One application – Two financial problems solved

The Restricted Fund Problem

Like all charities the MS Trust must account for income and expenses in restricted and unrestricted funds, a task which is complex and time-consuming. Their accounting systems are based on Sage Line 50 which has no native support for this style of accounting. The reporting of this data required them to extract data to Excel and manually manipulate it, a time consuming process, prone to introducing errors.

Initially the department field seemed to offer an ideal way of recording this information; unfortunately the inflexible report generation capabilities of Sage did not enable this information to be used effectively. The Sage report templates being too difficult to use, the MS Trust could find no way to report the information across department (restricted fund). They found that it was not worth the effort of recording the information as they were unable to utilise it in the way they needed.

AvalisBI had already provided the MS Trust with a solution to help them report on donations received through the Just Giving web service, and demonstrated how the Avalis Financial Intelligence for Sage (AFIS) solution could solve the 'restricted funds problem'.

The Solution

AFIS is the first true business intelligence solution designed specifically for small and medium sized enterprises. A standard key feature of the Sage Line 50 implementation of AFIS is the ability to report information by department, for example operating expenses.

Simply implementing AFIS at the MS Trust provided them with the ability to report restricted and unrestricted fund as required, utilising the information recorded using the department codes. No special report templates or programming skills were required from them; now their reports are available at the press of a button, over the web, as and when required.

Figure 1 : P&L split by Department (Restricted Fund)

Business Benefits

The elimination of the manual process saves hours of work and eliminates the possibility of introducing errors. The completion of statutory returns and accounts can be dramatically simplified and speeded up. The use of the department feature in Sage, and the corresponding reports generated by AFIS, provide a clear audit trail for managing these funds, removing the doubt that is introduced by manipulating this manually in a spreadsheet. Reporting and analyzing on the funds is simple, powerful and quick. Furthermore the reports have been made available to other users without having to buy additional Sage licences.

The Event Revenues Problem

AvalisBI's first assignment for the MS Trust was to help build a reporting application based on data they received from a third party company. They were working with a new company, Just Giving, an internet based business that collects charitable donations then completes all Inland Revenue forms to collect the Gift Aid tax rebate. This company provides basic reports to it's clients, however the data within these reports has great potential for further analysis as it includes a breakdown of donations by event, e.g. London Marathon, and fundraiser. By collecting this data over time a charity can

Figure 2 : Colour Coded Top 10 Events report

obtain information about which events are particularly successful. Unfortunately the basic tabular reports provided by Just Giving are unable to provide this analysis; and attempts to build a reporting solution in Excel were too cumbersome and time consuming. AvalisBI helped the MS Trust by quickly building this information into AFIS, a solution that was created and implemented in a matter of hours.

A year after introducing this system the MS Trust are developing an accurate picture of the effectiveness of various fundraising activities which they undertake. This will enable them to estimate future income more accurately and with greater confidence.

These examples demonstrate how AFIS can be used as the basis for a wide ranging financial reporting suite, integrating data from many sources, then reporting from a single consistent interface. AFIS puts the user back in control of their data, removing the need to spend hours manipulating and transforming it. They can simply get on with the business of using the information to improve the financial performance of their organisation.

Next Problems to Solve

Having already seen the benefits that AFIS can bring in 2 areas, the MS Trust is planning further developments with AvalisBI.

- Budgeting – Even though they can record the restricted fund information using department codes for Actual data, Sage Line 50 does not allow budgeting using department codes. The MS Trust would like to be able to budget individual restricted funds, then report actual results against these budgets.
- Hierarchies within restricted funds – One of AFIS's key strengths is the ability to impose one or more hierarchical structures on otherwise unstructured data, even where Sage 50 has no such structure. The MS Trust would like to group some restricted funds together to report subtotals for management purposes. AvalisBI have developed a simple, graphical tool which can be used to create hierarchies; this structure can then be incorporated in AFIS to create as many reporting sub-totals as required.
- Quarterly reporting – The trustees of the MS Trust require reports that aggregate data into financial quarters. AFIS provides this as a standard feature, removing the need to manipulate data externally in spreadsheets.

Conclusion

All these problems are typical of the real-life problems finance departments face everyday. AvalisBI, with it's 50 man years of reporting and BI experience, have solved them by using standard AFIS features and adding some simple customization. The power of the AvalisBI hosted infrastructure means that we take the strain of implementing complete finance solutions, leaving the MS Trust to the important business of maximising the funds that they raise.

About AvalisBI Online

AvalisBI builds and delivers scalable online services using proven technology and award-winning business intelligence applications from the Oracle Corporation. Our solutions provide integrated online business reporting and analysis of operational, management and strategic information, across organisations, helping them to meet the complex challenges of today's competitive and global business world. There is no software to buy, install, upgrade or maintain nor any IT infrastructure to invest in. No IT resources are required to implement the service. Powerful, simple and cost-effective.

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