



Overview:

Challenge

- The company was using Excel spreadsheets and an old general ledger system that flowed into its financial reporting tool and had no functionality to create a comprehensive budget.

Why IBM?

- IBM Cognos TM1 provided the right tools to perform complete and comprehensive budgeting, while offering an intuitive interface that users were familiar with.
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Cellular South

Cellular South gets a budgeting, planning and reporting makeover with IBM Cognos TM1 and Revelwood

Cellular South is the largest privately held wireless provider in the United States, giving rural Americans the same advanced wireless services long available to those living and working in metropolitan areas.

Challenges faced

Cellular South, the largest privately held wireless provider in the United States, has led the industry with innovative voice and data services and a commitment to providing the same kind of advanced wireless services in rural America that has long been available to those living and working in metropolitan areas.

Yet, according to Justin Croft, Cellular South's manager of financial analysis and planning, the rapid growth of the Ridgeland, Mississippi-company notwithstanding, his department found itself saddled with an outdated and inefficient budgeting system.

"We were using an old general ledger system that flowed into our financial reporting tool," he said. "You could report actuals against budget, but it really had no functionality in the way of creating a budget. This left us with multiple Excel® spreadsheets to create an operating budget, capital budget, sales forecast, customer budgets, and so on. All the data needed to compile our entire company's budget was in disparate spreadsheets, and then we had to try to shove it into a system which was really never designed to do budgeting. Basically, we lacked the infrastructure to complete a comprehensive budget for the company."



Overview:

Solution

- The use of Revelwood's BPM Suite Implementation Accelerator and Revelwood Reporter Manager with IBM Cognos TM1 gave Cellular South a powerful business performance management solution that was up and running quickly and leveraged the best of the IBM Cognos TM1 real-time OLAP functionality along with Revelwood's best practices.

Key Benefits

- Greatly facilitates the company's ability to produce dynamic, detailed budgets quickly and efficiently; allows users to drill down to the details of what makes up each account line item; frees the accounting department from the burden of having to manually look up invoices and play the role of gatekeepers.; provides employees with a transparency that gives them up-to-date information at any time and the ability to spot problems in advance; offers fast, flexible reporting and ad-hoc analysis.
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Strategy followed

Croft and his boss, Brian Jones, director of financial analysis and planning, began a search for a better way to do this in light of the department's need to produce more dynamic, more detailed budgets in a faster and more efficient way. The two mapped out their alternatives and began evaluating and demoing what would eventually be 10 to 12 different systems. IBM® Cognos® TM1®, one of the first systems they looked at, quickly stood out as a viable option.

"It is Excel-based and we wanted something that people here were familiar with," said Jones. "Everyone uses Excel in their daily jobs. We didn't want to bring something in that would result in people hesitating to use a new system, which would be the case with a different looking interface."

Cellular South held off on making a decision, first choosing to launch Oracle's E-Business Suite to replace all of its accounting applications. Shortly after completing this implementation, they re-activated their search for a business performance management (BPM) solution. This led them once again to TM1 and to Revelwood as the implementer.

The Need for a Mature Vendor

"We didn't have a great deal of internal IT resources for the implementation and ongoing support for the new system, so we needed to work with a mature vendor with deep experience in IBM Cognos TM1," said Jones. "Revelwood fit the bill perfectly. They have dozens of successful IBM Cognos TM1 implementations under their belt, stellar references and what I like to call their 'bag of tricks' – the pre-built models, templates and reports that dramatically reduced the overall implementation time and quickly improved our reporting efficiency."

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*~ Brian Jones, Director, Financial Analysis and Planning,
Cellular South*

More specifically, these tools included Revelwood's BPM Suite Implementation Accelerator™ and Revelwood Report Manager™ – out-of-the-box services and software for enterprise financial planning and reporting running on the IBM Cognos TM1 platform. These tools allow IBM Cognos TM1 customers to get up and running quickly and easily, leveraging the best of the IBM Cognos TM1 real-time OLAP functionality, along with best practices developed from Revelwood's years of experience developing such solutions.

Benefits realized

"From the get go, IBM Cognos TM1 greatly facilitated our data collection for the budget, giving us a central place for departments to input detailed information," said Croft. "People now have more access to reporting. They can drill down to the details to see, on a nightly basis, who the vendor is, or the details of what makes up each account line item. This enables us to reference the individual transactions that make up the totals in our financial reports.

"That's been huge, as it's relieved a great deal of burden from the accounting folks. We no longer have to manually look up invoices. All the information was trapped in the account and we were the gatekeepers – which was not the way we wanted it to work."

IBM Cognos TM1 offers a transparency that allows people to go into their statements anytime during the month to get up-to-date information and spot problems well in advance. It also allows for fast, flexible reporting and ad-hoc analysis.

"We're living in a very dynamic industry and we're constantly trying to figure out what the rest of the year will look like," said Jones. "Right now, we're looking to leverage IBM Cognos TM1 in that sense. Our biggest challenge about forecasting has always been the ability to fluctuate between scenarios. With this system, all you have to do is change the scenario from budget to actual and then it automatically refreshes based on that update. That's the value of having a system that works with an Excel interface. It's easy to use and has made our lives a whole lot easier."

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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3755 Riverside Drive
Ottawa, ON, Canada K1G 4K9

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