



## University Extension Compresses Financial Reporting, Gains Better Business Insight

### Overview

United States  
Education

UC Irvine Extension offers more than 2,500 courses to 20,000 individuals in Orange County, California, who are seeking to extend their professional skills or enrich their lives.

The state mainframe-based financial model that UC Irvine Extension is obligated to use required cumbersome, time-consuming efforts to produce financial reports.

UC Irvine Extension implemented Microsoft® Business Solutions for Analytics—Enterprise Reporting to facilitate its financial reporting, budgeting, and forecasting.

- Dramatically faster reports
- Better business insights
- No need to hire additional staff

“Since implementing [Microsoft Business Solutions for Analytics] Enterprise Reporting, we have shortened our planning cycle substantially, so we are able to make much better business decisions.”

Bob Rude, Chief Financial Officer, UC Irvine Extension

UC Irvine Extension offers residents of Orange County, California, university-level programs that range from business to the arts, for professional and personal development. The institution is run more as a business than as a state school, since it is financially self-supporting and receives no state appropriations; therefore, timely financial reporting is critical to maintaining profitability. The Extension’s old budgeting and reporting model was cumbersome and time-consuming, requiring mainframe data to be analyzed in Microsoft® Office Excel 2003. The institution then implemented Microsoft Business Solutions for Analytics—Enterprise Reporting and streamlined its monthly report generation alone from days to minutes. The new reports are providing deeper analysis, leading to better business insights. The solution has also eliminated the need to hire additional staff to keep up with the reports.



## Situation

UC Irvine Extension provides a rich array of academic and community programs to support a diverse constituency in Orange County, California. The institution offers highly regarded university-level programs in a variety of disciplines for professional development and personal enrichment. Subjects range from business and management to the arts, and from engineering to information technology. Most students already have college degrees and rely on the Extension's offerings to update their skill portfolios. One of the school's services is providing corporate training to many of Orange County's businesses. Each year, the school offers approximately 2,500 courses to 20,000 individuals.

Though it is part of the University of California state education system, UC Irvine Extension is financially self-supporting, receiving no state funding. It operates primarily through income derived from enrollment fees. Thus, UC Irvine Extension needs sophisticated financial analysis tools to remain competitive and profitable.

The state university system, however, requires UC Irvine Extension to use its mainframe-based financial systems—a constraint that severely impeded the UC Irvine Extension managers' ability to analyze the institution's financial situation regularly and accurately. UC Irvine Extension was dependent on several separate financial systems, none of which was easy to use or interacted well with the others. Accounting information was transacted in an inflexible general ledger system. Revenue and enrollments were handled in a third-party enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. Budgets and financial reporting were done

with Microsoft® Office Excel 2003 spreadsheets.

“Our models for budgeting and financial reporting took so long that it left little time for analysis between accounting cycles,” says Bob Rude, Chief Financial Officer of UC Irvine Extension. “We would import data from mainframe applications into Excel [2003] and massage it, but this was an extremely cumbersome process. We could generate clever spreadsheets, but they were a huge effort to maintain. We wanted the flexibility of a spreadsheet without the maintenance needs.” Also, Rude's staff had to be diligent in loading and manipulating the data to produce accurate results.

Consequently, it took several weeks to pull together quarterly financial reports, and up to six weeks to create year-end budgets and analyses. As the business became more complicated, the layers of financial data increased, which further slowed the already bogged-down system. “We couldn't intelligently manage the various departments, because we didn't have current standardized financial information on their performance,” Rude says. “As our financial reporting needs grew, it became apparent that we would need to hire one or two additional staff just to keep up.”

## Solution

Rude started exploring a variety of financial reporting packages and became acquainted with Microsoft Business Solutions for Analytics—Enterprise Reporting through a sister organization, UC Berkeley Extension. He called in Microsoft Certified Provider Solver, Inc., of Beverly Hills, California, for a closer look.

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Bob Rude, Chief Financial Officer, UC Irvine Extension

“Solver’s demonstration of Enterprise Reporting was very relevant to our business and our unique financial reporting and budgeting issues,” Rude says. “They had experience working with organizations similar to ours, and that raised our confidence level considerably. They demonstrated how our current Excel spreadsheets would operate in Enterprise Reporting. Our selection was based on both the ability of Enterprise Reporting to meet our current and future needs and our confidence that Solver would deliver everything they promised.”

Microsoft Enterprise Reporting promised two major benefits: It would be efficient, while reducing reporting errors in budgeting and forecasting, and it would generate reports faster, speeding the delivery of financial information to managers.

Solver designed the database structure, converted key reports and entry forms, and trained power users. The process was complete within two weeks, and Microsoft Enterprise Reporting was operational on time and at the negotiated cost. The product was flexible enough that Solver simply modified the database to suit the university’s needs.

UC Irvine Extension now uses Microsoft Enterprise Reporting for all its monthly financial reporting, budgeting, and forecasting, and has expanded its use as managers have realized the solution’s power and flexibility. Once a month, Microsoft Enterprise Reporting pulls data from the university’s mainframe-based ERP system and from the university’s general ledger data warehouse. The data is placed in a Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 database, where it is

queried by users through Microsoft Enterprise Reporting.

The Microsoft Enterprise Reporting graphical user interface is similar to that of Excel [2003], previously used by managers for reporting. This design allows the finance staff to more readily create, modify, and maintain the reports and forms, rather than relying on programmers. The resulting spreadsheet layout is familiar to most users and can even be exported directly into Excel 2003.

“Users simply fill in blanks for the information they want to request,” Rude says. “It’s flexible enough for them to request what they need, but controlled enough to keep them from getting what they shouldn’t. Plus, having a standardized format across the organization ensures that we’re getting consistent data from all departments.”

Most of all, Rude likes the tree structure of Microsoft Enterprise Reporting. Reporting structures, called trees, can be created for most dimensions in the system. A dimension is an information category such as account, unit, transaction type, and transaction category. The trees display the hierarchical relationship between items within each dimension and allow intuitive graphical manipulation of reporting structures and powerful “what if” analyses.

“The ability to have multiple trees has given us tremendous improvements in our financials,” Rude says. “By creating different tree structures, we can use the same report definitions for completely different segments of the business. I can arrange trees in a very streamlined fashion and get high-level snapshots and comparisons of our community, international, traditional, and

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distance learning businesses. By inserting a different tree, I can take a completely different slice through the data. The tree structure is the number-one strength of Enterprise Reporting.”

Microsoft Enterprise Reporting and the SQL Server 2000 database run on a single server computer with Microsoft Windows® 2000 Server as the operating system. (UC Irvine Extension is soon upgrading this computer to the Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003 operating system.) The SQL Server 2000 database is currently 120 megabytes and serves a total of 25 users. Windows Server 2003 and SQL Server 2000 are components of Microsoft Windows Server System™ integrated server software.

### Benefits

The use of Microsoft Business Solutions for Analytics–Enterprise Reporting is giving UC Irvine Extension faster, more accurate financial reports, forecasts, and budgets with which to better manage its business. Report generation time has gone from days to minutes, giving managers more time to analyze their business and make smart decisions. The solution has also eliminated the need to hire additional staff to help with reporting, even though the business is growing.

Microsoft Enterprise Reporting has slashed the time needed to do financial reporting at UC Irvine Extension from weeks to days. “Since implementing Enterprise Reporting, we have shortened our planning cycle substantially, so we are able to make much better business decisions,” Rude says. “Current information, trends, comparisons, and business drivers are always available.”

Pulling together monthly reports has gone from days to minutes, and assembling year-end budgets for the entire organization has gone from six weeks to two days. “Better and faster information enhances our managers’ ability to make quicker, more accurate, better supported decisions,” Rude says.

Also, the time needed for Rude’s staff to create new reports is minimal. To date, the staff has created approximately 30 reports with Microsoft Enterprise Reporting, each of which took less time than the one before. “I rarely create any reports from scratch anymore,” Rude says. “I take an existing report and skew it in a new way. In this way, Enterprise Reporting allows us to build on and extend work already done, making richer reports that give our users deeper and different perspectives on our data.”

A related benefit is more work satisfaction for financial employees such as Rude who have to produce the reports. “With Enterprise Reporting, our jobs are less data entry-oriented and more analytical in nature,” Rude says. “Getting the numbers out is a lot less stressful and more pleasant now. We all have more time to do other tasks.”

The ability of Microsoft Enterprise Reporting to give UC Irvine Extension managers new views of the business’s health has tremendous value. “Enterprise Reporting has given us an incredible depth of knowledge that we never had before,” Rude says. “It lets us look at all dimensions of our performance, which we couldn’t do previously. We can tell where we’re profitable and where we have problems.”

For example, after the burst of the dot-com bubble a few years ago, UC Irvine Extension experienced a decline in business. “Of course, we wanted to avoid painful layoffs,” Rude says. “By looking at our financial reports, we were able to quickly identify areas where we could move staff from one area to another. We were able to make these decisions based on hard data versus guessing.”

To properly manage the old systems, much less handle any increased complexity, would have required that UC Irvine Extension hire one or two additional accountants to create financial reports. Microsoft Enterprise Reporting has eliminated this need, allowing Rude’s current small staff to handle all reporting needs with ease.

“The cost for Enterprise Reporting was roughly equivalent to one staff salary,” Rude says. “Our ROI [return on investment] was roughly one year; however, the true benefit is the enhanced financial reporting and budgeting that’s now possible.”

Looking forward, UC Irvine Extension is planning to incorporate an Excel 2003 add-in from Solver into its Microsoft Enterprise Reporting solution. This add-in will allow managers to use dashboards to view reports, and the IT staff to more effectively distribute reports to managers. “The dashboards will give managers a graphical view of key financial drivers, and will refresh with new data, viewable on-demand by authorized staff,” Rude says. “This will help us automate our process even more, and continually enhance our investment.”

## For More Information

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For more information about Solver, Inc. products and services, call (310) 691-5303 or visit the Web site at: [www.solverusa.com](http://www.solverusa.com)

For more information about UC Irvine Extension products and services, visit the Web site at: [www.extension.uci.edu](http://www.extension.uci.edu)

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### Software and Services

- Microsoft Windows Server System
  - Microsoft Windows Server 2003 Standard Edition
  - Microsoft SQL Server 2000
- Solutions
  - Microsoft Business Solutions for Analytics–Enterprise Reporting

### Hardware

- HP ProLiant ML530 server computer

### Partners

- Solver, Inc.

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