

Software Providers: Let Reporting Be Your Competitive Advantage

Or “How I Won More Deals and Made My Customers Happier”

Fact #1: It's getting easier to build software... but harder to sell it.

However you define yourself — software provider, solution developer or OEM — there's no denying that:

- Companies with SaaS and mobile tools are upending established software businesses,
- The Internet is boosting the exposure of lower-quality challengers in your space, and
- Advances in development tools and languages mean smart competitors are not only quicker to market but are copycatting many of your coolest features.

Whether you're a big fish or an agile minnow, it's harder to get noticed, more difficult to “wow” your customers, and nearly impossible to distinguish yourself from the pack. But you knew that already, didn't you?

Fact #2: Reporting is the public face of your software.

Reporting is the output on which your customers rely: the tangible documentation they need to convey information, deliver proof of business, or make a critical decision. It's often the last step in their business process and the first document their own customers see.

Unfortunately, too many software companies ignore this critical component.



Fact #3: Your reporting function can be your competitive advantage.

The de-emphasis on reporting is more common than you may think. The trouble begins when software companies focus solely on the user interface and data input, on perfecting the initial “customer experience.”

Sadly, by the time the engineers get to address the output process, the release date is around the corner, the VP of Engineering is freaking out (again), and the result is a substandard reporting feature that you “promise to upgrade in the next version.”

Sound familiar now?

While reporting may seem to be just a small part of what you do, it’s a crucial one that you can’t afford to ignore. This is especially true if it’s an exploitable competitor’s weakness or the top enhancement request of your own customers.

8 Reasons Why You Should Upgrade Your Reporting Component

Upgrading your reporting component is the single best way to attract and keep customers – and to set yourself apart from - and above - your competitors.

1 Reporting is a vital sales tool.

It would be fabulous if potential clients took you at your word when you told them you’re the best in the industry, but that isn’t likely to happen. You need to be able to *show* them why you’re so good at what you do. Reporting software can make that happen.

Recent psychological research has shown that when customers wait in checkout lines, their impression of the entire wait is colored primarily by *what happens in the final few moments of the experience*. When the line speeds up at the end, they feel more positive, even after a long wait.

Demos are no different. When your sales reps finish an hour-long presentation by creating and running beautiful reports, from scratch and within minutes, the impact on your prospects is powerful and lasting. Asking for the PO becomes that much easier.

2 Because looks DO matter.

While you’re rightly proud of the power of what’s going on behind the scenes in your product, your customers will also judge you on your looks. Good looking, well-organized reports are what enable them to turn data into information, which they can then turn into actionable knowledge.

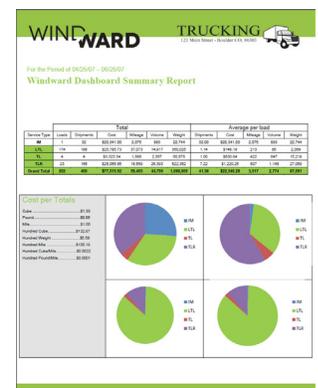
Application security provider Aspect Security found this out firsthand. Aspect was using a basic reporting tool. The output wasn’t up to the task.

The software “generated lots of text boxes instead of a real table. Our reports are complex and have to look professional. We simply couldn’t achieve that,” said Arshan Dabirsiaghi, Application Security Engineer.

Aspect Security overcame this limitation by switching to a tool that allowed for highly customizable layout, font and formatting. Not only do their users create reports in 1/10th of the time, but they’re able to showcase their results in beautiful, professional reports.

3 Linking with analytical tools.

Of course, you know it isn’t enough to simply report on data. Your customers also need to be able to analyze and put that data into context in order to make effective business decisions.



A great reporting tool lets you present complex data in an easy-to-understand format.

But who has the time and resources to create analytical and reporting tools from scratch? This is why it makes sense to upgrade your report designer so that it's linked with an established analytical solution like Microsoft® Office.

Using Excel's built-in analysis tools, your report template can run equations and perform statistical analysis on any data set.

4 Visualization tools lead to better business decisions.

Aristotle said, "The soul never thinks without a picture." If he were alive today, he might instead have tweeted: "The soul never thinks *about data* without a picture."

It's easy to get caught up in figuring out how to present words and numbers in a straightforward, linear manner.

Sometimes, however, the best and clearest way to display data is to use visual elements such as charts, graphs and other eye-catching graphics.

The right reporting tool can make all the difference between a jumble of facts and information your customers can act upon.

Features like shapes, photos and dynamic and editable charting will give your customers visually arresting reports that outline key concepts and illustrate trends.

5 Automated scheduling is a must.

Your customers are as busy as you are, and they appreciate everything you do to help them save time.

That's why the best reporting components now enable automated report delivery. With scheduled and auto-generated reports, your customers get the info they need **WHEN** they need it and in the format they need it in.

6 A significant ROI for you.

An effective reporting solution does more than simply cut costs through report generation. It also dramatically cuts costs during the report creation process—which can have a tremendous effect on your bottom line. That translates to an impressive Return on Investment (ROI).

Take a look at the experience of Byggeweb/Docia (formerly Backbone Digital Systems), developer of collaboration and management products for the building and construction industry.

Because one of the biggest expenses in the report creation process correlated to the design tool's ease-of-use, they upgraded their reporting component to one that could quickly create individually designed templates for each customer.

"Compared to systems where both layout and data must be coded, as we did before, the process of creating a new report is at least five times faster," said Michael Bjerregaard Pedersen, who headed the implementation.

7 Process efficiency means cost savings for everyone.

With the right reporting solution, you'll find numerous ways in which the process is more efficient, leading to additional cost savings for your organization and also for your customers (a competitive advantage for sure).

Project-focused logistics software leader HAL, Inc., upgraded its reporting component and was able to pass along savings to its customers because of the streamlined reporting process.



“Our previous solution was time-consuming and required us to deploy an entire report set to correct a single report. The ability to deploy single reports is much better and a huge benefit,” said Chuck Hanebuth, CEO.

Another way to make the process more efficient is to eliminate the reporting bottleneck. Enterprise reporting is traditionally an iterative process. Report users go back and forth with programmers multiple times to get their templates coded and tagged. This game of tennis creates a bottleneck that leads to huge expense and a significant IS/IT resource drain.

Upgrading to a solution that uses a standard design interface like Microsoft Office will eliminate this painful expense. Working in a familiar tool will give your business analysts the freedom they need to design and update report templates and give your software engineers the uninterrupted time they need to complete your next amazing, market-dominating release.

8 Power to the people.

The “people” being your customers, of course. When you upgrade to a reporting solution that allows your customers to run or create their own reports without relying on you, the OEM, it puts more power where it belongs: in the hands of your customer.

Plus, when your customers are generating their own reports, it frees up your time. Your company can then focus on your core business, where it makes the most sense to put your time and energy.

Add that to cost savings, improved efficiency, automated processes, flexible formatting, and vibrant and visual report design, and you’ve got a serious competitive advantage.

About Windward

For businesses in document-intensive industries, Windward Studios is the document generation and reporting software company that empowers business professionals to create beautiful, professional reports. Create custom reports with Microsoft Office as your design tool and a Java or .NET engine that connects to virtually any data source. Windward has been delighting customers since 2004.

Fact #4: Now is the time to explore your reporting alternatives.

Your competitors are working harder than ever to launch high-performing software that conquers an ever-growing share of your market. They may even be trying to steal away a few of your customers as you read this.

Don’t let it happen because of a mediocre reporting component.

Relatively speaking, upgrading your reporting capabilities is one of the quickest ways to get the most bang for your development buck. In many cases, you can install a ready-to-run system that will work with your current setup.

We invite you to check out the Windward Embedded Solution. It not only delivers on the eight advantages in this paper, but it simplifies how you add reporting and document generation functionality into your new or existing software application - *in as little as 14 lines of code.*

Come see the Windward difference.

Upgrade Your Software Product’s Reporting and Document Generation

Download a free, 14-day trial of Windward’s products or request a live demonstration.

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