reporting's Sales Template to map their dealer's sales data and gain better insight into what was happening with their channel sales.

O'Mahony Packaging were also able to use Interactive Reporting's Sales Template and adapter for Sage Line 100, to construct a flexible web

anything including branch, major department, sub department, buyer, bar code, size, style, & colour. As an option, users could be restricted to only view their branch's figures. Key reports could automatically be emailed to the right users.

In the BI marketplace, numerous mergers and consolidation of companies take place every month. Cognos bought Adaytum for \$157 million. Business Objects bought Crystal Decisions for \$1.2 billion. Hyperion bought Brio for \$142 million. Consolidation can lead to reduced competition, and increased prices for customers. We, at Interactive Reporting, promise you that we will fight them on the servers. We will fight them in the marketplace. And we will give you, the customer, increased choice and flexibility.

Our goal is to make BI as simple as possible and easy to use, by giving you the choice to avoid reinventing the wheel. We include standard templates with our product that helps simplify complex BI projects. Standard templates are available for sales, purchasing, inventory, AR, GL. By using industry standard templates, you can spend more time on understanding your own business, and less time on building and deploying more complex BI solutions. If you feel you want more than that, additional templates can be downloaded from our template marketplace. We also provide a template editor, so you can build your own templates. Our approach can sometimes cost an order of magnitude less than competitive products. 

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based interface that allowed them to quickly analyse sales data without the need for regular lengthy printouts. Margin and sales volume slippage was quickly spotted leading to corrective action. Sales margins could be sorted, highlighting good and bad sellers, and a detailed analysis of reps successfully revealed the ones with the weakest performance.

The Shaw Group, with 15 large department stores in Ireland, were able to connect Interactive Reporting's Sales and Purchasing Templates to their HQ Sales and Purchasing databases. IR gave staff the power to analyse just about

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