

QlikView Business Intelligence for SAP Users

A fast, intuitive and flexible front-end for your SAP data

Information Technology is an ever more important part of people's daily lives, not only in the workplace but also in the home. Applications such as Google have made business users increasingly demanding of their workplace tools, and rightly so.

Why can a user search the entire internet in 1/10th of a second yet it take several minutes to produce a report of a few hundred lines from their data warehouse or ERP system?

One answer to this question might be cost. It is true that Google has a larger budget, but ERP implementations are also awarded considerable amounts of money and effort so cost alone is not the whole answer.

Affine believes the end user experience can be improved without breaking the bank.

SAP Business Objects Reporting Tools

SAP delivers a powerful data warehousing product and a peerless ERP solution together with a wide range of reporting and analysis tools. This range has grown considerably with the acquisition of Business Objects.

With such a range of reporting tools from which to choose, why would you even want to consider a tool from another vendor?

Complementary Products

Aside from the challenges and timescales around the technical integration of the Business Objects tools with a SAP NetWeaver backend¹, Affine has identified three fundamental reasons why it makes sense to consider a complementary product for certain reporting areas: Cost, Usability and Speed.

¹ True integration of SAP and Business Objects tools will take time. The first replacement to the BEx toolset is due to be released in mid 2010.

Cost – Licensing the full Business Objects reporting toolset is an additional cost on top of the NetWeaver licenses. Moreover the consulting cost, at least for early adopters, is likely to be higher.

Usability – SAP and Business Objects offer strong front-end products but nothing actually unique. They are all fairly standard OLAP tools. When compared against more modern tools Affine considers them to appear restrictive, with clunky and cluttered user interfaces. There are many talented SAP consultants but there are few who specialise in designing a good contemporary user interface.

All too often front-end design is driven by technology rather than by what is convenient for the end user.

The heart of a good User Interface, or UI, (again consider the clean UI of Google) is to give the viewer the most information in the shortest time, with the least ink, in the smallest space as shown in Figure 1 below².

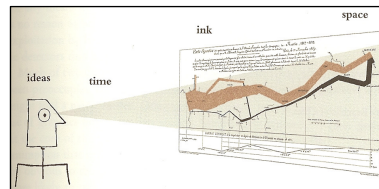


Figure 1 – Principles of a Good UI

Speed – SAP offer the BW/BI Accelerator product and it can be a very effective plug-in that alleviates some performance problems. However, the BW/BI Accelerator is not designed into the NetWeaver architecture from the ground up and only improves performance up to a point³.

² From "Visual Display of Quantitative Information 2nd Edition", E. Tufte, 2001

³ BW/BI Accelerator improves transaction data read times. The accelerator does not help with processing time on the application server with, for example, user exits, nor with master data reads.

Enter QlikView from QlikTech

QlikTech have been quietly developing QlikView since 1993. It has been designed from the ground up to run entirely in-memory, without any underlying database, and to offer a unique way to analyse data that traditional OLAP tools cannot replicate.

Now that memory prices have fallen sufficiently to allow QlikView to be mass marketed, the uptake of the product has been considerable.

Affine believes that QlikView readily addresses the issues of Cost, Usability and Speed.

Affine has a deep functional and technical knowledge of SAP Business Intelligence, having successfully completed numerous implementations and performance reviews.

We have partnered with QlikTech to provide industry-leading consultancy for SAP and QlikView implementation projects.

The "Associative" Data Model

The idea of moving away from the traditional OLAP approach of drilling down is well described by Lars Bjork, CEO of QlikTech. "Your brain is associative," he says. "Think of trying to remember the name of someone you met 20 years ago. You don't drill down. You probably try to remember a situation, someone else who was there."

This associative idea is expressed in reports by using a colour scheme that applies across every QlikView application. Data that is selected is green, any associated data is white and any unrelated data is grey, as shown in Figure 2.

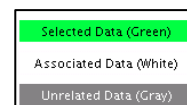


Figure 2 – QlikView Analysis Principle

This very simple colour scheme, coupled with report layouts that show the important data values, allows the effortless visualisation of unrelated data. This is something that is not easy with traditional OLAP.

As an example, consider Figure 3 below. This excerpt from a report shows that Company Code 4500 is selected (green) and that business areas 4000, 6000 and 9900 are related (white). This may cause a user to think "that's odd, I thought business area 7000 would show as selected too".

Business Area									
0001	1000	1500	2000	3000	4000				
5000	6000	7000	8000	9000	9100	9900			

Company Code									
CABB	CH01	5300	1000	2000	2100	2200			
3000	3010	4000	4500	5000	6000	7500			
7700									

Figure 3 – Viewing Unrelated Data

Although this is a toy example, imagine expanding this layout across dozens of characteristics across multiple reports (all QlikView pages are linked together) and the real power of the associative data model becomes easier to appreciate. This technique has been used to spot fraudulent trades, to help police collate evidence and to cleanse data.

Best Practice User Interface Design

QlikTech have thought long and hard about user interface design, consulting with industry gurus such as Stephen Few⁴ in order to make the most intuitive and useable product possible. Gartner commented that QlikView offers an "exceptionally high degree of customer satisfaction"⁵.

This understanding of UI design is conveyed by including reporting samples bundled with the QlikView download. These samples describe how and when to use bar charts over line graphs over sparklines and describe how to keep a clean looking UI.

Figure 4 shows a typical QlikView application.

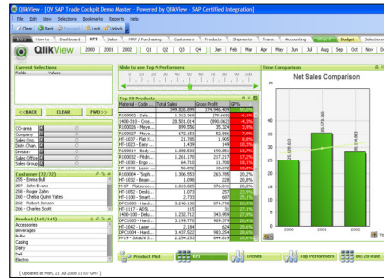


Figure 4 – Sample QlikView Application

Affine is a leading provider of advice and implementation support in Finance Transformation, Performance Management and Business Intelligence.

Performance

Since QlikView has been designed from its inception to run entirely in memory, it is no surprise that it has exceptional performance. It has been described by Gartner as "the most performant BI platform in the market"⁶ and uses patented technology to send highly compressed data from the server to the client.

The end user experiences excellent response times even with very large datasets and high concurrent usage.

When not to use QlikView

Despite its impressive offering QlikView is still at heart a reporting tool. Affine believes that there are situations where you should recognise that it is just that and not expect capabilities beyond this.

Writing Data - QlikView does not focus on writing data back into a data warehouse or ERP system. Affine's opinion is that other dedicated tools may perform better in situations where the results of analysis need to be written back (as in a CRM analytics or a planning scenario). QlikView does, however, offer collaboration scenarios where user comments and enhancements to reports can be written back to the server.

Enterprise Data Warehousing -

QlikView is not a substitute for an Enterprise Data Warehouse. QlikView by design has no underlying database. If your business requirements are to consolidate large volumes of data, perhaps use Master Data Management (MDM), or merge information from multiple systems to produce a single view of the business for reporting and feeds to other systems, then an EDW project is going to be the right course. Then you are better placed to use SAP BW. Of course, QlikView still has a place sitting on top of this EDW, but Affine believes that it should not be considered an EDW in itself.

Fixed Format Reports – QlikView

is well suited to dashboard and ad-hoc type reporting but less so to delivering fixed format reports, such as financial statements (although it does offer Excel type views of data). In these cases Affine believes that SAP products should be considered.

How easy is it to use QlikView as a Front-End?

It is clear then that QlikView has a lot to offer, but just how easy is it to safely integrate with your SAP data?

As QlikView's first partner in the UK that specialises in SAP Business Intelligence, Affine brings experience of both products, together with knowledge of their connectivity and methods to ensure SAP data-level security is respected within QlikView.

Utilising QlikView's add-on to SAP ECC or BW systems that provides an SAP-certified interface, Affine can support clients with integration that is surprisingly easy.

Download a fully-featured copy of QlikView via Affine's website: http://www.affine.co.uk/Services/QlikView_SAP.html

To arrange a demonstration contact us at <http://www.affine.co.uk>

⁴ See <http://www.perceptualedge.com/>
⁵ Gartner Magic Quadrant 2009

⁶ Gartner Magic Quadrant 2009