
Evaluation of: Cognos Series 7

Software Supplier: Cognos

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Name of Current Release:	Cognos PowerPlay Series 7 Cognos Impromptu Series 7 Cognos Query Series 7 Cognos Visualizer Series 7 Cognos NoticeCast Series 7
Date of Current Release:	1Q02
Date of Next Release:	2Q03

Strengths:

- Event detection and push technology features are now tightly integrated to the framework through Cognos NoticeCast.
- The products have strong administrative features, including support for audit trails and log-file tracking. Users can specify online traces for database connections. A central administration console has also been added in Series 7, enabling users to drive all administrative services (for all Cognos components) from a single console.
- Impromptu Web Reports provide report publishing functionality, as well as a central location for distribution management and the ability to customize reports. With the Series 7 release, users are capable of administering reports via the Web and handling issues such as access rights, report properties, scheduling, setting priorities, bursting, versioning, etc.
- Support for Teradata on Unix data sources has been added in Series 7.
- Cognos products are very flexible. PowerPlay integrates with numerous third-party OLAP servers (Hyperion, Microsoft, more) to give customers a familiar look and feel while supporting outside data sources.
- PowerPlay now supports exception highlighting for all reports and offers users the ability to create alerts. These features were absent in the previous version.
- Version control and multiple report subscription features have also been added to Impromptu Web Reports.

Business Intelligence

Limitations:

- ActiveX controls are still not supported. Cognos feels functionality between Web and client/server is comparable, so ActiveX controls and additional plug-ins are not required.
- Some advanced features (e.g., ETL functionality, predictive data modeling, financial forecasting, write-back capabilities) are provided by additional business intelligence (BI) components not included with a standard Cognos Series 7 license. Cognos 4Thought, Cognos DecisionStream, Cognos Scenario, and Cognos Finance are offered at extra cost. DecisionStream is part of Series 7 but all capabilities can be licensed separately. Cognos supports this “plug and play” BI framework strategy to offer customers flexibility in customizing solutions to specific requirements.
- Data mining functionality can be provided by Cognos Scenario and 4Thought but is not inherently supported by PowerPlay or Impromptu.

Evaluation Summary:

Cognos Series 7 offers users a complete BI platform and is one of the most functionally complete solutions evaluated. Specific areas of strength include navigation and analysis, query functionality, and data modeling features. Information delivery features — which were lacking in the previous versions — are significantly enhanced with the release of Cognos NoticeCast. Administration and overall ease of use have also been improved.

SPEXmarks

Functionality	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ -
Usability	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Technology	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ -
Market Strength	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ +
Overall	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ -

✓✓✓✓ : Outstanding ✓✓✓✓ : Excellent ✓✓✓ : Good ✓✓ : Fair ✓ : Poor

Vendor Background:

Formed in 1969 and headquartered in Ottawa, Canada, Cognos specializes in decision support tools and integrated BI suites. With 2,500 employees in 17 countries, the company has nearly 20,000 customers in more than 50 countries worldwide, representing more than two million licenses. Revenues for FY02 were \$491.3M, a 29% increase over the previous year. Net profit was \$64M. Revenues for the most recently completed fiscal quarter (ended May 2002) reached \$120M, with a net profit of \$9.9M.

Cognos acquired NoticeCast in 2000, adding push technology and support for custom content notification to their product line. NoticeCast technology was fully adopted into the Cognos BI suite with the release of Cognos Series 7 (1Q02). Another notable acquisition was Relational Matters (1998), which brought ETL functionality to Cognos by way of the DecisionStream component.

Package Background:

Cognos develops BI solutions for large organizations that are primarily used in e-business, CRM, and analytical application environments. Cognos offers various BI tools, but the core analysis services components are Cognos PowerPlay (OLAP engine), Cognos Impromptu and Impromptu Web Reports (reporting tools), Cognos Query (query tool), and Cognos Visualizer (dynamic mapping and dashboard creation). These four products are typically used in conjunction with one another, but can serve as standalone components as well. It is rare, however, for customers to use one without the others. Other Cognos BI tools include Cognos 4Thought, Cognos DecisionStream, Cognos Scenario, Cognos NoticeCast, and Cognos Finance.

With the release of Cognos Series 7, Cognos has taken great strides in unifying its BI components and simplifying installation and ease of use. Series 7 offers an integrated framework with one front end and one back end, where any of the four main servers (reporting, query, OLAP, scorecarding/dashboard) may be added as desired. A portal front end is offered to users and an open, distributed architecture is used for additional flexibility and scalability. Cognos has simplified installation (to make the suite as "enterprise ready" as possible) by reducing the process to two steps: copy files and configure separately. This enables users to easily replicate data to new/additional servers as well. A central administration console has also been added in Series 7, which makes it possible for users to manage all administrative services (for all integrated components) from a single point.

Event detection and push technology features are provided through Cognos NoticeCast. NoticeCast works with PowerPlay, Impromptu Web Reports, and Cognos Query to deliver pushed, personalized business information in the forms of alerts, exceptions, and

Business Intelligence

reports to any e-mail-enabled device, both on the PC and to mobile devices such as personal digital assistants, pagers, and cell phones. Examples of NoticeCast's event detection services include notification events, performance events, and operational events. Notification events look for new events such as modified reports. Performance events monitor business performance measures, while operational events monitor business risks and opportunities in the operational data.

Cognos PowerPlay follows the company's "analyze then query" strategy, which provides a high-level summary of data prior to running actual queries. This reduces network traffic while still providing analytical capabilities such as slice and dice, drill-down/drill-up/drill-through, and changing views. PowerPlay clients include PowerPlay Web, PowerPlay for Excel, and PowerPlay for Windows. PowerPlay Web is a pure HTML client intended for Web users. Client users are geared toward PowerPlay for Excel (an Add-In for Excel) and PowerPlay for Windows (for thick or thin Windows clients).

Cognos PowerPlay is very flexible, because it can produce its own PowerCube or serve as the front end to other OLAP servers (e.g., Hyperion, Microsoft, SAP). This provides users with the same Cognos look and feel while using a third-party data source. PowerPlay also integrates with Cognos DecisionStream for ETL functionality. DecisionStream was acquired with Relational Matters in 1998, and is capable of producing MOLAP cubes and star schema data marts at the same time. Microsoft cubes are also supported. In a typical environment, the PowerPlay Enterprise Server sits on top of a central server and is responsible for connecting with cubes, thin clients, and a Web server. Cognos Upfront, a portal service providing users with a single, Web-based point of access, serves as the Web interface. Multiple application servers and report servers can be added as well, providing means for load balancing and failover. New features in Series 7 include support for exception highlighting and creation of alerts.

Cognos Impromptu and Impromptu Web Reports are database query and reporting solutions. The Windows client enables users to create reporting applications and deploy them over the Web to users in the enterprise and beyond. Impromptu Web Reports provides a central location for report distribution and management. PowerPrompts enable users to customize reports for specific needs and requirements. New features in Series 7 include support for versioning controls and multiple subscription in Impromptu Web Reports and the ability to administer reports via the Web across all capabilities in Upfront.

Cognos Visualizer Web is a Java tool that provides views of massive amounts of potentially disparate pieces of information. The tool enables changing or creating different viewpoints, zoom in/out, and animating filtering over time. Multimetric visualizations (from different sources in different areas of an organization) can be

presented in a single, interactive view. Visualizer can also use PowerPlay as the back-end, so familiar drill down and slice-and-dice functionality is supported. Series 7 provides greater deployment options with HTML dashboard deployment (for a zero footprint environment) as well as enhancements to existing charts and new charts to support quality initiatives like Six Sigma.

Cognos Query enables Web users to access relational data in real time. Like Visualizer, the Query component has not changed significantly in Series 7, with the exception of being able to generate operational alerts, pushing information to users as conditions of interest arise. Cognos 4Thought is a predictive modeling tool that enables measuring one element against another, what-if analysis, and forecasting. Cognos Scenario is a data mining tool for discovering hidden trends and patterns, and unearthing previously unsuspected correlations. Cognos Finance is an integrated component for planning, budgeting and consolidation.