

Business intelligence software products for Sage Timberline Office

By Duane Craig

As technology burrows its way deeper into construction businesses, data overload occurs more frequently. It gets increasingly difficult to corral, identify and extract the important things from the torrent of information. Technology also brings with it an increase in the speed at which everything hums along.

That speed increases even more as business processes begin happening in real time. Take the invoice that accompanied the delivery of materials to a distant job site, which is integrated into the company's accounting system as a remote worker scans the materials while receiving them. This is just one instance where the quest for business intelligence begins and where companies such as Sage, which supplies software to the construction industry, see business intelligence and reporting tools as integral to increased efficiencies.

[Sage Timberline Office](#) has its own set of robust reporting and business intelligence tools, but, since it serves such a vast market, the company also turns to its partners. This article looks at three reporting and business intelligence software products for Timberline.

Stonefield Software (Stonefield Query)

Being able to find information and route it to all necessary users is just the first step in business intelligence. After that, it needs to be filtered for relevancy, cleaned of extraneous information and, finally, presented in a way that is meaningful.

This is a difficult process no matter what software a user has in front of him, since most applications use fairly complex data structure, said Doug Hennig, chief technology officer for [Stonefield Software Inc.](#) in Lake Mary, Fla. Even Crystal Reports, which Hennig described as "a great reporting tool, is literally intended for wizards -- people who are experts at database structures and experts on the specific database structure of the application. It's not for the average person like the estimator, or the secretary, or the construction manager."

Even for construction companies with an IT department there may be delays in obtaining meaningful reports, since IT is often dealing with higher priority items like security, system maintenance, and tech support, Hennig said. Stonefield has reduced the complexity of creating reports by cutting down on the depth and breadth of the database viewable to the user. In addition, its business intelligence software product automatically presents the most likely starting point for the Timberline module the user chooses. For example, if the user chooses the accounts receivable module, then he or she is presented with invoices as a starting point. The other unique aspect of Stonefield Query, especially relevant to construction, is that it can pull information from disparate databases. A company with multiple organizations could easily combine operating expenses from them all into just one report.

"Stonefield Query adds an additional layer on top of the database, which gives the added capability to group things that a customer might think up," Hansen said. For example, forms with boxes and lines

can't be done in Timberline, and, though reports with embedded images are possible with Crystal Reports, it is a rather technical process, Hansen said. "Stonefield did more than we offered with our own report designer, but were able to do it with greater simplicity than the Crystal solution. [It does] a great job of streamlining the work flow."

Stonefield Query is purchased and downloaded from the company's website. For \$2400 initially the purchaser gets licensed for one report designer and five report viewers. Additional licenses for the same number of people are then \$600. Hennig said it isn't uncommon for companies to have two or three people as report designers, since not everybody needs to be able to design reports or for that matter wants to.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly many companies will find the reporting and BI functions built into [Sage Timberline Office](#) to be all they need. Others may want simpler or expanded processes -- and, for those reasons, they can adopt complementary business intelligence software products such as TimberScan, Stonefield Query and Office Connector. Such products help companies get a grip on all the data that must be analyzed before decisions can be made and long-term plans can be created.

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