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Oracle Announces Long Awaited BI Upgrade

OBIEE 11g integrates relational and OLAP analysis, clarifies product roadmap and adds controls to take action on business intelligence.

By [Doug Henschen](#)

Oracle today announced the imminent release of Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition (OBIEE) 11g. Three years in development, the upgrade better integrates Essbase and Hyperion Financial Management, adds new components that will replace legacy tools and embeds a new framework designed to help users respond to BI insights.

At the core of OBIEE is a Common Enterprise Information Model that integrates multiple data source types to the BI server while shielding users from the need to know where the data resides. With the 11g upgrade, Essbase and Hyperion Financial Management, the OLAP engine and performance management app obtained through the Hyperion acquisition, become full partners within the OBIEE suite.

The blending of diverse data sources was there as a data modeling capability in 10g, but 11g upgrade extends the capability to the user interface. "Now you can have an OLAP-style user experience with hierarchical columns, custom members and groups, and rich interactivity even directly on an OBIEE dashboard," said Paul Rodwick, vice product of Product Management, Oracle Business Intelligence

So OBIEE 11g improves support for interactive data analysis, though not quite with the same flexibility afforded by some in-memory analysis products in that new data sources have to be mapped to the Common Enterprise Information Model -- something IT or BI power users would have to handle. Competitors were quick to point out the lack of in-memory technology in the 11g upgrade, but Rodwick countered that end-user flexibility is not always a good thing.

"One of the things we're seeing in the industry is people grabbing dumps of data, going off into Excel or another tool and then people go into a meeting and everybody has a different answer," Rodwick said. "With OBIEE, once you've made the investment to connect to various data sources, then users are completely free to do their own analysis without having to prebuild cubes."

Oracle delivers speedy, in-memory-like analysis by way of caching techniques, Rodwick said, an approach that gains hardware horsepower when customers are using Oracle's flash-

memory-rich Exadata V2 appliance. The 11g upgrade also supports the Oracle Times Ten in-memory database as a data source.

The 11g upgrade makes it clear that Oracle Discoverer and Hyperion Interactive Reporting are legacy products (though they will still be supported). With the 11g upgrade, OBIEE's enterprise reporting capabilities have been improved and extended with a new, thin-client report designer that lets business users develop interactive Web reports or pixel perfect production reports. Dashboarding capabilities have also been improved, and a new Oracle Scorecard and Strategy Management application is said to make it easy for business users to track metrics that are aligned with higher-level strategy and goals.

Tapping administrative capabilities developed for Oracle Fusion Middleware and Oracle Database, OBIEE 11g relies on Oracle Enterprise Manager 11g as a single point for managing and monitoring BI system performance, scalability and security. Oracle also exploits its business process management and applications know-how by embedding an Action Framework feature into OBIEE 11g. The framework lets users initiate business processes or Web services directly from reports or dashboards. Other BI systems have the ability to publish alerts and deliver Web services calls, but independent analyst Cindi Howson of BI Scorecard said the capabilities in 11g stand out.

"Users can define actions associated with dashboards or reports that can then invoke processes or Web services," Howson said. "Other BI vendors have notifications, but OBIEE lets the user decide what to do about them."

Critiquing Oracle's 11g announcement, competitor SAP BusinessObjects noted the lack of in-memory analysis capabilities, unstructured data analysis options (used in sentiment analysis applications) and on-demand (Software-as-a-Service) offerings. Howson summed up the benefits of in-memory technology as including what-if scenario planning, speed-of-thought analysis and flexible data exploration. Oracle has long delivered solid what-if planning with Essbase, she said. "OBIEE 11g is not fully there on providing speed-of-thought analysis, but caching compensates and support for Times Ten is a start," she said.

On flexible data exploration, Howson noted that only some in-memory products -- among them QlikTech QlikView and SAP BusinessObjects Explorer -- support open data exploration while others require prebuilt cubes or predefined exploration paths, which puts them in the same boat as OBIEE in terms of flexibility.

Summing up, OBIEE 11g clearly wraps up the Hyperion acquisition, making Essbase and Hyperion Financial Management the go-forward products and first-class citizens within Oracle's BI and performance management strategy. OBIEE also trades on administrative-, process- and application-management strengths that other BI vendors either don't have or have yet to exploit.