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Press Release

Decision Support upgrades UI's data reporting tool

Implementation of BusinessObjects XI marks transition to web-based reporting application

Champaign, IL – April 20, 2008: As the Internet continues to play a greater role in people's lives, many companies are trying to capture that potential through web-based applications. The University of Illinois is keeping up with the transition to Web-based applications as evidenced by the recent upgrade to its data reporting tool, BusinessObjects.

Web-based applications generally promise a more robust and manageable environment, providing user availability from any location with an Internet connection. With the implementation of BusinessObjects XI Release 2, the University's Decision Support department enables users to experience those advantages, if desired, without having to give up the comfort of the desktop application with which many are familiar.

"There is always a learning curve and an adjustment period with any change," said Lisa Ed, Technical Analyst for Decision Support. "Many people have to access the data daily and need information quickly, so they don't always have time to learn the new tool first. We are happy to provide a more familiar tool to those who had used the desktop application in the past while we encourage them to become familiar with the Web-based application through training and experimentation at their own pace."

The BusinessObjects company, now owned by SAP, provides two environments for the data reporting tool with version XI: Desktop Intelligence and Web Intelligence. Desktop Intelligence is a traditional workstation-based program that is installed locally and can only be operated only from the computer on which it is installed. With only slight modifications in some menus or visual aspects, it is essentially the same as the previous version, BusinessObjects 6.5.

Web Intelligence, however, is accessible through a Web browser from any computer at any location with Internet service, provided a user has the appropriate login and access permissions. This interface represents the direction in which the company is heading, focusing its resources on improving

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and expanding the functionality and usefulness of the Web-based environment to rival and eventually exceed the desktop application. While it does not currently provide all the functionality of the desktop application, the Web-based tool meets the needs of a large portion of the University's data reporters.

Ed, who led the upgrade project, points to advanced preparation and information sharing as essential to the smooth upgrade. In preparation for the transition, Decision Support spent several months testing and configuring the new version before introducing it to the Data Warehouse users. In addition to keeping users informed about the transition, the DS team provided self-guided training materials and a preview environment prior to the upgrade implementation on March 10.

"Investing several months on the project allowed us to work out the kinks and resolve several issues before the product reached the users," she said. "We learned a lot through the testing, and that helped provide a better experience during the upgrade implementation. We kept BusinessObjects users informed about what to expect in advance, as well as what to do for a smooth transition, and they took it from there with great results."

DS provided additional self-guided training materials and demonstrations after the launch and added a Web Intelligence introductory course to its suite of BusinessObjects classes. These instructor-led classes, held in a computer lab where trainees can get immediate hands-on experience, provide an opportunity for users at different levels and with different needs to learn about the tool's features.

As the Data Warehouse users take the classes and continue to become more familiar with the Web Intelligence interface, Decision Support is starting to look ahead at the next version of BusinessObjects XI and evaluating the value it can offer to the thousands who depend on it for data reporting across all the campuses.

"Program upgrades should be all about making the users' work easier or allowing them to do more," Ed said. "As the Web Intelligence environment continues to develop and people's information needs evolve, we want to stay current and provide the tools and support our customers need. We're looking forward to what the future offers, particularly with Web-based applications."

For the University's BusinessObjects users, the flexible Web-based environment shows a lot of promise after a successful implementation.

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