



Briggs & Stratton

Harnessing the power of its ERP systems

Briggs & Stratton is the world's largest manufacturer of air-cooled gasoline engines — designing, manufacturing, marketing, and servicing these engines for original equipment manufacturers worldwide. But while the company's product line dates back 90 years, its commitment to innovation and sophisticated technology keeps it at the forefront of the global market for small, reliable engines.

By helping Briggs & Stratton harness the power of its ERP systems, SAS software is enhancing the effectiveness of the company in satisfying the market and quality demands of tomorrow.

Grant Felsing

Project Manager for Finance Controlling
Briggs & Stratton



From small engines to big business

According to Grant Felsing, Project Manager for finance and controlling at Briggs & Stratton, the company began data warehousing initiatives in 1988, “long before the disciplines were understood, defined, or even named.” They used a data mart approach, which eventually grew to over 15 major staging engines, where data is extracted from operational databases, denormalized, and staged in “human-intuitive” form. These warehoused data stores grew to support more than 4,000 reports, “a very large and robust reporting capability,” says Felsing.

Some “substantial surprises”

The company selected an ERP solution in 1998, and installed SAP AG's R/3 product, which removed the bulk of their legacy systems and almost all of the sources for their data warehouse. “What happened,” says Felsing, “is that once we went through the rather

daunting process of installing that ERP software, we were immediately faced with the reality that we'd lost a portion of our reporting layer.” The legacy systems that had been replaced had contained not only the data management component replaced by the ERP system but had over the years accumulated programming unique to Briggs & Stratton. Reports had been written that took the operational data, manipulated it, and presented it back to operational managers in the specific form they needed to efficiently manage their areas. An ERP system comes equipped with excellent data displays and generic reports but this special layer of “frozen human intelligence” is unique to every company and contributes substantially to competitive advantage.

“At the same time,” explains Felsing, “our database analysts were telling us that the system was undergoing explosive growth, and we'd be out of disk space in four months.” So while the company started initiatives to replace that management-reporting layer, they realized that they were going to have to quickly start removing data from the operational system to keep it manageable. “The need to keep an ERP system lean and responsive,” says Felsing, “is directly counter to the ability to get information analysis from it. The very data we would need for analysis reporting was the data being targeted for removal. It quickly became obvious that our reporting response was going to have to include a data warehouse solution deployed in parallel with the operational system.”

How SAS software helped

Having installed SAS software in 1988, Briggs & Stratton's IT team was familiar with data warehousing concepts and practices. Operational data in a normalized form is ill-suited for human comprehension, according to Felsing, and he and his colleagues appreciate SAS software and custom programming that lets data be extracted, transformed, enriched, and presented. In addition, the embedded dictionary of the SAS data set is a valuable feature, allowing data stores "to be brought together seamlessly even if later releases of the ERP system have added or deleted fields — and data stores created today can be read and reported against 10 years from now by whatever the current release of SAS is."

"The success of SAS software in an ERP environment is simply that its strengths are in line with the need," says Felsing. "Deploying a world-class operational system in conjunction with a world-class informational system provides the opportunity to exploit each at its best." Building the data warehouse with SAS software provides for the seamless addition of data stores not maintained within the ERP system. "SAS software supports

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"SAS Institute really stepped up to the plate for us," says Felsing. "SAS people helped us craft our reporting landscape. We left our legacy mainframe environment with all of the associated data center expertise and moved to Unix-based servers, and they helped us make the components work seamlessly together. They didn't just install their products. They helped us define our naming standards, security schemes and conventions that must all be considered together to allow for an efficient data center."

The bottom line

Last but by no means least, says Felsing, "is simply cost. ERP contract resources come at a huge premium, so any initiatives involving ERP tools will carry a substantial cost. SAS resources are more accessible and available at more reasonable economics — so initiatives developed in SAS will cost substantially less. Leveraging that price differential with the speed with which SAS applications can be developed gives you a cost-effective solution to analysis reporting in an ERP environment."



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