Schweitzer-Mauduit International Replaces Oracle Discoverer with GL Wand to Expedite Oracle Financial Reporting with Instantaneous Data

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- Theresa Doppel, Controller-North America, Schweitzer-Mauduit International
At Schweitzer-Mauduit International (SWM), the accounting group had become increasingly frustrated over time with the lengthy process of creating financial reports using standard Oracle tools. After evaluating several reporting software alternatives, the company chose GL Wand from Excel4apps because it provided “instantaneous access” to live Oracle financial data and upheld Oracle security profiles.

SWM has shaved a day off its monthly close process since installing GL Wand from Excel4apps, among other benefits. The international company has also gained a clearer picture of currency details with the financial reporting tool.

SWM has been an Oracle user since 1995, when the company formed via spin-off from Kimberly-Clark Corp.

In 2004, while running Oracle E-Business Suite (EBS) Version 11i, SWM began looking for an efficient and secure way that finance users could create reports without dependency on the IT department. Standard Oracle reporting tools did not fit this requirement, so the company evaluated financial reporting alternatives. With its direct link to real-time Oracle data and familiar Microsoft Excel front end, GL Wand from Excel4apps was selected among several competitors and has since become SWM’s primary financial reporting software.

**Instantaneous Data Access Alleviates Frustrations**

Prior to purchasing GL Wand, SWM used several methods to extract Oracle general ledger (GL) data, all of which were “cumbersome, time-consuming, inefficient, and error prone,” according to Theresa Doppel, Controller-North America, for SWM. These methods included Oracle Discoverer reports, standard Oracle reports and use of Microsoft Access.

“Discoverer is not friendly for the basic financial accounting user, so new reports always required IT support,” said Doppel. “Once IT programmed the report and we ran it, the export to Excel was in a very rudimentary format and required lots of massaging in another tab to tailor the report for the final audience.”

The process was similarly inefficient using Microsoft Access and standard Oracle reports to retrieve the GL data and put it into Excel for presentation. In addition, one detailed report had to be completely re-keyed into Excel. In 2004, SWM began evaluating reporting software alternatives. When a database administrator discovered GL Wand at an Oracle User’s Group meeting, it became a prime contender and the company participated in a free trial of the software.

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SWM is a leading global provider of highly engineered solutions and advanced materials, including specialty papers. The company and its subsidiaries operate in nine countries and employ around 3,000 people worldwide.

In 2007, SWM started with five GL Wand licenses and now holds 50, with 10 used internationally. An Oracle E-Business Suite user since 1995, the company migrated to Version 12 in 2010. GL Wand is SWM’s primary reporting software for accessing general ledger data.

“IT is heavy into security, so that was a big factor in our eventual selection of GL Wand,” said Doppel. “And, they were also impressed with its ease of use for the accounting group, which would limit the need for intervention on IT’s part and alleviate some of their work.”

SWM purchased GL Wand in 2007 after its trial, as well as calling customer references who “had only positive things to say,” according to Doppel. As soon as IT installed the software on individual laptops, accounting users were off and running – and with virtually no training.

“GL Wand was easy enough for us to figure out on our own and just go from there,” Doppel described.

**Benefits and Users Spread Like Wildfire**

SWM uses GL Wand to create financial statements, such as P&L and balance sheets, as well as ad hoc reports. The reporting software is also used for account analysis, account reconciliations, SG&A reporting and inventory reporting. The time savings on monthly closes alone has been considerable.

“GL Wand has easily shaved a day off the monthly close process,” said Doppel. “We use it for some preliminary analysis before the books close, plus the final capturing of financial statements.”

Because the presentation layer – Excel – stayed the same with GL Wand, non-users, like managers, saw no differences in the reports. However, they did notice that reporting was faster. And, because GL Wand can automatically populate reports with the very latest live data without exports or re-keying, the accounting group had more confidence in the accuracy of the reports they were providing.

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As for ad-hoc reporting, GL Wand is used for analyzing fixed costs, operating costs, costs by location, costs by department, and costs by product line, for example. It also provides the ability to query costs in other currencies and by ledger.

GL Wand successfully transitioned with SWM’s upgrade from Oracle EBS Version 11i to Version 12 in 2010, and the financial reporting tool’s popularity continues to grow. While SWM started with five GL Wand licenses in 2007, as other users saw its benefits, it “spread like wildfire,” according to Doppel. Currently, the company holds 50 licenses, 10 of which are for international business units.

**International Company Reaps Unexpected Benefits**

SWM’s accounting group has reaped several benefits from GL Wand outside of the ability to easily create a variety of financial reports. For example,
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the drill down feature, which allows user to click on a cell and review its associated Oracle sub ledger details, has been especially useful.

“Drill down was something we hadn’t required in our search for a new reporting tool, but it’s been a nice inherited benefit that is used a great deal in our account reconciliation process,” Doppel said.

Another feature in particular has been helpful for SWM, which has six international business units running Oracle: Asia, Canada, United States, Poland, Brazil, and France.

“GL Wand allows us to inquire in other currencies, to get the entered currency as opposed to the translated currency, and to inquire by specific ledgers,” Doppel explained. “For France, Brazil and Poland, our ledger system is set up with primary ledgers, which is that particular unit’s local currency, and then it’s translated into a secondary ledger. GL Wand lets us inquire on both primary and secondary ledgers.”

Customer support from Excel4apps, along with the stability of GL Wand as a product, are other areas that SWM has been pleased to discover. Like the reporting itself, Doppel describes customer support as “instantaneous.”

“The support is awesome,” she described. “Whenever we log a problem, we typically get a response within 5 minutes, but GL Wand is such a low maintenance product that I only log an issue with the help desk once every couple of years.”

GL Wand Delivers as the Primary Financial Reporting Tool

Today, GL Wand is SWM’s primary reporting tool for accessing GL data; Discoverer and other previous methods are no longer used. And, there continues to be a strong demand for the product as more people hear of its user-friendliness and benefits.

For the future, Doppel is excited about upgrading to GL Wand 5, which features improved speed for drill-downs and refreshes of GL data, along with new toolbars and enhanced functionality that let users build richer reports in less time. On the IT side, this version also provides a Java-based framework that deploys easily on servers with no installation required at the user level. With a simple click, this zero client install makes GL Wand toolbars available through Excel in minutes.