4 WAYS TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR REPORTING

BAM!

CHOOSE YOUR SIDEKICK

ClearPoint Strategy
So you’re on a quest to become a reporting superhero, and your next feat is to take control of all your data and find the best way to present it. There are several applications available to you. But, you don’t want just any old software. You want one that is tailor-fit to your company—one that will function like a sidekick to your increasingly-powerful superhero self and meet the unique needs of your business.

Let us help. Below, you will find explanations of four ways you can create your reports. In addition to identifying these four methods, there is an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages, and a description of what kind of company the particular method would be best suited for.

After just a few minutes of reading, you’ll be able to choose a reporting method with confidence and be off to your next act of heroism.

So, let’s get to business. Here are four ways to take control of your reporting.
Since you are reading this, there’s a likely chance that you and others in your organization already have and are familiar with the Microsoft desktop applications like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. (Or maybe you use Google Docs or the Apple iWorks suite.) We’re sure you have considered how to configure these applications in order to meet your reporting needs.

Here are our thoughts...
Using Office applications is one of the most inexpensive options available for presenting data and reports. Programs can be purchased separately or in bundles.

Advantages of Office Applications

**Cost Efficient**
Using Office applications is one of the most inexpensive options available for presenting data and reports. Programs can be purchased separately or in bundles.

**Familiar**
If you’ve ever owned a desktop computer, you’ve probably used these programs. They’ve been around forever, so they’re incredibly user-friendly and intuitive (or at least they’ve trained us well). And whenever software updates come out, it’s traditionally pretty easy to navigate through the new interfaces.

**Simple**
With a program like Excel, you can easily enter data and present it in tables and graphs. Then, you can effortlessly export those graphs, tables, and charts into PowerPoint for a more polished presentation.

Disadvantages of Office Applications

**Multiple Users**
When even just two people are using the application and entering data into the system, it becomes increasingly more difficult to present accurate data. The more people you have entering data, the higher the chance for error. Then, the data you’re presenting is likely to be incorrect (one way to not look like a superhero).

There aren’t different “versions” of these applications fit for small businesses or enterprises. They are more like “one size fits all.” As your business grows, you may have to manipulate the programs to meet your needs for reporting.

So, is this the Sidekick for you?
Microsoft Office is the “granddaddy” of all “Office” applications, having kicked Lotus 1-2-3 and WordPerfect to the curb years ago. So when people talk “Office,” they’re usually talking Microsoft Office.

Google Docs is the new kid on the block for office productivity software. While not as feature-rich as Microsoft Office, it has some neat online collaboration capabilities that warrant your consideration.

If you are going to be the only person gathering and entering data, or, if you only need to report data from one department, Office applications are a great fit. Their low cost and simplicity make them smart choices for small businesses and startups. Once you start feeling the pains of these systems, you’ll know you’ve outgrown them and need a better solution.
Why look at numbers and simple tables in a spreadsheet when you can be looking at a report from a database? With report generation software, you can access the hidden gems stored in your organization’s database servers. (Those are those scary boxes in the corner called “Oracle” and “SQL Server.”).
ADVANTAGES OF REPORT GENERATION SOFTWARE

CREATE ONCE, RUN MANY
Once you create a report in a report generation software, it’s just a matter of clicking a button to get that report. No need to copy and paste from the screen into Excel or any of that nonsense—just set it up and it runs. And, you can even schedule some reports.

GROUP AND SUM
With report generation software, it’s easy to group numbers and sum them by category, subcategory, etc. You can create running averages, counts, and things like these without worrying that the number of rows will change each month. Report generation software takes care of all that for you.

INTERACTIVE
Kick stagnant data to the curb. Having a program with interactive reporting means you can sort, filter, search, zoom, and even hide and move columns around. You can take a report, copy it, make changes, and instantly have a whole new report.

LOW-COST
Given their capabilities, getting a desktop license for report generation software is relatively inexpensive (depending on your needs, a license could cost anywhere from $300-$600)

DISADVANTAGES OF REPORT GENERATION SOFTWARE

COMPLEX SETUP
Using report generation software is not as simple as using programs like Microsoft Office. Instead, you may need to watch several tutorials to tap into the full potential of the software. What report generation software is doing for you, is putting a pretty face on SQL queries that run under the hood (so, to get the full benefit from report generators, you might need to know a little SQL).

INFLEXIBLE
Report generation software is not as flexible as a program like Excel. So you won’t be able to come up with a custom-made formula to show certain results. Instead, you’re limited to the functions the software comes with.

LIMITED VISUALIZATIONS
The charting capabilities in most report generation software is pretty limited. If you’re okay with a simple line, bar, or pie chart, you’re probably okay. But, if you want “pretty” charts, there are other options out there that will work better for you.

SO, IS THIS THE SIDEKICK FOR YOU?
Crystal Reports calls itself a “robust production reporting tool,” giving you the ability to easily generate all kinds of interactive reports, accessible on or offline.

If your company is able to budget a small amount for reporting, these programs are a great reporting solution. To easily create sophisticated, interactive reports that will give you insight from your data sets, make report generation software your right-hand man.

A NOTE-WORTHY CHOICE

Crystal Reports

BUT BEFORE YOU SETTLE FOR SOMETHING, LET’S SEE WHO'S ON THE NEXT PAGE
A dashboard is a data visualization tool that shows the current status of business metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs). With a dashboard, you can view and arrange your data and metrics in a single screen. Being able to see all these things at once and objectively can help you see any connections, trends, strengths, and weaknesses in your business. (And, we all know that pretty charts are the way to the CEO’s heart.)
**ADVANTAGES OF DASHBOARDING & DATA VISUALIZATION**

**SLICE & DICE DATA**
You can easily take large segments of data and break them down into smaller parts until you get your desired level of detail. Drill, baby, drill. There’s knowledge in that database.

**GREAT VISUALIZATIONS**
Dashboarding solutions pride themselves on their eye candy. They produce great looking charts and graphs, with cool sliders and other visual ways to present the data. Executives love the idea of dashboards.

**INTEGRATION**
Have data in multiple places? No problem. These programs can pull and integrate data from multiple sources. They typically work in conjunction with a data warehouse, which has consolidated data from throughout the organization.

**DISADVANTAGES OF DASHBOARDING & DATA VISUALIZATION**

**COST**
These programs can be very expensive, depending on how the vendor charges for software licensing. Vendors can charge by user (number or type of user), data source (how many sources you’ll require the software to pull data from), or by server (based on things like speed and memory required). Prices can range from $16-$400 per user per month, and even up to $35,000 annually.

**NEED IT SUPPORT**
Some programs require extensive IT involvement or customized projects in order to link data together and then slice and dice it. And, to manipulate data in certain ways, you have to define and ask the right streams of questions. Setup may take six-nine months to really make all of the connections you want, and if you need to make any changes or add additional data, you’ll need to reach out to IT again.

**GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT**
The information presented in the dashboard is only as good as the data source that’s feeding it. If clean data isn’t going into the system, the charts and graphs won’t be accurate (which means you’ll get to endure a special kind of torture: a data cleaning project).

**SO, IS THIS THE SIDEKICK FOR YOU?**


This easy-to-use business intelligence application equips you with tools to pull data from multiple sources and create analytic dashboards based off that data.

If you want insightful data analytics and want to see tiered data (data that cascades from division to department, or from product category to product line by geography), look into a dashboard license.

This business intelligence application is an in-memory dashboard tool that lets users analyze large volumes of data easily, no matter where they are.

Dashboarding & Data Visualization...The Right Sidekick for You?

NOTE-WORTHY CHOICES

TIBCO Jaspersoft

JasperSoft will provide you with interactive and web-based reports, online analytical processing (OLAP), data visualization, and data integration.

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE...
Your company is not a mere machine pumping out products and services—there are goals you want to accomplish and there is a vision you want to see unfolding. Management reporting applications and scorecards let you see how your activities as a business are helping you accomplish your goals and make your vision a reality.

A scorecard combines the measures from your dashboard with the objectives and projects from your strategic plan. With this kind of software, you can actually measure your company’s performance and make intelligent, performance-enhancing decisions based on the whole picture.
A scorecard combines the projects that you're working on every day with your overall goals and metrics so that you can plan, manage tasks, and report results all in one application. There's no need to search all over for information—it's a true Executive Information System.

Combining quantitative (the "what") and qualitative (the "why") data allows managers to make decisions, and document why those decisions were made so that they're not continually revisited.

Have data in multiple places? No problem. These programs can pull and integrate data from multiple sources. They typically work in conjunction with a data warehouse, which has consolidated data from throughout the organization.

The results your scorecard gives you can only be as accurate as the data you provide the system with. In order to get accurate results, you'll need to measure the right data consistently and in the right ways.

You may have already done this, but to get the most out of a scorecard, you need to have articulated your goals, your metrics, and your projects. If you're just looking for a quick report on the operational aspects of your company, this might not be for you.

This kind of approach requires management to be intricately involved. They need to be the ones to develop a clear, actionable vision and strategy, and then communicate those with the entire organization so that every department (from manager to intern) can proactively work toward accomplishing company goals.

As stated above, you want to actually accomplish the goals your company has in place. Management reporting software will take your data and give you a structure that not only measures performance, but also helps you see what should be done next.
Your company is not a mere machine pumping out products and services—there are goals you want to accomplish and there is a vision you want to see unfolding. Management reporting applications and scorecards let you see how your activities as a business are helping you accomplish your goals and make your vision a reality.

**Scorecarding & Management Reporting...The Right Sidekick for You?**

**Executive Strategy Manager**

An intuitive, flexible software that will give users an easy way to track KPIs and monitor strategic goals.

**Spider Strategies**

This popular, user-friendly, web-based metric tracking software can empower you to manage your business strategy intelligently.

**ClearPoint Strategy**

This cloud-based application will help you translate strategy into action. Use it to manage strategy review meetings, automate BSCs, and track key projects and initiatives.

**Whoosh!**

So...How do you choose?
In our opinion, the scorecard and management reporting applications are the best options for businesses to use for reporting data. This approach demands that management and executives establish clear goals and strategies for success and communicate that vision throughout the entire organization.

Additionally, it gives leadership a more holistic view of the business, helping them actually measure which business actions and strategies are most prosperous, identifying where weak links are and equipping them to make proactive, data-based decisions to improve the organization.

Pretty powerful, right? It’s exactly the kind of solution a reporting superhero (like you) wants in their arsenal.

Of the four methods identified, scorecard and management reporting has the highest level of capability. And, given those capabilities, it’s an affordable option even for smaller businesses. While it may seem like an unlikely fit for small businesses, it’s not.

This solution is not just for enterprises. According to 2GC’s 2014 BSC Survey, 56% of respondents using the Balanced Scorecard have less than 500 employees.

You might be thinking, “What do these businesses use their scorecard for anyway?”

Well, 66% respondents use their scorecard for company planning and budgeting. And, a total of 73% of respondents said that the scorecard was “extremely” (27%) or “very” (46%) useful to them.

Understandably, not all companies are at a place of needing a reporting solution like this (for example, startups or very small organizations). But, as business grows, the way you manage needs to grow, too. So, when your management process matures and you need a new reporting solution, swoop in and save the day by making a management reporting application your trusted sidekick. Hands down, it’s the most complete approach.