SEQUEL
the 7 Course Meal of BI Tools

by Tom Huntington

Why Do You Buy A BI Tool?

This seems like a simple question, but many organizations fail to deliver on the real business aspect of business intelligence (BI). They develop an entire staff around maintaining, massaging, and growing a large data warehouse, but it's one that doesn't meet the needs of the end user. These solutions may boast great technology, but lack in delivering what's important. Therefore, the simple answer to the above question is "The End User". Your users need a tool that lets them harvest the data they need to be more competitive in growing the business.

A common scenario is that the corporate IT group buys (or has) a tool that harvests data and then provides end users with access to the data. The problem is that the only way for the end user to access the data is to enlist the support of the IT group. It's safe to say this BI tool serves a cold sandwich to the end user.

What Do End Users Crave In Their BI Tool?

When you're searching for a new business intelligence tool for your end users, you need to consider the appetite of the staff who will use this tool. They're hungry for information in a format that is easy to use and easy to access. Why serve them a cold lunch when a full seven-course dinner is available to satisfy all their appetites?

What's In A Good Seven-Course Meal For The End User?

1 Let's start with the appetizer. The BI Chef will deliver a fine list of templates to the table. These templates need not be complicated. They have predefined the database so the end users can just sit down and enjoy a quick look at what's available for them to query. The templates take into account table relationships so that end users don't have to know how to join the tables.

2 Next, the BI Chef offers course number two—a fine salad of options in the user interface. Users can easily drag and drop fields into the view they are building. To their delight, they can derive other results by combining fields with calculations like a variety of dressings. Simple arithmetic and complicated substrings are available for the beginner or advanced user. With a simple click, the end user has the results in a list.

3 Now, the Chef delivers a surprise to cleanse the palette. This is a tangy sorbet that reminds the end user that the data is fresh and accurate. It is current and can be refreshed with a click of the mouse. The end user relishes in not having to wait days for month-end results because real-time business data is available at all times.

4 The pre-main course offers many options for viewing the results. The end user can display the results in a list or as a graph; print them; send them in an e-mail; or convert them to another format, such as XLS, PDF, TXT, XML, CSV, and more. The end user is delighted with all these options and naturally wants to try a little of each.

5 Next up is the main course, and the end users once again see a full cart of options. They can convert the data to a pivot table or a report, add run-time prompting, and format the results to impress their manager. The pivot table looks fun to try so it becomes the hottest choice at the table as the end users add their own dimensions and categories. The columns are summed up and the totals represented as percentages in a graph. At this point, the user is really becoming satisfied and sends compliments to the BI Chef.

6 By now, the BI Chef is hoping everyone has saved room for dessert. The end users have a dashboard of desserts for the table to share. On the dashboard, they'll find a view that lists the totals for each sales region and supports a dynamic drill-down to detailed data. To the right is a pie chart of the last three quarters' sales, which reflects a great start to the year. Another list indicates that a key ingredient is slowly falling below the desired inventory level. Below the inventory list is the company's current stock position—retrieved from the Internet. This item pleases the management group. The BI Chef asks if they want to have the data refreshed automatically every minute to reflect the current business. With a resounding yes, a fresh round of coffee and espresso arrives at the table.

7 The users are certain there can't be more, but the BI Chef says a final course has been prepared consisting of fine artisan cheeses and port. They're presented with the option to view them first through a browser, a graphical interface, e-mail, a report, or on a green screen. With options like these, the users are gratified and overjoyed by a perfect evening of dining at the BI bistro.

It Can Be That Simple

When you engage end users in what they need in business intelligence, it helps you make better choices. The solutions you choose should affect your business in a positive way and offer a great return on your investment. The solution can be as easy as pie. SEQUEL is built with your end user in mind.

BI Menu

Appetizer........... templates

Course 2....... user interface options

Course 3....... fresh & accurate data

Pre-Main Course.......
result viewing options

Main Course....... pivot tables,
reports, & graphs

Dessert......... dashboards

Final Course.....
an array of viewing options
from browser to green screen