

customer success story: by Margot Drees

“The IT project manager estimates that by implementing Windward Reports, his group now spends only a tenth of the development time formerly spent on reporting.”

How Windward Reports Saved one State Agency 90%

Company Background

Alcohol is state-regulated in 18 U.S. states, and in those states, the agency in charge oversees everything having to do with alcoholic beverages. One particular agency, which could not be named because of governmental policy, has been around since 1934. It is one of the largest public agencies in its state, with more than 280 locations and 3,000 employees. The agency generates more than \$40 million in revenue and \$130 million in taxes on alcohol sold each year. In addition to managing the distribution of alcoholic beverages, the agency acts as an administrative hearing agency and manages educational and prevention programs.

The Challenge

The information technology infrastructure required to support the agency is enormous. Numerous departments, including Education, Enforcement, Records Management, Human Resources, Retail Outlets, and Warehousing and Distribution, all have disparate reporting needs. Not only is the content of each report unique, but the format in which the reports are generated varies by department. Some departments require .RTF documents while others require PDF or HTML documents, or even a combination



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of these three. In addition, many of the Human Resources reports require landscape formatting. Plus, the agency is accountable to the state's citizens, so it makes sales reports available to the public through its Web site.

On the back end, the agency runs its software applications on an Oracle database by Delphi. The agency is converting to a J2EE environment, which will allow the agency to have a browser as the user interface, Weblogic as the application server and .JSP to support both internal and external portals for various departments.

The agency's IT group was faced with the challenge of quickly rolling out reports for multiple divisions. Plus, more than 130 employees needed access to the reports while in field offices and home offices, and the agency needed a solution that would not require software installation or technical support on the client side.

The agency also needed a tool that could be deployed quickly with minimal development time. For example, developers were spending enormous amounts of time developing custom reports for the Human Resources department, and they were looking for a way to cut back on some of that development time.

High-priced license fees were also an issue for the agency. Like many state agencies, this agency has a limited budget and a complicated approval process for big-ticket purchases.

The Solution

The IT project manager evaluated several report writing packages. He was looking for a cost-effective tool that would integrate well into an application server and not require client side installations. During his evaluation process, he found Windward Reports. He downloaded a demo and was pleased to find a "2 in 1 development tool" where the report is generated and formatted without having to be scripted.

Windward Reports' primary benefit

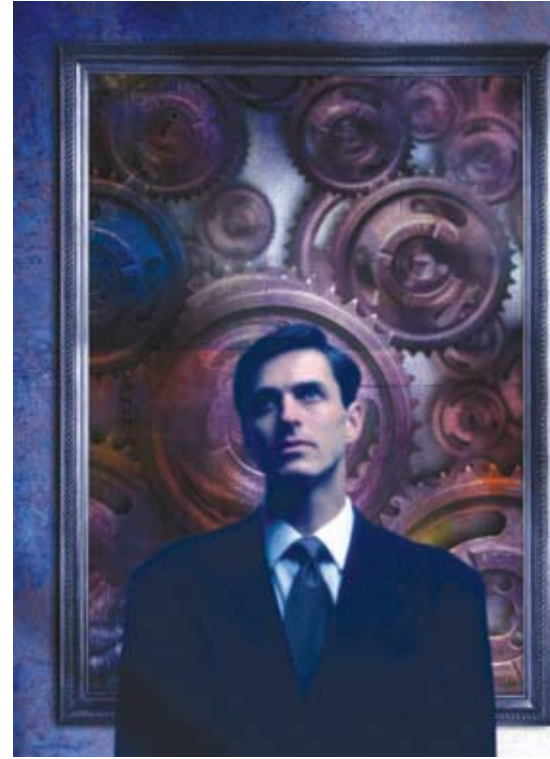
is that it is both quick and simple to design report templates. The report templates' layout, font and formatting are designed with Microsoft Word. Windward' AutoTag plug-in allows the user to add database tags in either SQL or Xpath to the report template. The Windward Reports wizard allows the user to create a wide variety of reports simply by choosing what data to include and when to run the report.

Windward Reports' ease-of-use is backed by a powerful reporting engine. Because it's Javabased (Windward Reports is also available in a .NET version), it is simple to integrate Windward Reports into any software product, and the report output can be in PDF, RTF, HTML, WordML, SpreadsheetML, XLS, or text format. Windward Reports is available as a Java Library and integrates directly as a reporting engine in a J2EE environment, which was an excellent fit for the agency's new enterprise architecture.

Implementing Windward Reports was quick and straightforward. After the development team reviewed the documentation, team members integrated and tested Windward Reports in less than 48 hours. The developers had only a few questions, and they were quickly addressed by the Windward Reports' technical support center. (Windward Reports' technical team guarantees a 30 minute response time for email inquiries during regular business hours.)

The project manager estimates that once the team identified all the reporting elements, it took less than a week to create the reports. Because the agency uses Java beans in its application, and Windward Reports recognizes these beans, existing components can be re-used, so using Windward Reports significantly reduced the time needed to generate reports.

Another benefit of using Windward is that it allows the agency to avoid a multi-step report development



process. Microsoft Word can be used to format and display the reports, so developers don't have to script a report, get the users' approval and then generate the report in the requested format. The whole process is done using the Word template.

Plus, reports can be displayed in a variety of outputs. The Human Resources department had been creating custom reports using HTML, but the reports needed to be in landscape format, a format HTML couldn't handle. The group next tried to use Apache's Formatting Objects Processor in conjunction with style sheets to format PDF documents, but the process was too time-consuming to be effective. But with Windward Reports, the department could create just the reports it needed, and the developers didn't have to write any additional code.

The Results

The biggest result the agency sees is in time savings. The IT project manager estimates that by implement-

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ing Windward Reports, his group now spends only about a tenth of the development time formerly spent on reporting. This has freed his group up to focus on other agency priorities. In addition, after the agency’s development staff deployed Windward Reports, the end users could format, edit and generate subsequent reports, which saves the agency both time and money.

And, the documents now have a more professional look and feel. Each department is able to get the data it needs in the proper format:

- The Records Management division uses Windward Reports to generate liquor licenses.
- Enforcement agents can now save PDF documents on their local workstations for future reference; they no longer have to request old reports.
- Retail outlets use HTML reports to view reports detailing amounts of alcohol sold online.
- The Warehousing and Distribution department uses HTML reports to monitor traffic flow online.
- The Training Department uses a PDF document generated from Windward Reports as a training certificate that the manager can sign and give to an employee who has completed training. The data in the training certificate can’t be manipulated, nor can the manager’s signature be forged, which provides a high level of security.
- The Human Resources Department uses Windward Reports to generate separation reports, turnover checklists, and timesheets. Prior to implementing Windward Reports, these document flowed over multiple pages and contained awkward or confusing page breaks. With Windward Reports, the timesheets and reports can be pre-formatted to have just the right output.



There were measurable cost savings, as well. The agency estimates that Windward Reports is about a tenth of the initial cost of its competition, and because Windward Reports can generate PDFs, the agency did not have to purchase proprietary Adobe Acrobat software for creating PDF files. Plus, not only did the agency find Windward Reports to be an excellent value, but its low price point helped the bureaucracy reduce the decision-making time for purchase approval.

About Windward Studios:

Windward Studios has been in business since 1995. Based in Boulder, Colorado, the company was formed to develop innovative software products for both enterprise and individual customers. Windward Reports is the only comprehensive report generator to use Microsoft Word as a layout tool, thus cutting the learning curve to virtually nil while saving time and money for both technical and non-technical users alike.