

Information Matters Volume 5

Work and Play *The Intelligence Game*

Please, I must insist that no fun can be had whatsoever while you are reading this article. This is *Oracle Magazine* and in reading this, you as an IT professional are hard at work and are not to have fun. Having fun at work is restricted to professional athletes, movie stars, circus performers and trampoline salesmen.

Let's face it, we'd all like to be having more fun at work even though no job description, corporate mission statement or HR web site ever promises that work will be fun. Yet those that are most successful in their fields are clearly having fun. If you talk to a professional athlete or a concert violinist, they might use different words, but the essence is the same: I want to be a better player, playing a better game. This, in essence, is what we all strive for. In work terms, a better game means that less time is spent on repetitive or low-value tasks, and more time is spent on activities that make a difference to the organization.

Even though IT staffers are expected to be more productive and more innovative with less budget and fewer resources, job satisfaction is not something that can be completely ignored.

How is this achieved? According to a recent *Computerworld* survey, job satisfaction in IT correlates strongly with "access to new and challenging technologies" and "opportunities for additional training and enhancement of skills."¹ This is all about playing a better game, and it points to the dawn of a golden age in business intelligence (BI) technology.

According to *InfoWorld*, business intelligence technology is being used more widely across organizations than ever before—and it is supporting greater and greater numbers of users. Seventy percent of the people who responded to a recent *InfoWorld* survey plan to increase the number of employees who have access to BI solutions."²

While I'd like to think that these managers want their people to have more fun, there is a basic business reason why these technology investments are increasing. An IDC report on the financial impact of BI projects concluded that the median return on investment for business analytics is 112%.³ Most bottom-line thinkers like things that pay for themselves.

Sales and marketing organizations, call centers and supply chain managers are finding and using BI capabilities through more accessible tools and familiar interfaces such as portals and enterprise applications like Oracle E-Business Suite.

¹ [Include Computerworlds ref here](#)

² "Business Intelligence Report 2005," "Trickle Down Business Intelligence," - InfoWorld 4/25/05

³ [Include IDC ref](#)

Business intelligence has become one of the largest areas of R&D investment at Oracle. BI pervades all Oracle product lines, from apps to tools, from middleware to database. Oracle powers the largest data warehouses in the world, but lately, Oracle has been gaining attention higher up the BI stack in areas such as data mining, online analytical processing (OLAP), data transformation and data quality.⁴

In the past, one of the main barriers to the adoption of BI technologies was usability and expense. Arcane interfaces, complex data sets and prohibitive hardware costs have often restricted access to small teams of elite analysts. For years these professionals held the keys to the BI mother lode.

In order to make BI applications accessible to a larger population of information workers, they must be integrated with familiar interfaces and applications. The true value of BI is realized when new insights and predictions are integrated with operational information from our day-to-day business processes.

Oracle E-Business Suite has steadily progressed to include embedded BI capabilities in the marketing, sales, projects and financial applications, to name but a few . These integrated analytics will go a long way to delivering decision support capabilities to users throughout the enterprise—not just to professional analysts. This provides a better game to these users without their even knowing they are using business intelligence software. Ultimately, the entire organization will benefit through better decision making on the front lines.

Even traditional BI operations like data mining, OLAP, and reporting are being extended to a larger audience. Tight integration of Oracle Discoverer and Oracle Data Mining with Oracle Portal means that seasoned BI analysts can do a lot of the analytical heavy lifting, then publish the results to any number of web sites or dashboards around the company. Many of the resulting portlets allow for live analysis of dashboard items without fear of disrupting the actual data. In short, this allows people to play with information—to enter their own parameters, drill down into the data, and view the results using their choice of graphs, colors, and output formats.

For years I have been fond of saying that Oracle never met data that we didn't like. We like relational tables, files, XML documents, analytic data, images, sounds—anything made of ones and zeros. For the last five years, we have expanded the boundaries of e-business by creating real, actionable information from that data. Lately, we have talked about Information Age applications, which to me is all about achieving some degree of predictability where none seemed possible before.

⁴ IDC, “Why Consider Oracle for Business Intelligence“ (September 2004), Oracle Magazine, “*Zen and the Art of Information - What is Data Quality*” (March/April 2005).

Your information systems should deliver to you, in real time, the information you need to either win the big game, perform at your highest level, or at the very least survive to play another day. Wouldn't that be fun?