

IBM® Cognos FSR™ Internal reporting process automation



IBM Cognos Financial Statement Reporting (FSR) automates the collection of data and creation of content-rich management and operational reports including narrative discussion and analysis. Cognos FSR enables users to collaborate with real-time data in a secure and controlled environment, eliminating complex and manual activities and bottlenecks that delay delivery of critical internal reports and insights. Cognos FSR will ensure your executive and operational leaders have timely and accurate insights to make better business decisions.

The problems

Business leaders demand more insights and analysis from analytical reports

To respond and adapt to the many market challenges organizations face in today's economic environment, management requires more robust discussion and analysis within their business and performance reports. Many organizations manually prepare discussion and analysis that drives strategic decisions, leading to inaccurate and out-of-date reports because of the inherent difficulties rolling up disparate plans and analysis from around the organization into an enterprise level aggregated view – inhibiting the timely development and execution of new strategies.

Current tools limit quality, transparency, and timeliness

Companies have made significant investments in reporting solutions that focus on analytics, but these solutions typically were not designed to capture the narrative analysis and insights on performance reports that are essential for synthesis of new strategies. Manual processes are used to share information, usually by copying and pasting data and related commentary into disparate Microsoft® Word, Microsoft Excel® and Microsoft PowerPoint® files, then emailing them throughout the organization for edits and approval. This complex and cumbersome process provides little transparency, prevents consistent results and increases the risk of data inaccuracies, which can cause management to question the integrity of data in key internal reports.

Management needs shared insights – not more data

To remain nimble, business leaders need to have accurate, up-to-the-minute information and a shared analytic interpretation at their fingertips – information and commentary that illustrates the insights of others who have examined the supporting data. Instead, most companies' manual and complex reporting processes prevent them from sharing accurate and timely insights collected across the organization to make better business decisions.

“FSR has improved our accuracy. The items that need to appear in numerous places in our document are populated immediately, and they’re right! We feel a lot more comfortable with the accuracy of the document using FSR.”

Senior Director, Giant Multinational Petroleum and Natural Gas Corporation

Inadequate governance and controls

The manual and complex nature of many management reporting processes using email, spreadsheets and word-processing files makes it difficult to control who sees sensitive financial data and analysis concerning company strategy. Many companies have invested heavily in back-end IT infrastructure to comply with Sarbanes-Oxley requirements, but there are still gaps in internal controls and governance when creating reports. These gaps are clearly seen when structured data is manually copied and pasted from source IT systems into spreadsheets and word-processing files that provide little or no controls, audit trail or visibility into who made what changes to the reports and subsequently emailed them throughout the organization for analysis and various reporting.

The benefits

Streamline management reporting, discussion, and analysis using Cognos FSR

Cognos FSR is a unified financial and management reporting platform for automating the production of financial reports and narrative analysis in a controlled and auditable environment. Cognos FSR users can create content-rich reports that combine up-to-date financial data with robust narrative analysis quickly and securely. This enables existing finance or operations staff to provide more accurate and reliable discussion and analysis in reports to the people who need them, when they need them.

Better decisions based on accurate data and insightful commentary

For executive leadership, access to accurate data and timely discussion and analysis is critical to making better business decisions. By automating reporting with Cognos FSR, frontline managers can spend more time analyzing and explaining performance and less time on the logistics of report assembly. Improving the timeliness of management reporting can yield significant benefits including the ability to:

- Identify inaccuracies in performance data and analysis earlier using Cognos FSR's business rules and validation tools that notify users of potential problems throughout the reporting and review cycles
- Respond and adapt to market opportunities by delivering an integrated view of data from financial and operational systems combined with supporting commentary and insight from others, in one unified and secure managed report
- Present insight, rather than just reported financial data, to senior management with supporting narrative analysis created through collaboration with other internal experts
- Deliver the reports as frequently as necessary since the report-creation process is automated to handle the most complex, text- and data-intensive reports

Improve governance and enhance controls

When employees are tasked with gathering information for management reporting purposes, they need access to sensitive data. This raises security issues when preparing the reports that could result in insider leaks. With Cognos FSR's built-in security and workflow, only the employees who need to see the information are provided access, and only when they need to see it. And Cognos FSR provides a comprehensive audit trail – tracking each change to the document. Users can easily compare any two versions of the document to see what was changed, who changed it and when it was changed – creating a level of internal control and visibility into the reporting process not possible before.

A single source of the truth

Cognos FSR provides a single, secure database and application environment that pulls data from both structured and unstructured sources (e.g., GLs, ERPs, consolidation systems, HR systems, payroll, OLAP and relational data, Excel files, etc.) and automatically updates those values wherever they appear in financial reports and commentary stored in Cognos FSR.

Report formats can stay exactly the same

Cognos FSR can accommodate any report style or formatting so you can continue using your existing report formats instead of conforming them into pre-built templates. And when it's time to publish a report created in Cognos FSR, Cognos FSR automatically marries quantitative data and narrative discussion and analysis to produce a single highly formatted Microsoft Word document, Adobe® PDF, or Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. This ensures business leaders know exactly where to get the information that is relevant to drive better decisions.

The solution

Link source data to report data

In Cognos FSR, financial and operational data in the final report can be linked directly back to a single data source, ensuring that there are no conflicting numbers anywhere in the report. And changes to that source number automatically cascade through the report. This ensures there is “one version of the truth” reliably “tied out” throughout.

Use prior report as a template for the next report

Successive reports typically contain the same sections and formatting as previous reports, as well as data from the same sources to populate the numbers in the report (e.g. revenue, net income, etc.). Cognos FSR can automatically roll over a report to the subsequent period to “jump-start” the report creation process. The latest data is automatically loaded into the new, pre-formatted report, allowing the user to focus on the content rather than on the collecting, consolidating and formatting of the report.

Change once, update everywhere

Using what is called variables in text, Cognos FSR users can link hundreds of slave reports to a master report, enabling report sections to be “shared.” This ensures that reports in Cognos FSR always reference a single narrative or data point in the highest level report; other sections are simply replicated to expedite editing at lower levels. In this way, hundreds of departments or legal entities within an organization can quickly source common data from the highest level entity and customize other sections of the report as required.

Continue using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word

Most people are already familiar with Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. Cognos FSR is a database-driven reporting solution that uses the familiar interface and capabilities of Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel with the added value of security, audit trail integration and automation of a database-backed enterprise application.

Pull data from any data source

Cognos FSR provides an easy-to-use method of accessing and integrating data from key operational systems including the leading ERP systems, GLs, ERPs, consolidation systems, HR systems, payroll, OLAP and relational data, CRM systems, Excel files, etc.

Create Audit Trail Reports

Cognos FSR provides audit trail reporting – tracking each user and each change to the document. With the Cognos FSR audit trail, users can easily compare any two versions of the document to see what was changed, who changed it, and when it was changed.

Optimize Controls with Workflow and Task Management

A workflow process within Cognos FSR tracks the status of each section of the document, with due dates and responsibility assignments. With workflow, the administrator can easily see the status of each section of the document, see which sections are overdue and who is responsible for each section.

Single Data Source – Multiple Output Options

Cognos FSR supports a variety of output options including: Microsoft Word, Microsoft PowerPoint, Adobe PDF, and Adobe InDesign.

The proof

Reduced personnel costs

“My staff and I have reduced the time we had to spend compiling, checking and producing our reports, as was the case during ‘crunch time.’ Not only are we filing on time but our employees have a life!”

Senior Director, Leading National Distributor of Medical Supplies and Equipment

Reduced risk

“We found the one product on the market that could automate our manual, Microsoft Excel-based annual account preparation and filing process ...with Cognos FSR, we’ve gained greater control over the reporting process, with the specific benefit of the consolidation of numerous spreadsheets into a single Cognos FSR document, complete with version control, workflow and audit-trail capabilities.”

Group Financial Controller, UK Mutual Financial Services Group

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Senior Director, Multinational Petroleum and Natural Gas Corporation

Reduced cycle time

“The automation of numbers that once took three days to accomplish now are done in 12 seconds. And the ‘dynamic links’ between our source documents and FSR is a huge advantage to us!”

Director of External Reporting, Electronics/Defense Contractor

About IBM Business Analytics

IBM Business Analytics software delivers actionable insights decision-makers need to achieve better business performance. IBM offers a comprehensive, unified portfolio of business intelligence, predictive and advanced analytics, financial performance and strategy management, governance, risk and compliance and analytic applications.

With IBM software, companies can spot trends, patterns and anomalies, compare “what if” scenarios, predict potential threats and opportunities, identify and manage key business risks and plan, budget and forecast resources. With these deep analytic capabilities our customers around the world can better understand, anticipate and shape business outcomes.

For more information

For further information or to reach a representative please visit www.nexdimension.net



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