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QlikView Saved Candle Maker Millions

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by **Alex Woodie**

Blyth HomeScents International (BHI), a manufacturer of candles and other scented items, faced an IT challenge when it merged two divisions. While both organizations had used the iSeries, they ran different ERP programs--one used BPCS, while the other ran Movex--and each system has its own set of reports, written in RPG and Query/400. The company was hesitant to plop down millions for a big-bang business intelligence implementation, and instead found a reporting solution it could grow with in QlikView from [QlikTech](#).

Running two different ERP systems made things difficult, especially when it came to month-end reporting, and the extra week it would often take to reconcile the information from the two systems into a single sales analysis report for the executive team, says Oleg Troyansky, vice president of business information systems for BHI, which is headquartered near Chicago.

"It was really hard to give management an appropriate report that would ignore, if you will, the ERP system, and give them the consolidated view," Troyansky says. "One division was very proficient in BPCS, but knew very little about Movex. And vice versa with the other division."

So Troyansky began the hunt for a new reporting system that would eliminate the grunt work of manually reconciling data from multiple sources, and more quickly put actionable data in the hands of top managers. He had worked on business intelligence implementations before, and had some ideas of what he wanted, so he checked out the offerings of some well known reporting tool vendors, such as [Cognos](#), [Business Objects](#), and [Hyperion](#).

While these vendors undoubtedly have been involved in tremendously successful implementations, Troyansky's previous experiences were apparently not among them.

"The problem with many of these tools is there's a pretty long learning curve," he says. "Before you can produce anything meaningful, you need to learn a lot and put a lot of effort into the tool . . . Seasoned professional trained in the tool can get stuff done, but they have to get there first."

Troyansky had heard of a tool called QlikView from QlikTech, a Swedish software developer with a considerable customer base among OS/400 shops. What initially attracted him to this tool was the array of connectors it offered for popular OS/400 ERP systems, including Movex and BPCS, among others. Because this was the primary problem at BHI, he decided to experiment with the tool. He was immediately impressed.

"What was very attractive about QlikView, after I downloaded an evaluation tool and played with it for a couple of hours, is that I was looking at something fairly meaningful," he said. Anybody who knows SQL and is familiar with their organization's data structures can get up and running in days, he says. "You can literally run from scratch."

So he decided to give it a shot and bring it into production, albeit in a "very small footprint," and grow from there.

QlikView Reporting

QlikView is a Windows-based business intelligence system that has been in development since

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1993. At that time, QlikTech's founders were looking for an alternative to the time-consuming process of loading data into data warehouses used for online analytical processing (OLAP), and so it decided that the best route was to store the data in memory. However, because memory was prohibitively expensive, the company needed a way to compress the data, which is how it came up with its Associative Query Logic (AQL) engine. (For more about QlikView's technology, read ["QlikTech Targets iSeries Base with Business Intelligence App"](#)).

Interestingly, while Troyansky was first attracted to the robust set of adapters for OS/400 ERP systems that QlikView offered, his team actually ended up developing its own connections. It was easier to develop a new application from scratch, than to purchase and modify two separate templates, he says.

BHI's QlikView environment consists of a two-way Windows Server 2003 box that houses the reports, and a smaller Windows workstation that runs the extract, transform, and load (ETL) workloads that pull data from the OS/400 servers. The company's production iSeries machines consist of a multi-processor Model 830 and a multi-processor Model 825, which run the OS/400 applications. Troyansky says he has no qualms with using Windows machines, which are generally less reliable than iSeries servers, to house critical business data.

Every night, after the nightly batch processes are done on the iSeries, the Windows workstation connects to the iSeries systems to gather the latest production data, which is accomplished via ODBC and OLE. This data is then propagated, via the two-way Windows Server 2003 box, to the Windows desktops and notebook PCs used by onsite and mobile BHI employees. Most of the employees interface with QlikView through a thick-client application residing on their PCs, although some users access reports via Web browsers.

User Buy-In

The introduction of any new technology raises the question of user buy-in and learning curves. If the learning curve is too steep and the technology too complicated, users will feel they're not getting enough satisfaction out of the new system, and will go back to doing things the old way. Troyansky calculated this risk was too great with some of the other well-known business intelligence applications, which require weeks of training to even begin to use.

But just three weeks after installing the tool, Troyansky and his developers produced the first QlikView application--a sales dashboard. "Reading information from those two systems and an Excel spreadsheet, it was quite amazing to bring out that type of application in three weeks," he says. It also helped to quell the fear about whether people will use it, or "if it will be another wasted technology that wouldn't stick," Troyansky says.

Since that first implementation in 2003 that included 20 users across two divisions, the use of QlikView has blossomed, and now the tool is used by more than 250 employees across five company divisions. Troyansky even has two developers dedicated to maintaining existing QlikView applications and building new ones.

User buy-in was never a problem with QlikView according to Troyansky, who describes QlikTech as "by far the most successful IT project" he has ever been involved with. "The typical response from our users, is 'This is the best tool I've ever seen,'" he says.

Even the president of the company uses QlikView on a regular basis, which has a very positive effect on user buy-in, because people say to themselves, "If the president is looking at something, I better look at it, too," Troyansky says.

Positive ROI

Today, BHI uses QlikView to create reports for a variety of elements of its business, including sales analysis, inventory management, transportation management, point of sale, credit scoring, and Sarbanes-Oxley Act compliance. But it was the inventory management report that saved the company millions of dollars.

A couple of years ago, BHI was struck by a supply chain situation that it could have prevented if the right data was in the right hands at the right time. The company had a glut of inventory at the end of the year that basically eliminated the company's profits. The situation was caused in part by the "non-user friendly" reports the company used, and the fact that only a few specialists could

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understand it and make the necessary changes in inventory beforehand.

In response to the problem, Troyansky's team created a QlikView application that brought greater clarity to the company's current inventory situation, and enabled the company to reduce significantly the amount of excess inventory it was carrying, thereby saving the company millions of dollars. "The key thing for senior management is, when you have inventory management [applications], that's fine," Troyansky says. "But if you can have president look at the reports and ask the right questions, that has a big impact."

With all of the reports now generated by QlikView, and all of the decision-making that it enables at BHL, has Troyansky ever considered re-architecting the system around a data warehouse? The answer is, Not really.

"For really big shops, it comes down to a philosophical question, do you need a full-blown data warehouse?" he says. "But for a midsize company like ours, there's no question in my mind that QlikView can do everything a traditional data warehouse can do, and more, and do it much easier and quicker and faster."

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