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The Road to BI Success in SAP Environments: Are You On It?

When SAP acquired Business Objects two years ago, customers initially had questions about how to incorporate SAP BusinessObjects business intelligence (BI) and information management (IM) solutions into their SAP environments. That space is now well understood.¹ I am, however, still hearing lots of questions about the product roadmap for BI and IM, and many customers aren't fully aware of how much has happened since the acquisition.

In this article, I'll share a summary of the key IM and BI best practices, integrations, and optimizations that SAP has delivered in various product releases and service packs over the last 20+ months – and preview what's to come.

The SAP BusinessObjects IM Portfolio: What's New and Most Relevant for SAP Customers?

Some of the most notable new features of the SAP BusinessObjects IM portfolio (see **Figure 1** on the next page) include functionality that makes it easier to get data into SAP NetWeaver Business Warehouse (SAP NetWeaver BW), access the data in more flexible ways, and keep tabs on the downstream consequences of any source changes:

- Now that **SAP BusinessObjects Metadata Management** supports SAP NetWeaver BW, data lineage and impact analysis for SAP NetWeaver BW are available to customers for the first time. *Data lineage* answers important questions like: Where has the data come from? What has it been through? And *impact analysis* should be part of any IT survival kit; it lets IT professionals understand the impact of data source changes on end-user reports and other downstream data consumption. "Reputation assurance" might be an even better name for impact analysis – it avoids the classic case of a user asking: "Why doesn't my report work anymore? What have you changed?"
- **SAP BusinessObjects Data Federator**, which makes SAP NetWeaver BW data available with high performance,

now supports Data Store Objects (for low-level, detailed information), MultiProviders (as a union between InfoProviders), and InfoCubes (for aggregated information). This approach scales very well and is fully compatible with InfoCubes accelerated by SAP NetWeaver Business Warehouse Accelerator (SAP NetWeaver BW Accelerator). Unlike other federation products that support SAP NetWeaver BW via public BAPI access, SAP BusinessObjects Data Federator accesses the data in SAP NetWeaver BW directly and at the lowest level (right above the InfoProviders) while leveraging metadata in SAP NetWeaver BW. Customers using this connectivity for large operational reports have experienced excellent performance results.

What's New with SAP BusinessObjects BI Tools?

There are also new optimizations and features on the SAP BusinessObjects BI tools side (refer again to Figure 1), including:

- **Usability improvements** (such as fold/unfold capabilities for complex reports) to better consume SAP NetWeaver BW hierarchies in SAP BusinessObjects Web Intelligence

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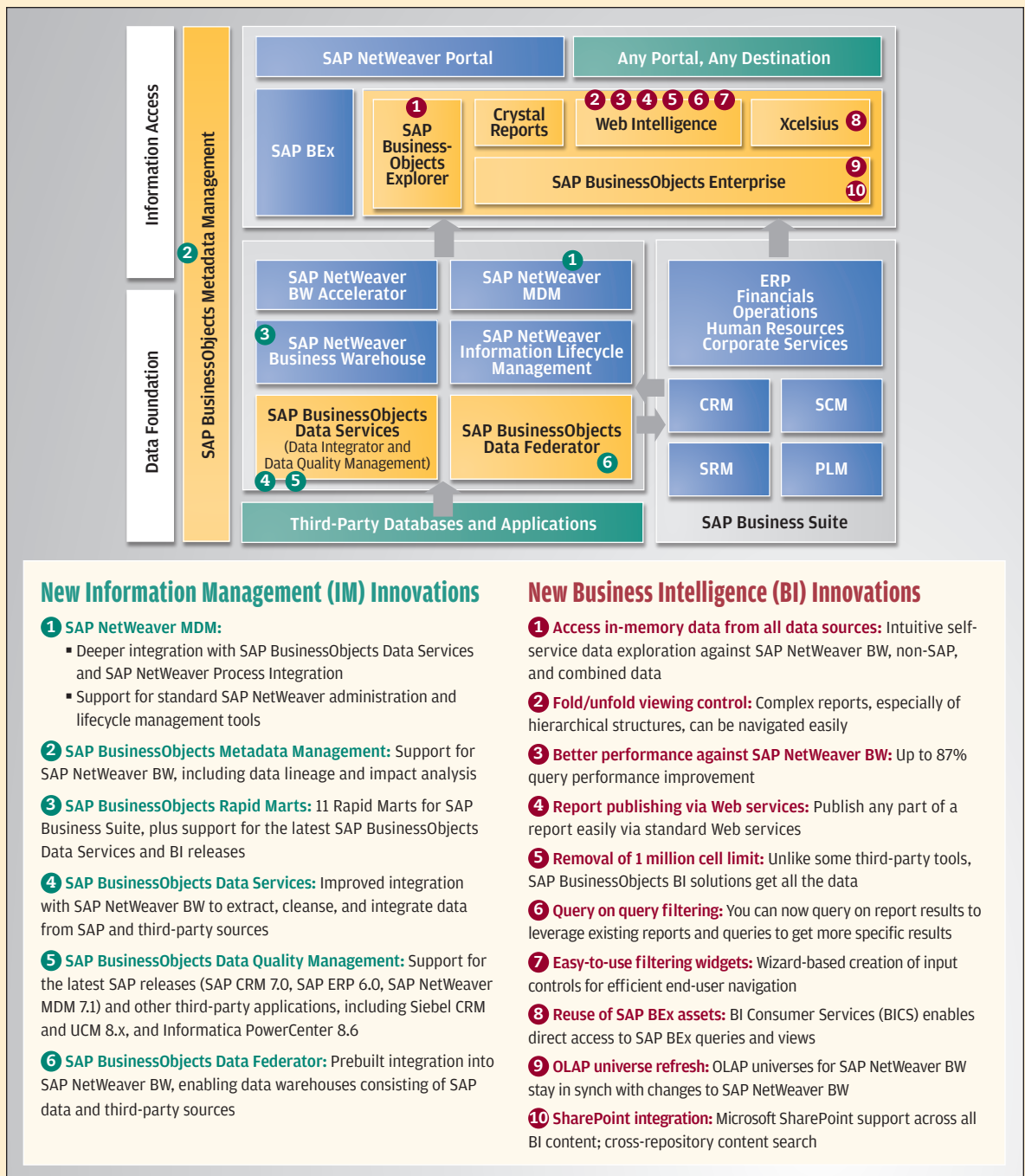
¹ Please see my article "Which Business Intelligence Tools Should You Use?" in the January-March 2009 issue of *SAPinsider* (sapinsider.wispubs.com).

- A dramatic **performance boost** (nearly 90%) by taking out layers and optimizing MDX queries
- **Better lifecycle management for OLAP universes** on SAP NetWeaver BW; changes in SAP NetWeaver BW are now automatically promoted and reflected in OLAP universes
- Implemented in Xcelsius, new **BI Consumer Services (BICS) connectivity** provides direct access to SAP Business

Explorer (SAP BEx) queries and views in SAP NetWeaver BW; with this new connectivity, customers can not only get faster and more direct access to SAP NetWeaver BW, but also leverage their existing SAP BEx views and queries to get best-of-breed, interactive dashboards for SAP NetWeaver BW data while minimizing additional license and implementation costs

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FIGURE 1 ► Key new information management (IM) and business intelligence (BI) innovations and integrations available today in SAP landscapes



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Customers today are adopting SAP BusinessObjects BI tools because they find them easy to use, more visually appealing than their SAP BEx tools, and full of capabilities that aren't available in the SAP BEx toolset. Organizations are already realizing the benefits, including increased self-service and greater end-user adoption of BI. Most enterprises are also seeing expanded SAP NetWeaver BW use, which is leading to better ROI from SAP NetWeaver BW.

I strongly recommend that SAP customers adopt SAP BusinessObjects BI tools for all their reporting, ad hoc analysis, and dashboarding needs. For multidimensional (OLAP) analysis, customers should continue to use the SAP BEx analyzer tool until the next-generation OLAP analysis tool (codenamed "Pioneer") is available.

What's Next? The SAP BusinessObjects Roadmap

SAP's public BI roadmap (available via the SAP Developer Network at www.sdn.sap.com/irj/scn/vste) already unveils

key capabilities and features of the next major release of SAP BusinessObjects Enterprise, version XI 4.0:

- At the heart of the new release will be a revamped semantic layer with full support for hierarchical data structures in OLAP sources like SAP NetWeaver BW.
- SAP BusinessObjects Web Intelligence will give users full access to data hierarchies for filtering and sorting.
- The inclusion of a data federation capability will enable multisource universes and simplify analysis across multiple data sources and types.

Additionally, SAP BusinessObjects universes will include newly designed and optimized connectivity to SAP NetWeaver BW, and SAP NetWeaver BW customers will be able to leverage their existing SAP BEx queries and views via BICS access in Crystal Reports (for enterprise reporting) and Web Intelligence (for interactive analysis), in addition to Xcelsius. Customers gain the best of both worlds: the seamless reuse of existing SAP BEx investments *and* proven BI self-service capabilities based on a semantic layer that abstracts the data complexities away from the end user.

What's more, the next-generation OLAP analysis tool "Pioneer" (which is based on the SAP BEx analyzer engine) will be able to open existing SAP BEx analyzer workbooks. "Pioneer" uses the charting and interactive visualization known from tools like SAP BusinessObjects Explorer and SAP BusinessObjects Voyager – so the entire user experience is designed for ease of use and includes additional innovations to help analysts with complex, advanced analysis tasks. Again, existing SAP NetWeaver BW users will get to maximize their existing investment and gain access to a next-generation, easy-to-use analysis tool.

Recommendations: Are You Making the Most of BI?

SAP customers now have access to market-leading BI capabilities that have been optimized to support end-to-end BI for SAP environments and non-SAP data sources and applications. I encourage customers to start implementing new SAP BusinessObjects BI and IM tools today and build out a roadmap for adopting the next-generation release of SAP BusinessObjects Enterprise, version XI 4.0.

The most critical success factor for a BI program is to have a proper plan and strategy. An architectural diagram is not a BI strategy. A BI strategy needs to start with an understanding of the business pains that BI can solve (see sidebar).

To learn more about the SAP BusinessObjects portfolio, visit www.sap.com/solutions/sapbusinessobjects. ■

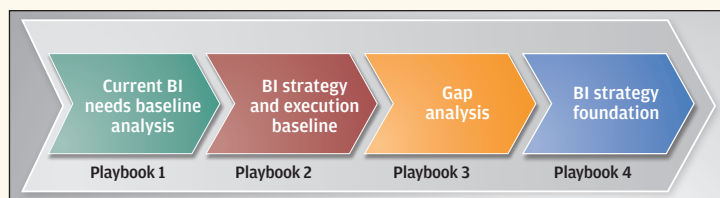
Successful BI Needs a Proper Strategy: SAP Helps You Build One

As part of our "Road to BI success with SAP" program – which includes a complete framework, content, and tools to help customers implement BI – SAP worked with Gartner Consulting to develop a BI strategy workshop (see figure below) consisting of four sections called playbooks:

- Playbook 1 includes lists of the most common business pain points – sorted by line of business (LOB) – that BI can solve. These lists are used to determine the degree of each pain point and the impact it could have on the company if addressed effectively through BI. The result is a prioritization visualized in a matrix.
- Playbook 2 provides the scope and components of a BI strategy, best practices, and an assessment of progress and results to date.
- Playbooks 3 and 4 are all about analyzing the results of playbooks 1 and 2 and translating them into solution recommendations and business benefits.

I encourage customers to use this or a similar methodology to create and articulate a BI strategy, as well as key performance indicators (KPIs) for the BI program. This is as critical as choosing the right technology to ensure success.

To learn more about the workshop, best practices, and how to build a BI strategy, please visit www.sdn.sap.com/irj/boc/bi-best-practices.



▲ A four-phased approach to developing a BI strategy