

“We use Cognos business intelligence to determine price increases, what customers we need to notify, and the overall business impact. Given the thousands of customers we have and the vast product mix, Cognos affects our bottom line tremendously.”

*Chuck Redpath, Director of IT, The HallStar Company*



The HallStar Company, formerly known as The C. P. Hall Company, is a leading supplier of performance additives to the polymer and personal care industries worldwide. HallStar manufactures and supplies materials that are used extensively in the production of rubber, plastics, adhesives and coatings, selected personal care and specialized industrial applications. The manufacturer is a lean and agile mid-sized company focused on innovation and efficiency.

To streamline the management of its business, HallStar implemented a Lawson ERP system. The implementation went well, however, the abundance of data overwhelmed employees, who described it as “*drinking water from a fire hose.*” Dedicated to providing employees with the right tools, HallStar decided to deploy a Cognos business intelligence (BI) solution to provide employees with quick and easy access to information and reports in their ERP solution.

### **Challenges faced**

For the first three years of its ERP implementation, HallStar tried to leverage Lotus Notes, a technology that the company already had in-house, with its ERP system. “*It was like using a shoe for a hammer. It was just the wrong platform to really deliver the reports and data that we needed,*” explains Chuck Redpath, Director of IT, The HallStar Company. “*Employees really wanted to make the ERP sing. The only way to do that was to look at the data that the system was capturing and find solutions to access it more effectively and seamlessly.*”

#### **Industry:**

- Manufacturing

#### **Geography:**

- North America

#### **Information Needs:**

- Easy access to ERP data
- Web capabilities
- Self-service
- Flexibility

#### **Platforms:**

- Windows
- SQL Server
- IBM DB2
- Lawson

#### **Users:**

- 25

#### **Solutions:**

- Cognos 8 BI
- Cognos PowerPlay
- Impromptu Web Reports

#### **Benefits:**

- Increased revenue
- Reduced inventory by 25 percent
- Provided employees with easy access to relevant information
- Tighter integration with suppliers
- Delivery of key metrics and reports through executive dashboards

Equally important for HallStar was finding a solution that offered user self-service to help take the reporting and analysis burden off IT. *“Prior to Cognos IT had become the query department, with employees wanting access to numbers, data, and statistics from every facet of the business. We were getting nothing else done and it became a real hindrance,”* stresses Redpath.

### Strategy followed

HallStar evaluated several reporting solutions, including Business Objects' Crystal Reports. The company was attracted to Cognos BI due to its usability, Web-based functionality, and self-service capabilities. *“The way the data was put together and presented to end users, made a lot of sense,”* comments Redpath. *“The Web front-end was key. That really was an important aspect of the system because everybody knows how to use a Web browser. Due to this ease of use, we knew that we could get users up and running with only about half an hour of training.”*

The first project that HallStar tackled with Cognos was its inventory. Considered the company's 'killer app,' the solution enabled HallStar to reduce inventory by 25 percent within a year. *“Employees were amazed at their new visibility the system offered with just a few mouse clicks. That was a huge eye opener,”* states Redpath. Based on this success, executive management and employees eagerly embraced Cognos. The IT department quickly rolled out the solution to the company's order fulfillment, sales and marketing, manufacturing, quality and finance departments, and other business units across the company.

Since going live with Cognos in 2003, HallStar has deployed the solution throughout the entire enterprise. It has also standardized on Cognos for all its reporting and business intelligence needs.

Recently HallStar completed its migration to Cognos 8 BI. The company completed much of the upgrade on its own; however, it did benefit from the expertise of Cognos platinum partner, JCB Partners. JCB helped the company develop best practices and create the initial set of reports and dashboards for the CEO and the sales team.

Moving forward, HallStar plans to develop a dashboard that enables employees to access information that is relevant to them, such as key performance indicators affecting their yearly bonus.

### Benefits realized

In addition to freeing up the IT department at HallStar, Cognos has enabled its employees to meet their business objectives. It is now considered integral to the success of the company. *“Cognos is how we track everything that we're doing,”* emphasizes Redpath. *“It allows us to see something going in the wrong direction and correct it immediately.”*

Leveraged extensively throughout the organization, Cognos has positively impacted the company's revenue. *“We use Cognos business intelligence to determine price increases, what customers we need to notify, and the overall business impact,”* explains Redpath. *“Given the thousands of customers we have and the vast product mix, Cognos affects our bottom line tremendously.”*

Using Cognos, HallStar is now able to easily track thousands of individual stock keeping units (SKUs) worldwide. The company has a network of 20 distributors in more than 30 countries. Furthermore, its products can be packaged in five different ways. *“Our product line grows exponentially every time we roll out a new material because of the different packaging options. It can be a nightmare to track if you don't have the right tools,”* says Redpath. *“Cognos allows us to view that kind of information very easily. Now it's literally a click of the mouse away.”*

HallStar also serves as a distributor for large chemical companies. Previously, HallStar would provide these companies with a monthly report to let them know how much product had been sold. With the help of Cognos, HallStar has created an extranet for suppliers so they can conveniently log in and check the status of their products. This frees up HallStar's internal resources and creates stronger ties with its suppliers.

HallStar is already realizing strong benefits from its recent Cognos 8 BI implementation with the delivery of key reports and metrics through its dashboards. CEO John Paro is often on the road. Previously, in order to get the reports he needed, Paro would have had to call the controller and have several reports emailed. Thanks to Cognos, on a recent trip to India he was able to use the executive dashboard to access all his information in real-time in a central location. *“John definitely sees the value,”* states Redpath.

