



AQUENT

STAFFING FIRM USES SAP® BusinessObjects™ SOFTWARE TOOLS TO DELIVER TALENT

“The SAP BusinessObjects portfolio is a platform we can build on – it will essentially serve as a foundation for Aquent to become a truly global company moving forward.”

Larry Bolick, CIO, Aquent

QUICK FACTS

Company

- Name: Aquent
- Headquarters: Boston
- Industry: Professional services
- Products and services: Staffing of marketing positions worldwide
- Web site: www.aquent.com

Challenges and Opportunities

- Increase visibility into the business
- Improve corporate agility by giving managers flexibility and fast turnaround in reporting

Objectives

- Consolidate worldwide operational data into a single data mart
- Create a true marketing database with easy access to all valuable data
- Enable ad hoc reporting without using IT resources each time
- Save time in report generation
- Allow reports to be saved for reuse

SAP® Solutions and Services

- SAP® BusinessObjects™ XI solutions
- SAP BusinessObjects Web Intelligence® software
- SAP BusinessObjects Desktop Intelligence™ software
- SAP BusinessObjects Data Integrator software

Implementation Highlights

- Reviewed and modified data definitions through collaboration between business, finance, and IT staff along with SAP consultants
- Scrubbed report definitions to reflect changed data elements
- Managed the user change effort effectively to accustom business users to new report style and delivery method

Why SAP

- Flexible, powerful access to data
- Comprehensive reporting functionality
- Leading-edge business intelligence tools

Benefits

- Gained high-level perspective for financial analysts and executives
- Gained the ability to drill down into report data
- Reduced the average time to produce a mailing list from 20 hours to 1
- Enabled more precisely targeted marketing campaigns
- Freed up development resources from distracting reporting requests

Founded in 1986 by friends residing in a Harvard dorm, Aquent is today the world's largest marketing staffing firm. The company helps FORTUNE 500 marketing organizations find the people they need, on both a contract and direct-hire basis, and helps marketing professionals find the rewarding engagements they want. Aquent represents talent in virtually every marketing discipline, from brand managers and copywriters to data analysts, Web designers, and search-engine optimization experts. Throughout its history, the company has made more than half a million matches between its clients and the talent they are looking for.

The reporting environment at Aquent is complex, involving staffing levels and requirements, results by region, time entry and billing, headcount utilization, pay rates, gross profit, and much more. Some reports end on calendar dates, others on fiscal dates. Different roles within the staffing organization are reported on differently. Diverse payroll schemes are also reflected, depending on the preference of individual clients and marketing professionals. Unlike most companies in this sector, Aquent provides benefits for its talent, so it requires additional reporting to establish eligibility.

Although Aquent offers a broad range of ancillary services – including project management, translation and localization, and healthcare consulting – staffing is its bread-and-butter business. So when Aquent migrated its custom-built enterprise resource planning (ERP) staffing system to a Web-based model,

it needed a modern reporting solution that would complement the newly enhanced infrastructure. Aquent looked to the SAP® BusinessObjects™ portfolio of solutions for the answer, including SAP BusinessObjects XI solutions, SAP BusinessObjects Web Intelligence® software, and SAP BusinessObjects Desktop Intelligence™ software.

Time Consuming and Frustrating

According to business intelligence (BI) systems engineer Jeff Payton, the previous reporting environment left much to be desired. "It had limited ad hoc capabilities," he says. "For unusual reports, you had to submit a set report to the development team. They would figure out how to compile the code and query the database and then prepare the report for you. It was a time-consuming and frustrating process, and you sometimes ended up with a report that wasn't exactly what you wanted after all."

Marketing director Jenny Norwood had her own problems with the legacy system. "There was a ton of information in the database – including mail and e-mail addresses and whether people had opted in or out of our mailing campaigns – but it really wasn't a marketing database," she says. "Pulling contact information was a multiday struggle. Worse, I couldn't save the reports I created, so I'd have to start all over the next time I needed to create one. It used to take me the better part of a business week to compile a mailing list. And because the number of lines I was working with in the old system was so big, I would often have to run it overnight, so it wouldn't slow down everybody else's work."

A Single Data Mart

The first step was to get operational data from around the world into a single data mart. Aquent pulls data from a database in Sydney that covers its Asia-Pacific operations, one in London for Europe, and a third in Boston for the North American market. The databases are replicated to shadow databases in Boston and then extracted out to the data mart in a nightly batch cycle using SAP BusinessObjects Data Integrator software. SAP BusinessObjects XI runs on this data mart.

The new system is getting plenty of attention. Says Payton, "The introduction of SAP BusinessObjects software has given people that look in their eye like, 'Ooh, we can do that? Well then, can we do this?' I'm starting to get more requests for things that people didn't



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Jenny Norwood, Director of Marketing, Aquent

know they could do before. It’s a very exciting situation to be in.” Payton notes that business users can manipulate data and look at reports from new perspectives. “SAP BusinessObjects software makes it possible to assemble virtually any object in the universe into an ad hoc report and run it on the fly, so you get exactly what you want – immediately,” he says.

It’s a big help to the development team too. “We have been able to cut them loose to do what they do best, rather than being distracted by the reporting requests and operational needs of the company,” says Payton. “We’ve been able to take that off their plate.”

New Query Capabilities

Aquent’s consolidated data and leading-edge BI system has delivered significant benefits. “Using SAP BusinessObjects solutions, we can run individual reports for Asia Pacific, Europe, or North America,

easily drill down to see what portion of the revenue came from which market and how each area is performing in relation to the others.”

Payton also points to a report, prepared for the president of the North America staffing business unit, that tracks full-time employees placed within Aquent’s client base. “Some of the reporting the president wanted to do was impossible with the legacy query tool,” he says. “With SAP BusinessObjects software tools, we were able to create the report and even automate it. Now the numbers are waiting for her every morning.”

Marketing director Norwood has also seen clear benefits. “By doing some analysis, we discovered that clients who order marketing managers from us tend to be in management positions themselves,” she says. “With SAP BusinessObjects software, I can pull a report of all marketing directors and managers in the system in order to

Norwood’s mailing lists are under control too. “My average report, even a complicated one, takes less than five minutes to run in SAP BusinessObjects software, and there’s minimal cleaning required when it gets to Microsoft Excel,” she says. “It has literally gone from about 20 hours to maybe 1 hour. It’s been a huge benefit to me.”

A Fundamental Transformation

For Aquent CIO Larry Bolick, SAP BusinessObjects solutions represent the key to a fundamental transformation. “Today Aquent is managed as a multinational company,” he says. “Folks in France manage their piece of the puzzle, they report up to London, and London reports up to Boston. I believe that when the company is ready, SAP BusinessObjects software will help us think of Aquent as a global company with fewer national and organizational boundaries – because we’ll be able to report across all of those boundaries.

“We have very flexible access to global data today, and that was a difficult problem for Aquent in the past,” concludes Bolick. “We’re starting to extract information from this mass of data that we just couldn’t extract before. We are on the cusp of doing things we could not do before. From the transformation perspective, it’s our ability to really understand the data better and in different ways than we could in the past. The SAP BusinessObjects portfolio is a platform we can build on – it will essentially serve as a foundation for Aquent to become a truly global company moving forward.”

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Jeff Payton, BI Systems Engineer, Aquent

or we can run a single report with common criteria,” says Payton. “Our financial analysts can look at revenue across the board to gain a high-level perspective. And because the underlying data is contained within the report, they can

specifically market to them about hiring marketing project managers. This helps us segment the messaging to our hiring audiences much better, reducing waste in our mailing campaigns.”

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