



Empowering business decision makers by extending your SAP applications

Contents

- 3 Business problems**
The need for operational BI
- 3 Business drivers**
- 7 The solution**
IBM on SAP: Empowerment for performance management
But what will IBM Cognos solutions do for my IT department?
How does IBM leverage SAP applications?
- 13 Conclusion**

Abstract

How business users can manage their performance on an SAP infrastructure.

Overview

What you need to manage your performance

Are you getting the information you need? Is it based on data from all of the relevant sources? Are you getting information the way you need it, when you need it to meet your decision-making timelines?

As a business person, you depend on information technology to make the better, more informed decisions that let you optimize your performance. Used effectively, by everyone at all levels of your organization, performance management solutions provide greater agility, improve corporate performance, and increase competitive advantage.

But technology can also limit you. If it doesn't address your real business needs, and it isn't flexible enough to help you find reliable and innovative answers to key business questions, it can hinder rather than help.

What separates the good from the not-so-good when it comes to performance management solutions? First, you need a strong information technology infrastructure. Second, you need to leverage and extend that infrastructure with performance management capabilities that empower business users.

Business problems

If your Information Technology (IT) department has chosen SAP applications as all or part of your environment, they have taken an important first step toward building a solid information infrastructure on which to build a performance management solution. But to realize the potential of that infrastructure, you need to leverage and extend it in ways that enable business performance management. When choosing a solution to do this, you should consider these key criteria:

- Your performance management solution must be proven and available
- It must provide self-service for all users
- It must deliver all capabilities for all users
- The information it provides must be based on all the data
- It must be SAP-version independent

Business drivers

1. A Solution that is Proven and Available

An effective performance management solution provides business intelligence (BI) and planning capabilities that will work for you now and in the future. You must be confident that the solution you choose is from a vendor with a proven track record of BI and planning innovation – one who will continue to meet your needs over time, including those that you haven't yet thought of.

The solution must also be able to leverage and extend your existing infrastructure. It must provide you with performance management capabilities now. You should not have to wait months or years for a vendor to deliver what you need before you can implement a solution. In a market where information is a competitive weapon, you can't afford to wait for the answers you need.

2. Self-Service Authoring for All Users

Is your access to information limited to pre-built reports, and your planning proscribed by what IT has built for you? Are you dependent on IT to generate new information, reports and plans? Have you ever wondered how quickly you could answer that burning question or discover that new opportunity if you could only find the information or adjust the plan yourself?

When it comes to authoring the reports, analyses and plans that you need to manage your performance, your solution should free you from a dependence on IT. True self-service authoring goes beyond the ability to select minimal criteria through prompts – it provides an environment in which you can ask new questions, explore new situations, adjust the business model for your plans, and collaborate with others at will to make better decisions. With self-service authoring, you can take an iterative approach to answering questions and solving problems that makes you more flexible and agile.

To make sure that business users throughout your organization embrace your solution, it must be simple to use. You should not have to spend hours training. And, because business users are typically not experts in coding, you should be able to meet your BI and planning needs without programming and without having to go back to IT. Your solution should offer an intuitive, easy-to-use interface that is consistent across all performance management activities.

3. All Capabilities for All Users

How much time do you spend searching for information the way you need it? How many tools must you master to get that information? How much training is needed to learn them all? Would you like to see the same information everyone else does, but delivered in ways that meet your unique needs? How much time does your organization lose comparing numbers instead of focusing on business?

Your performance management solution is only a solution if it is used throughout the organization. To effectively manage business performance, business intelligence and planning capabilities must be in the hands of everyone, not just top-level executives. It must provide personnel throughout the enterprise with the information they need in the way they need it, so that each and every one contributes to overall business performance.

What's more, the solution must enable all capabilities. These include budgeting, planning and forecasting functions that allow users to set goals and monitor their progress toward achieving those goals. They also include a full range of query, analysis, and reporting capabilities that provide scorecards, dashboards, and business alerts, so that users know where they stand at any time and where they have come from. Only by providing this full range of capabilities can you deliver complete information to the diverse array of users who need it, when they need it, in the ways they need it.

4. Information Based on All the Data

Do you need to know where the data comes from to select the right tool to use? What do you do when you combine data manually from different spreadsheets or reports only to find that others who have done the same have ended up with different results?

Decisions are only effective when they are based on all the facts from all the data. Organizations typically use a mix of SAP and non-SAP applications, often combined with legacy systems from distributed IT and operational technology investments or acquisitions. This might include one or more SAP sources, such as SAP BW and SAP R/3, along with any number of non-SAP sources, including external data. A performance management solution must incorporate the data from all these sources into a single business model. And it must do it without having to resort to recurring manual effort in Microsoft® Excel® or other tools. Only then does the information tell the whole story.

Keep in mind, too, that your information infrastructure is in constant flux. Under the covers, IT is continually adjusting it to reflect new data sources, acquisitions, and upgrades or changes to your ERP system and information platform. IT must have the flexibility to do this. But business users must be insulated from it. Your solution must leverage existing and future infrastructure components, yet be independent of the actions of IT.

5. SAP-version Independence

Is the BI or planning capability you need only available for the SAP version you don't have? How long will it be before IT upgrades to that version? How long have you already been waiting to get what you need? How will waiting longer impact your business?

You need to be able to get the information you need, when you need it and how you need it, on the SAP version that you have today. Your ability to add performance management capabilities should not be tied to the plans of IT, to SAP ERP versions, or to upgrade schedules. You shouldn't have to depend on someone else's timetable to implement what you need now.

Extensive waiting for the capabilities that you need can reduce your effectiveness, impact business performance, and cost you competitive advantage. To increase business agility in a competitive marketplace, your performance management solution must be able to take advantage of new performance management capabilities as quickly as they arise, unimpeded by the need to change your information infrastructure.

The solution

IBM on SAP: Empowerment for performance management

Given their deep, long-standing relationship, it's not surprising that the IBM Cognos performance management solution meets all of the criteria needed to successfully leverage and extend an SAP infrastructure for performance management.

- Cognos and SAP have been partners since 1997, before IBM acquired Cognos.
- IBM is an official SAP Software Partner.
- The IBM Cognos solution was one of the first to be certified as Powered by SAP NetWeaver.
- The IBM Cognos and SAP partnership works because of their close ties at the executive, research and development, and customer support levels.

1. The IBM Cognos solution: available, proven, and supported by an industry leader

When it comes to planning, business intelligence, and performance management, IBM is a proven leader. IBM has years of experience building and implementing solutions globally in a wide range of industries and organization types, and a proven ability to innovate and react quickly to changing customer and market needs.

The IBM Cognos solution is available now, on your existing infrastructure, no matter what combination of SAP and non-SAP components and versions that includes. No waiting for another vendor to deliver capabilities that you need, because IBM already has them.

With IBM, you get a proven performance management solution for your business users, and you get it now, from an industry leader. It's a solution that lets you leverage and extend your infrastructure, so that you get the best possible return on your investment in SAP and provide effective performance management capabilities throughout your business.

2. Simple and Self-Service Authoring

In her review of leading BI software that identified IBM Cognos software as Network Computing Editor's Choice, Lori MacVittie had this to say about how easy the solution is to use: "If your business analysts can't use Cognos' end-user-focused tools, check their pulses."¹

IBM Cognos software provides true self-service reporting, analysis, planning and other performance management capabilities. You don't depend on IT to build and deploy your solutions. Self-Service BI authoring and plan modeling is owned by business users independent of IT. This means faster time to results, increased business agility, and greater competitive advantage. As a business person, you are free to explore, adjust, and react to unexpected changes as they occur. You can answer new questions, explore new paths, and seek creative solutions without a time lag while IT addresses your needs.

And the IBM Cognos solution is simple to use. It features a common interface for all capabilities and all users across all data sources. This means you can perform all of your tasks without switching tools. You can focus on answering business questions and developing innovative solutions instead of mastering different software for different tasks. The intuitive nature of the interface, with its drag-and-drop simplicity, means that start-up time is short and training costs minimal. The result is greater adoption by all users.

3. A Complete Solution in a Single Product

Imagine only having to go to one place and use one interface to create, interact with and understand the plans, data, reports, and other components that make up a complete performance management solution.

That's what the IBM Cognos solution offers you. From its single, Web-based interface, IBM delivers all of the capabilities needed by all business users to address the diverse requirements of your organization and expand the use of information for decision making.

IBM provides a complete performance solution across all data sources. Built upon years of focusing on customer business requirements for planning and BI, the IBM Cognos solution includes the following market-leading capabilities:

- Sophisticated planning and budgeting, which reduces the time and effort needed to collect data. Driver-based planning is owned by the office of finance, which increases accuracy through greater forecasting frequency and higher participation across the organization
- Ad hoc queries and reports that provide quick answers to key questions – new or known – for all business personnel at all levels. These include over 80 extended functions and a range of sophisticated formatting capabilities
- Customized dashboards – another kind of report that visually communicates complex information quickly, for at-a-glance understanding of key business issues
- Active scorecarding, to ensure accountability and improve performance management by connecting strategy to individuals
- Deep, comparative analysis, with guided exploration and analysis of information that pertains to all dimensions of your business, regardless of where the data is stored
- Business event management, with alerts based on important events that occur anywhere in your data

- Flexible scheduling and distribution that includes one-touch bursting to hundreds or thousands of users
- Browser-based deep search capabilities, so you can find information quickly, no matter where it resides in your database
- Reliable BI in Microsoft® Office®, for those users who prefer to consume information via Microsoft® Excel® or distribute via Microsoft® PowerPoint®, yet leverage all the same sources and take advantage of BI built by others

Built on a proven architecture, with one intuitive interface for all users and activities, and with multilingual capabilities, IBM provides business users with everything they need to manage their performance.

4. Support for all Data and Infrastructures

Imagine having a single view of your business, no matter how many sources of data you use or how your IT landscape changes.

The IBM Cognos solution provides this with a common business view across all data sources – SAP and non-SAP alike. You don't have to wait for IT. The independence of the IBM Cognos solution from SAP and other components of your infrastructure ensures that business users are insulated from upgrades and other infrastructure changes.

All this means that you can base your decisions on information that incorporates all of your data, from any source, now and in the future. Any data can be the source of planning or BI information. A single report, dashboard, plan or other management tool can combine data from any and all data sources, eliminating manual and recurring efforts to combine information in spreadsheets.

Transactional and historical data can be combined in the same report or plan, so the business picture you see is based on all your data.

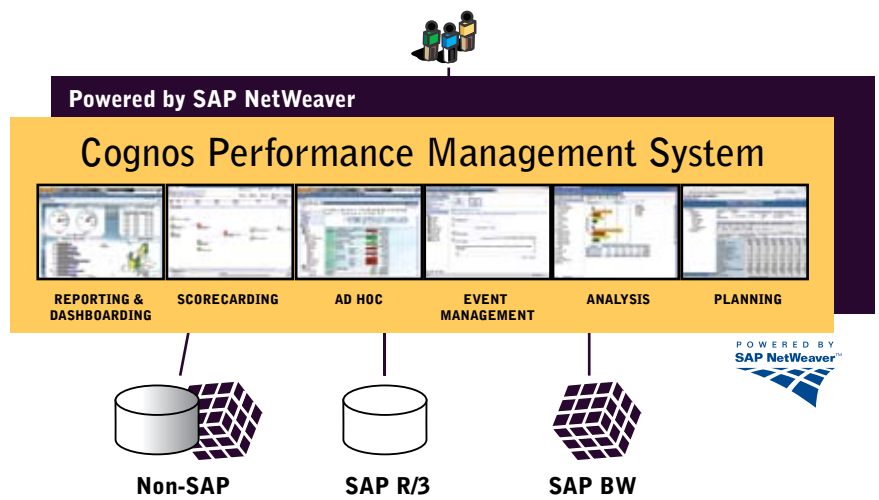
But what will IBM Cognos solutions do for my IT department?

IBM makes life easier for your IT professionals too. The same self-service authoring that frees you to experiment and explore makes IT more productive – freeing them to focus on supporting your information infrastructure instead of building your solutions.

With its Web-services based services-oriented architecture (SOA), the IBM Cognos performance management system can exist across mixed infrastructures, leveraging existing SAP and non-SAP components now and as they change. IT is able to leverage all of their investments and spend less time deploying and administering the solution.

IBM leverages existing security and auditing functions as well, and features both centralized and distributed administration. A single underlying architecture, open access to all SAP and other data, and ERP version independence make the job of IT simpler and more straightforward.

For an IT perspective, see the IBM Cognos technical white paper Extending Your SAP Applications to Better Manage Business Performance: How Your IT Department can Add Value to an SAP Infrastructure or visit www.cognos.com/solutions4SAP



Cognos Performance Management: A Business Perspective3

5. SAP-version and Instance Independence

Imagine getting the BI and planning capabilities you need without having to wait for long upgrade processes.

IBM takes full advantage of your SAP infrastructure investments, ensuring that you get the full benefits of the business values built into those investments, whether you are on the most current version of SAP or not.

Being version independent means you have the flexibility to add performance management capabilities independent of your IT department's ERP plans. This makes for increased business agility. And it means you can take advantage of new performance management capabilities as soon as they are available, without having to wait for an infrastructure upgrade. Performance management capabilities are not limited to any version or instance of SAP, providing you with the flexibility you need.

How does IBM leverage SAP applications?

The IBM Cognos solution integrates deeply with SAP, has been certified by SAP, and was one of the first vendors to achieve Powered by SAP NetWeaver® status. IBM Cognos integration with SAP includes:

- A certified driver to leverage SAP R/3 data
- A certified driver to leverage SAP BW data
- Certified and seamless integration with the SAP NetWeaver Portal
- A solution that is deployable on the SAP NetWeaver Web Application Server

Conclusion

The IBM Cognos solution leverages all aspects of your SAP infrastructure, including data, platform, security, business rules, and more. And it enhances and extends the value that you gain from SAP with extended BI and planning capabilities.



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Endnotes

- 1 Lori MacVittie, Network Computing, October 2005.

About IBM Cognos BI and Performance Management

IBM Cognos business intelligence (BI) and performance management solutions deliver world-leading enterprise planning, consolidation and BI software, support and services to help companies plan, understand and manage financial and operational performance. IBM Cognos solutions bring together technology, analytical applications, best practices, and a broad network of partners to give customers an open, adaptive and complete performance solution. Over 23,000 customers in more than 135 countries around the world choose IBM Cognos solutions.

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