

Great Plains Business Intelligence Foundation Layer

Delivering advanced analytics capabilities to your company's Great Plains financial application suite, at a reasonable cost.

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By Trish Saunders

In today's still-recovering economy, every dollar spent on technology is subject to ruthless scrutiny. "My company and a great many others are much fussier about how money gets spent," says Robert McDowell, Microsoft® vice president for Business Critical Solutions and co-author (with William Simon) of *In Search of Business Value: Ensuring a Return on Your Technology Investment* (Select Books, 2005).

The upside of such belt-tightening is that the technology community has had to come up with new solutions that deliver more for less. For example, Microsoft Great Plains® has introduced an add-on module, the Business Intelligence Foundation Layer, that delivers advanced analytics capabilities to your company's Great Plains financial application suite, at a reasonable cost.

Leveraging the power of Microsoft SQL Server, the Foundation Layer allows you to extend Microsoft Great Plains capabilities to every desktop in your organization, without actually purchasing the software for each user, explains Brenda Bown, global product manager for Great Plains. The Foundation Layer includes a new module, Analysis Cubes for Excel®, as well as Microsoft Business Portal Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Sarbanes-Oxley.

Here's a closer look at each component and how they benefit midsize companies.

Analysis Cubes for Excel

Let's say you're the regional sales director for a national real estate company that has divisions in 32 states. Using Analysis Cubes integrated with Microsoft Great Plains financial modules (such as General Ledger and Accounts Receivable), you can get information and build charts much faster than before, displaying sales numbers for individual agents, territories or states. You can also create profit-and-loss and other sophisticated reports, taking advantage of advanced graphic options that help people understand complex numbers. For example, you can create a top-level graphical view for executives who want at-a-glance visibility, or include optional links that drill deeper to display more detailed numbers.

"The big advantage for businesses is the time they'll save building advanced analyses using OLAP [online analytical processing] cubes for deeper intelligence," explains Bown. "Executives need this capability in order to make decisions with confidence in their numbers. We've made it much easier to provide the information they need without spending days in preparation, and they

can slice it according to their requirements.”

When a company acquires the Analysis Cubes for Excel module, it receives the following Great Plains Financial Series cubes: General Ledger, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, Receivables Aging and Bank Reconciliation. The Analysis Cubes Library add-on also gives organizations access to Great Plains Distribution Series cubes, which are used for analyzing information within the Sales Order Processing, Purchase Order Processing and Inventory modules.

Both the Business Intelligence Foundation Layer and the Analysis Cubes Library are available for Microsoft Great Plains Professional edition only.

Microsoft Business Portal KPIs

Business Portal KPIs, also included in the Business Intelligence

Foundation Layer, empower users to create reports that define metrics specific to your company, such as sales comparisons by month, quarter or year. For example, use the tools to measure sales this year versus last year. If numbers drop below a certain level, alerts are automatically sent to key decision makers, enabling them to take corrective action quickly.

Microsoft Solution Accelerator for Sarbanes-Oxley

Specifically targeting Sections 404 and 302 of the federal act, the Microsoft Office Solution Accelerator for Sarbanes-Oxley integrates with Microsoft Business Portal to create a framework businesses can use to demonstrate transparency. Business Portal reports, queries, portal pages and KPIs can be attached as evidence of your company’s compliance with controls mandated by law. For instance, you can attach an Accounts Payable Setup report from Business Portal to support a “control” stating that the company’s ERP system will not allow duplicate invoices.

While a technology solution alone isn’t sufficient to demonstrate compliance with Sarbanes-Oxley, software that automates many of the reporting processes can save enormous quantities of time. Now more than ever, that’s an important boost to your bottom line.

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