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Oracle Users Benefit from Partner Tools that Enhance System Functionality

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FOR DESTINATION HOTELS & RESORTS, DAILY REPORTING NEEDS PRESENTED UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Small IT departments are constantly being asked to do more, often with fewer resources. At Destination Hotels & Resorts, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Lowe Enterprises and the country's fourth largest independent management company of hotel and resort properties, we are certainly no exception.

Our company's more than 30 properties stretch from Florida to Hawaii and include nearly 7,000 rooms, condos or villas, as well as luxury spas, health club facilities, premier golf courses and full-service conference centers. The hospitality industry is somewhat unique in that it operates under daily operational reporting requirements, which present some unique challenges in IT support.

With a lean IT support staff, we are constantly looking for ways to improve our efficiencies and provide

our organization's business users with the ability to function independent of our limited IT resources.

In April 2006, great improvements in efficiency were reached with the implementation of Oracle E-Business Suite. More than 325 of our organization's 8,500 employees are professional users of Oracle, and yet our four-person Oracle support staff consists of just one Oracle developer, one support associate for finance, one for human resources and one database administrator.

The requirements of day-level operational reporting for multiple hotel properties (for Actual, Forecast and Budget information), as well as the need for unique ad hoc reporting, was a constant source of frustration for our professional users. Like most financial professionals, they were familiar with and committed to using Microsoft Excel to crunch data and format final report presentations. These finance and accounting pros were spending lots of valuable time building custom presentations and were clamoring for an easy-to-use, ad hoc reporting tool.

Initially, our IT team surveyed numerous "out of the box" tools to assist with the daily and ad hoc reporting, but none was deemed "simple enough" for business users. We briefly considered developing our own customized business intelligence/data warehouse solution. However, major concerns over the lack of security incurred by

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going outside of our Oracle security layers, coupled with the complexity and cost of developing and maintaining a customized data warehouse and the difficulty and time delays posed by extracting data from various systems, quickly ruled out that option.

In February of 2007, we created a project team made up of a project manager, our database administrator and ten financial business users from around the nation, including regional controllers, property controllers and business analysts. We set an aggressive timeline of six weeks to come up with a solution for our reporting needs, with a defined budget of under $100,000.

In outlining our system requirements, we identified a number of factors that, during the initial analysis, seemed to be unique to our industry. However, we were certain that many of our requirements had already been addressed by available software that would work with Oracle.

For our business users, the major requirements included:

● Ease of use in both function and speed.

● An "MS Excel-like" front end for our financial users who use Excel on a daily basis and are intimately familiar with its capabilities.

● The ability to query or create ad hoc reports with no assistance from IT, including general ledger balances and transactional data, as well as real-time data.

● The ability to connect to the Oracle data source and query from Oracle datasets and non-Oracle databases alike and integrate the data in a single report.

● The ability to drill down to specific details.

In addition, our IT department had very specific operational requirements, such as the ability to install the tool from a central location, support more than 100 users at the same time and ensure its functionality in locations across the country. We also were concerned with finding from a strong and profitable company a proven system that would be easy to deploy, support and manage.

Despite the relatively long list of requirements from both a user and IT standpoint, we were able to identify several applications from major Oracle partners that our user team could

test and review. Interestingly, only one vendor allowed us to demo and test their product "live" against our organization's data and metrics. That system was GL Wand from Excel4Apps, an Excel-based Oracle GL reporting tool developed exclusively for finance departments using 11*i* or R12.

GL Wand not only met 90 percent of our high-priority requirements, but after rigorous testing by our business and financial analysts, it ranked the highest among all the systems we tested for its ease of use and overall functionality.

In addition, during the demo and analysis phase, and prior to even signing a contract, Excel4Apps provided technical and development resources who partnered with us to create the "Day-Level" query for both Non-Posted and/or Posted journals that was missing from the tool's original functionality. This customization took just three days to create.

By March 2007, we had made our decision to purchase and install GL Wand, and in April we embarked on the installation and deployment, including the training of roughly 75 users. The entire process took less than a week. Users were able to complete the installation and begin using GL Wand literally within minutes of their training session with no assistance from IT.

The time savings for the more than 120 business users who currently use GL Wand, including controllers

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and financial and business analysts, is perhaps the biggest benefit to Destination since realizing the vast improvements of our initial foray into Oracle E-Business Suite. Estimated average time saved for our users is roughly three to four hours per month. The time to develop, test and roll out reports, schedules or scorecards takes

literally minutes to do now by our end business users, compared to what used to take our developers and analysts hours, days, weeks and even months to do!

Another benefit to our organization is that our business analysts are no longer spending their time querying for data and manipulating it for presentation purposes. They are now free to generate even one-time reports quickly and to spend their time analyzing data and providing qualitative business analysis, which leads to innovative business decisions that benefit our entire organization.

Martin Stanton is currently the vice president of Information Technology for Destination Hotels & Resorts. He has more than 22 years of hospitality experience with a focus in finance and technology.

The Stowe Mountain Lodge in Vermont is just one of the more than 30 properties in the Destination Hotels & Resorts portfolio of properties. Accurate day-level reporting is critical in the hospitality industry, and GL Wand from Excel4apps has made that infinitely easier. Destination has 120 employees using GL Wand and considers it a valuable addition to their Oracle E-Business Suite.