



Microsoft Enterprise Reporting Lays the Foundation for Growth and Expansion at E! Networks

With its budgeting and reporting processes stretched thin by rapid growth and global expansion, E! Networks began the search for an integrated budgeting and reporting solution to replace its Microsoft Excel spreadsheet-based model. The answer? Microsoft Enterprise Reporting. This enterprise-wide solution has dramatically streamlined budgeting, forecasting, and reporting processes, reducing errors and improving the company's ability to analyze budgets and allocate spending among programs and departments.

SOLUTION OVERVIEW

COMPANY PROFILE

Based in Los Angeles, E! Networks is the world's largest producer and distributor of entertainment news and lifestyle-related programming. The company operates E! Entertainment Television, the 24-hour network dedicated to the world of entertainment; style., the 24-hour network devoted to beauty, fashion, and home design; and E! Online (www.eonline.com), the number one entertainment news and celebrity gossip Web site. E! Entertainment Television is currently available to 84 million cable and satellite subscribers in the U.S.

SITUATION

With rapid growth and global expansion overwhelming its spreadsheet-based budgeting and financial reporting processes, E! Networks needed a solution that offered greater flexibility and a more sophisticated and powerful set of features.

BUSINESS SOLUTION

E! Networks partnered with Solver, Inc., to implement Microsoft Business Solutions Enterprise Reporting, a comprehensive solution that provides both budgeting and financial reporting capabilities in a single package.

BENEFITS

Enterprise Reporting has enabled E! Networks to sharply reduce the amount of time it spends on budgetary processes, while eliminating the errors that were common with the manual spreadsheet-based model. E! Networks has also benefited from flexible report writing tools and advanced payroll budgeting features.

The world's largest producer and distributor of entertainment news and lifestyle-related programming, E! Networks creates television programming and Web content that helps define the world of popular culture.

But when rapid growth began straining the organization's budgetary systems, the company realized that its spreadsheet-based financial processes no longer provided the flexibility or features that E! Networks required. Problems included outdated worksheet and workbook links, inaccurate data, and difficulties assessing variances between budgetary and actual numbers. And with operations expanding outside the United States, it was becoming increasingly difficult to aggregate company-wide data.

"Because we were growing so quickly, budget and reporting processes needed to be streamlined," says Nancy Baumann, E! Networks Director of Planning and Analysis. "We knew we needed an integrated solution that would deliver accurate information quickly to help us spend more time on planning and less time on consolidation."

THE SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION

Because the new solution was critical to the company's ability to achieve its strategic objectives, Baumann and her team conducted a thorough search, attending software tradeshow and conferences, and researching budgeting solutions and solution providers on

the Web. E! Networks looked at four solutions: Comshare, Hyperion Pillar, Budget Plus, and Microsoft Business Solutions Enterprise Reporting. They also invited a number of vendors to demonstrate their software.

According to Baumann, the company had three key selection criteria: the flexibility to create budget input screens similar to Excel, the ability to handle detailed payroll budgeting, and a scalable tool with a strong report writer. Microsoft Enterprise Reporting was the clear choice.

"Enterprise Reporting offered the flexibility to create any kind of input form or report, along with the ability to do advanced payroll budgeting," explains Baumann. "Because we have Microsoft SQL Server™ expertise in-house, we also liked the fact that it utilized a SQL Server database."

FINDING A PARTNER

It was at an accounting software conference that Baumann's team met representatives from Solver, Inc. A technology firm that focuses on budgeting, financial reporting, and business intelligence solutions, and offers extensive experience working with the broadcast and cable industry, Solver was a great match for E! Networks.

"Solver analyzed our Excel model and then gave us a customized demonstration that showed how it would look in Enterprise



Reporting,” says Baumann. “After the demonstration, we were confident that we would get the solution we needed.”

“Our best practices methodology allows us to maximize return on investment by quickly implementing high-quality, industry-tailored solutions,” adds Solver National Account Executive Tracy Maynor. “Our extensive experience with budgeting, financial reporting, and business intelligence solutions enables us to identify where our clients can improve their budgeting and reporting processes.”

GREATER EFFICIENCY, FEWER ERRORS

During the design phase, Solver and E! Networks worked together to develop specific input forms based on E! Network’s Excel-based budgeting model. Solver also implemented add-on modules that delivered enhanced functionality, including an Excel add-in that provided direct two-way integration between Excel and Enterprise Reporting. The feature enables E! Networks users to enter data into Enterprise Reporting using an Excel front-end.

With Enterprise Reporting in place, E! Networks saw an immediate drop in the time required to complete the budget cycle. “Today, we spend 40 percent less time on the budget and forecast processes,” says Baumann. “And because the numbers are in much faster, our managers have more time to analyze how dollars should be allocated.”

The foundation for these dramatic efficiency gains is a SQL Server database that serves as a repository for the information required for the budgeting and financial reporting capabilities of Enterprise Reporting. On the front end, pre-defined templates in Enterprise Reporting have replaced the Excel macros that E! Networks used for data entry, eliminating inaccuracies that plagued the process.

“Often our consolidation macros and links would not work due to changes made by the various departments within the Excel files,” says Baumann. “Now our numbers go directly into the Enterprise Reporting database and the budget administrator has full control of formats, changes, and consolidation.”

Because the solution delivers budgeting and financial reporting capabilities in a single package, E! Networks analysts can compare actual figures against budgeted numbers and produce variance and exception reports without switching between systems that utilize different databases and interfaces. That means E! Networks users only need to master one interface, and that no time is lost re-entering numbers between databases.

DRIVING CURRENT AND FUTURE GROWTH

Another important benefit is the advanced payroll features of Enterprise Reporting, which allow for budgeting at the individual employee level to handle associated payroll tax and benefit information. The solution also calculates amortization percentages for E! Networks programming. Its security model ensures that users can only access the data they are authorized to view and modify.

According to Baumann, the report writing features of Enterprise Reporting have also had a dramatic impact. “The report writer is so flexible that we can generate any type of report our business needs,” she explains. “Today, our month-end cycle is virtually painless and our budgeting process is no longer a major source of stress because we know that numbers will be timely and accurate.”

A key component of E! Networks ongoing growth and expansion, Enterprise Reporting will drive continued success, says Baumann. “Enterprise Reporting has helped us achieve global status by delivering the accurate numbers our managers need to forecast growth,” she says. “Now we’re moving towards implementing Enterprise Reporting’s Web-portal to allow users to access budgeting and reporting tools from anywhere in the world. We’re also looking at implementing the Enterprise Reporting Analysis Services module so we’ll have more sophisticated analytical tools to help us make better decisions about how and where to allocate future spending.”

“We spend 40 percent less time on budget processes. And because the numbers are in much faster, our managers have more time to analyze where dollars can and should be allocated.”

– Nancy Baumann
Director of Planning Analysis
E! Networks

CONTACT INFORMATION

ABOUT SOLVER, INC.

270 N. Canon Drive, #1166
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

Tel: 310-444-9633

Fax: 310-477-7113

E-mail address: tma@solverusa.com

Web site: www.solverusa.com

Solver is a leading provider and implementer of budgeting, financial reporting, and business intelligence solutions from Microsoft. Solver’s consulting teams, which consist of leading experts and authors in the fields of budgeting and business intelligence, work closely with clients to optimize planning and reporting processes by providing cutting-edge analytical solutions and services. Solver is a two-time recipient of the Microsoft Business Solutions Enterprise Reporting Partner of the Year award.

MICROSOFT SOFTWARE USED

Microsoft Business Solutions
Enterprise Reporting

Microsoft SQL Server 2000

OTHER PRODUCTS USED

XL Pack

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