

Background and Problem

We were working on a project introducing a new practice management system into a major corporation that provides accounting services. I was asked as an additional project to support the design of a web based Data Warehouse Reporting System to meet the needs of their Corporate Recovery Division. Several operating units had recently been brought together from different accounting practices each from different cultures and with legacy reporting systems designed to meet the preferences of their former owner / partners. The requirements of a corporate structure ultimately responsible to shareholders brought the need for a radically different reporting structure. At the same time it was crucial to ensure that those managing at the lower levels of responsibility were provided with information to a standard that would enable them to carry out their tasks efficiently and without making them slaves to the system.

The changes that were required were fundamental and we were keen to avoid stimulating resistance from Directors carrying local responsibility who may be concerned that they would lose the controls, measurements and reports that they had traditionally received. In some cases they may have held an underlying concern that they would lose their autonomy to the company headquarters staff. In fact a realistic concern, as that was in part the intention. If that resistance was allowed to build it was anticipated that the project would be delayed and possibly halted. Consequently it was necessary to quickly demonstrate that the operational benefits would considerably outweigh the disadvantages.

Actions Taken

The agreed plan was to reconstruct the current period's data into a format similar to that which the planned output would be presented in. That operation had to be carried out without the elegant and sophisticated software in place which would normally be used to build a Data Warehouse. Having then demonstrated the value of the new reports to his local offices the Departmental Director would have a powerful argument to demolish any resistance to finishing the job.

The task was

1. To agree a reporting structure based on a hierarchy of data that could be expanded at different levels to meet the detailed needs of managers.
2. To review the reports of each office to determine what information was needed but lacking from their current versions. Specify those deficiencies and ensure that they had the sources to gather the data from.
3. Design a method of plundering the local reports for the information needed for the new reports. Sort the data into a usable form.
4. Consolidate and summarise into the new reports.
5. Design a procedure that would speedily produce the output with accuracy. Allowing for a large volume of data to be handled.

The Result

The result was achieved using the advanced functionality available within spreadsheets and delivered within the agreed timescale.

Whilst this project was being planned a requirement arose in the Group Head Office to obtain some important but routine information that had been overlooked when the company's practice management system had been specified. The cost of rectifying this deficiency would have been in excess of £35k using a specialised programming team, this cost was totally disproportionate to the value gained. The management of this task was passed to a member of our team who in a few hours devised a method of extracting the data using low cost software. Thereby saving most of the cost and completing the task well ahead of schedule.

**If you want to find out more about any of the areas covered in this case study
and how we can support your business – contact us today.**