

SOLE TECHNOLOGY SKATES PAST REPORTING OBSTACLES WITH BUSINESS OBJECTS

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George Bock, Senior Director of IT, Sole Technology



Industry

Retail
manufacturing/
Apparel

Business Pain

Rapid growth drove a need for better reporting and inventory control.

Why Business Objects?

A robust product line, enterprise-level reporting at mid-market prices, and sophisticated BI and training capabilities makes Business Objects the perfect fit for Sole Technology.

Business Objects Products and Services

BusinessObjects
Edge Series

Crystal Reports

BusinessObjects
Knowledge
Accelerator

Xcelsius Enterprise

CHALLENGE

Established in 1986 as a specialty maker of skateboarding footwear, California-based Sole Technology, Inc. – creator of etnies, etnies Girl, Emerica, éS, ThirtyTwo, Altamont, and the Sole Technology Institute (STI) – is a globally recognized leader in action sports footwear and apparel. With a presence in more than 70 countries, Sole Technology is the largest private action sports company. In the last three years, Sole Technology doubled in size, to more than 400 employees and revenue approaching \$200 million – rendering the company's small-business approach to reporting insufficient. George Bock, senior director of IT at Sole Technology, says, "We struggled at getting data into the hands of people that needed it, when they needed it, so we could make better business decisions."

Legacy applications weren't helping, including an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that lacked a good reporting engine. Knowing how and where to tap into data was an issue. "We went through major hurdles to get data out of our system," Bock says. "And there were so many disparate sources of data that it created a lot of problems within the organization." Bridget Wagner, report developer at Sole Technology, adds, "When people walked into a meeting, nine times out of 10 they disagreed about the data. The data was very inconsistent because the methods for getting at the data were inconsistent."



Sole Technology needed to track the lifecycle of products, from development through production, shipping, warehousing, sales, and inventory. It also needed to ensure that everyone speak the same business language, so employees in various locations agree on a standard definition of terms when discussing concepts such as revenue, inventories, and discounts.

The company realized it needed to improve its reporting efforts. "We wanted to have one way of reporting in one integrated fashion," says Bock. "It became a strategic goal of ours to collect data, put it into a central place where everybody can access it, and then use tools that can deliver data on demand when our employees need it – in whatever way, shape, or form." The reporting solution must provide insight to questions such as: When will a stock keeping unit (SKU) arrive? How long will it take to get through customs and get into the warehouse? What's the velocity going to be when it reaches the warehouse – will it go right out the door or sit for two months? How long will it take, once it's shipped, to get to the customers? Keeping a tight watch on inventory is also important. Bock says, "In the apparel space, and in the footwear space, knowing what SKUs are flowing out the doors of our retailers and our distributors is as important as placing the original order to produce the stuff – if not more so, because that's a predictor of future at-once orders and future trends."

APPROACH

When examining reporting and tool requirements, Bock says, "It became apparent that the Business Objects toolsets were the better fit." Sole Technology deploys BusinessObjects™

Edge Series and Crystal Reports® for reporting, BusinessObjects Knowledge Accelerator to accelerate training for its user base to increase overall user adoption, and Xcelsius Enterprise for executive dashboards. Michael McLean, database manager at Sole Technology, says, “A key differentiator with Knowledge Accelerator is the ability to capture metrics. For example, after the person uses the tool, they take a test, the results are stored in a database, and we can see that the users are being trained, and they’re being trained effectively. To be able to capture those metrics – that’s huge.” Bock concurs. “Without actually having to go around to 50 people individually to train them – the time savings with Knowledge Accelerator is just unbelievable,” he says.



“Business Objects brought toolsets and technologies that were out of our range down to our market level – debunking the myth that Business Objects isn’t affordable,” says Bock. “Business Objects looked at the mid-size company, saw what we needed, and changed its entire pricing structure and licensing model to fit. They’ve allowed our use of enterprise technology to be a reality.” McLean adds, “Business Objects has been around for a long time, the product is mature, and along with Crystal Reports, Business Objects dominates the business intelligence (BI) and reporting space. It also gives us the centralization we needed.”

RESULTS

The company has already noticed differences, especially in productivity. “Reports that used to take people hours or an entire day to compile – now they get it with just a click of a button,” says Wagner, adding, “We automated so much that we’ve automated one person out of a job—so they can move on to other value-added activities.” Mid-managers and personnel from sales, finance, and production use the system to track inventory, revenue, warehousing, and a range of other data feeds. “Our inventory control group constantly needs to know different prices and inventory data. With multiple warehouses, we need to track a whole range of warehouse information. We’ve got several departments tapping our inventory,” says Wagner. Bock adds, “We’re looking at using BusinessObjects Edge Series as the main conduit not just for BI data but also for our general reporting data.”

Users are enthusiastic. “Now we can see the benefits of having all of the reports consolidated into a centralized location, where everyone knows exactly where to go to get the data they need,” says Bock. The company is also agreeing on terms and procedures. “Business Objects touches every part of our business, including finance. It’s helping us identify areas where the business needed to agree,” he says.

“A huge benefit for us is the universe creation,” says McLean. “We’re developing standard views of data, so when people walk into a meeting, the data is consistent. That’s had a huge impact so far.” He adds, “Integration is also key. The more we can use these tools to seamlessly integrate, the better our reports and analysis will be.”

Future initiatives will focus on expanding SKU productivity and warehouse metrics, and drilling down for detailed analysis. “When you’re operating on old data, you’re missing revenue opportunities, sales, and shipment windows – whatever the case might be,” says Bock. “Business Objects elevates the importance of data. And, you know, data is king. Ultimately, Business Objects helps us make better business decisions.”



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