

Clover Query and Nexus Portal accelerate decision making process at Key City Furniture

BCD Modernization Case Study



Michael Ellis displays Key City's reports in both modernized and green-screen formats.

BCD's solutions eliminate printed reports and reduce Key City's inventory costs by delivering critical reports in real time through a browser.

Key City Furniture is a third-generation family-owned business run by talented people with tenure to spare. Last year, as the downturn in housing began to affect everyone, Key City's IT department suggested a way to improve the company's workflow. As it was, managers had to plod through lengthy printed reports to find specific performance metrics. While stakeholders were receptive to the idea of improving

business processes, they were leery of the cost of new projects.

Key City manufacturers build-to-order products that are sold through hundreds of retail furniture outlets. With over 150 employees at two facilities in Wilkesboro, and North Wilkesboro, NC, Key City Furniture produces over 400 made-to-order furniture products and offers over 1,200 fabric colors and patterns.

Using an extensively modified ERP application running on an IBM iSeries model 810, all monthly, weekly and on-demand reports were the product of IBM i spooled file output. Once printed, managers sifted through rows and columns to find key metrics on sales activity, inventory of raw materials, labor statistics, and profitability.



As the economy dipped, it became evident that managers at Key City needed to obtain better information at a faster pace. Fewer dollars could be tied up in raw materials inventory, if, for example, real-time data on fabric and frame availability were accessible on demand. "Managing a business is really about having the right information in the right people's hands at the right time," says Michael Ellis, Key City's Director of IT and Process Improvement. Ellis, who had previously been a director of systems and business processes at Lowe's Home Centers, Inc. for 17 years, had a pretty good idea of how he wanted to re-frame the furniture maker's reporting infrastructure. "The IT department, anchored by Keith Whittington for nearly a quarter century, had built and maintained a very solid platform from which to grow. After understanding the breadth of data we were capturing and the processes we were using to get that information, I began looking for ways to push critical information where it needed to be and in a better format "



After signing up for a webinar on Clover and Nexus, presented by Business Computer Design (www.bcdsoftware.com), Ellis downloaded trial copies of both products. As an iSeries Web Query and Business Intelligence tool, Clover lets unlimited end users and technicians design and run real-time reports and queries that display in browsers. Reports and graphs can be created in minutes using its templates. SQL wizards make it easy to write reports with totals, level breaks, drill downs, or export to other applications. Says Ellis, "Clover skills can be acquired very quickly with only a basic knowledge of SQL."

Using the sample Web server configuration file that ships with Nexus, Ellis implemented his initial Web Portal with only a couple iSeries commands. The Web-based administration interface let him build a customized portal that provides secure access and a menuing system to the Clover reports without requiring any programming. The real time production data is displayed in the portal in pie charts, histograms and bar graphs. Drill down capabilities on key performance indicators facilitated access to additional detail. "BCD walked me through the installation and their support team is second to none. In about an hour I was creating charts and graphs using our own data. That's pretty much what sold me."

"It's been a small change that brought big results," says Ellis. "To keep it interesting, we're leveraging every aspect of the tool, from drill down reports to user entry applications, to every type of graph that's out there. It's been a tremendous tool for us."

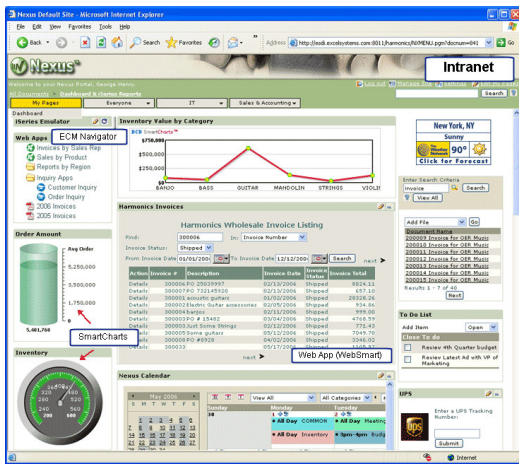
Michael Ellis, Director of IT, Key City Furniture

Top managers at Key City Furniture quickly embraced the new reporting system, so Ellis developed Clover dashboards for a number of departments. "We now have graphs on several task-specific dashboards that change before your eyes when new data becomes available." One of Key City's new reports looks like a speedometer and displays today's orders. "As new orders are entered, the dashboard reflects these entries and management knows exactly where things stand at any given moment," says Ellis. In Key City's case, Clover is set up to refresh every five seconds for several key metrics.

Another one of Ellis' dashboards tracks fabric performance. Most of the components used to make furniture can be obtained in a few days, but planning future fabric requirements is tricky because it has as much as a 12-week lead-time. Ellis' Fabric Dashboard shows how well each of the top fabric, leather and trim styles are performing. With this information they can reorder styles that are being quickly depleted. This system allows them to better manage investments in inventory and reduce delays associated with not having all

the bill of materials components necessary to build a product that has been ordered. "It's really important to stay on top of order fulfillment," he says.

To complicate matters, fabric mills will occasionally drop a specific style of material. In the past, the fabric manager at Key City would have to go through printed reports that were one to two inches thick to find all of the furniture styles that used the now cancelled material, and indicate a replacement. "Now we can see that information instantly," says Ellis.



Sample Nexus Portal dashboard

Since critical performance data is accessible through the Nexus Web Portal, Key City Furniture's managers can get real time updates on their smart phones. This, says Ellis, is one area where he is breaking new ground with these solutions. "I believe we're one of the first users to do this."

Ellis says his company has benefited in many ways. For one thing, information is presented to management in an easy to assimilate graphical format, and this allows them to save money through better control of raw materials inventory and other costs. It also helps to shorten the overall build cycle and allows Key City to better serve all of the furniture stores that sell their products nationwide. And from the perspective of an IT director, Ellis says they can do more with fewer resources.

What's next, aside from introducing a bevy of exciting new furniture designs at the next big bi-annual furniture market? Soon their representatives across the country will be able to enter a User ID and Password on a web page and have secured access to a dashboard that will display KPIs on each of their accounts. And furniture retailers will have Portal access that will provide information on the status of their orders.

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