

# AQUENT DELIVERS TALENT WITH BUSINESS OBJECTS



*"BusinessObjects is a platform we can build on – it will essentially serve as a foundation for Aquent to become a truly global company moving forward."*  
Larry Bolick, CIO, Aquent

## AQUENT

### Industry

Professional services

### Business Pain

Fragmented view of critical staffing and other operational data limited the company's overall visibility into the business.

### Why Business Objects?

Business Objects software enables flexible, powerful access to data and greatly enhances reporting capabilities.

### Business Objects Products and Services

BusinessObjects XI Release 2

BusinessObjects Web Intelligence

BusinessObjects Desktop Intelligence

BusinessObjects Data Integrator

## CHALLENGE

Founded in 1986 by friends residing in a Harvard dorm, Aquent is today the world's largest marketing staffing firm. The company helps Fortune 500 marketing organizations find the people they need, on a contract and direct hire basis, and helps marketing professionals find the rewarding engagements they want. Aquent represents talent in virtually every marketing discipline, from brand managers and copywriters to data analysts, Web designers, and search engine optimization (SEO) experts. Throughout its history, the company has made more than half a million matches between its clients and the talent they are looking for.

The reporting environment at Aquent is complex, involving staffing levels and requirements, results by region, time entry and billing, headcount utilization, pay rates, gross profit, and much more. Some reports end on calendar dates, others on fiscal dates. Different roles within the staffing organization are reported on differently. Diverse payroll schemes are also reflected, depending on the preference of individual clients and marketing professionals. Unlike most companies in this sector, Aquent provides benefits for its talent, so it requires additional reporting to establish eligibility.

Although Aquent offers a broad range of ancillary services – including project management, translation and localization, and healthcare consulting – staffing is its bread-and-butter business. So when Aquent migrated its custom-built enterprise resource planning (ERP) staffing system to a Web-based model, it needed a modern reporting solution that would complement the newly enhanced infrastructure. Aquent looked to Business Objects, an SAP company, for the solution. BusinessObjects™ XI Release 2 with BusinessObjects Web Intelligence® was the answer.

According to business intelligence (BI) systems engineer Jeff Payton, the previous reporting environment left much to be desired. "It had limited ad hoc capabilities," he says. "For unusual reports, you had to submit a set report to the development team. They would figure out how to compile the code and query the database, and then prepare the report for you. It was a time-consuming and frustrating process, and you sometimes ended up with a report that wasn't exactly what you wanted after all."

Marketing director Jenny Norwood had her own problems with the legacy system. "There was a ton of information in the database – including mail and email addresses, and whether people had opted in or out of our mailing campaigns – but it really wasn't a marketing database," she says. "Pulling contact information was a multi-day struggle. Worse, I couldn't save the reports I created, so I'd have to start all over the next time I needed to create one. It used to take me the better part of a business week to compile a list for mailing. And because the number of lines I was working with in the old system was so big, I would often have to run it overnight, so it wouldn't slow down everybody else's work."

## APPROACH

The first step was to get operational data from around the world into a single data mart. Aquent pulls data from a database in Sydney that covers its Asia-Pacific operations, one in London for Europe, and a third in Boston for the North American market. The databases are replicated to shadow databases in Boston, and then extracted out to the data mart in a nightly batch cycle using BusinessObjects Data Integrator. BusinessObjects XI Release 2 runs on this data mart.

The new system is getting plenty of attention. Says Payton, “The introduction of BusinessObjects has given people that look in their eye like, ‘Ooh, we can do that? Well then, can we do this?’ I’m starting to get more requests for things that people didn’t know they could do before. It’s a very exciting situation to be in.” Payton notes that end users can manipulate data and look at reports from new perspectives. “BusinessObjects makes it possible to assemble virtually any object in the universe into an ad hoc report and run it on the fly, so you get exactly what you want – immediately,” he says.

It’s a big help to the development team, too. “We have been able to cut them loose to do what they do best, rather than being distracted by the reporting requests and needs of the company,” says Payton. “We’ve been able to take that off their plate.”

## RESULTS

Aquent’s consolidated data and leading-edge BI system has delivered significant benefits. “Using BusinessObjects, we can run individual reports for Asia Pacific, Europe, or North America, or we can run a single report with common criteria,” says Payton. “Our financial analysts can look at revenue across the board to gain a high-level perspective. And because the underlying data is contained within the report, they can easily drill down to see what portion of the revenue came from which market, and how each area is performing in relation to the others.”

Payton also points to a report, prepared for the president of the North America staffing business unit, that tracks full-time employees placed within Aquent’s client base. “Some of the reporting the president wanted to do was impossible with the legacy query tool,” he says. “With BusinessObjects, we were able to create the report and even automate it. Now, the numbers are waiting for her every morning.”

Marketing director Norwood has also seen clear benefits. “By doing some analysis, we discovered that clients who order marketing managers from us tend to be in management positions themselves,” she says. “With BusinessObjects, I can pull a report of all marketing directors and managers in the system, in order to specifically market to them about hiring marketing project managers. This helps us segment the messaging to our hiring audiences much better, reducing waste in our mailing campaigns.”

Norwood’s mailing lists are under control, too. “My average report, even a complicated one, takes less than five minutes to run in BusinessObjects, and there’s minimal cleaning required when it gets to Excel,” she says. “It has literally gone from about 20 hours to maybe one hour. It’s been a huge benefit to me.”

For Aquent CIO Larry Bolick, BusinessObjects represents the key to a fundamental transformation. “Today, Aquent is managed as a multinational company,” he says. “Folks in France manage their piece of the puzzle, they report up to London, and London reports up to Boston. I believe that when the company is ready, BusinessObjects will help us think of Aquent as a global company, with fewer national and organizational boundaries – because we’ll be able to report across all of those boundaries.

“We have very flexible access to global data today, and that was a difficult problem for Aquent in the past,” concludes Bolick. “We’re starting to extract information from this mass of data that we just couldn’t extract before. We are on the cusp of doing things we could not do before. From the transformation perspective, it’s our ability to really understand the data better and in different ways than we could in the past. BusinessObjects is a platform we can build on – it will essentially serve as a foundation for Aquent to become a truly global company moving forward.”

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