

The New Face of Financial Reporting at Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated

Finance Users Bid Farewell to Manual, Error-Prone Data Exports

by Lauren Bonneau, Managing Editor

Enterprise finance isn't getting any easier; rather, its complexity increases daily. "My staff is being asked to figure out how to complete more and more tasks better, faster, and smarter," says Jody Billiard, Vice President, Controller, and Chief Accounting Officer of Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated (CCBCC). "The result, then, is that this continued pressure motivates our business to find ways to improve processes and capitalize on in-house resources."

The finance group at CCBCC comprises about 100 employees who access the company's financial systems on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. These individuals are tasked with analyzing income statements, like monthly profit and loss (P&L) reports, to examine profit ratios, costs, and selling prices — and they are always looking for ways to improve reporting.

The financial reports the finance group creates are instrumental to the business. Executives who are in charge of managing the budgets for their respective departments rely on these reports to make important and timely decisions. And the finance users who create the reports want to follow the most efficient processes possible.

Seeking a Financial Reporting Boost

"From a finance perspective, we use Microsoft Excel tremendously," says Christy Ruth, CCBCC's Director of Financial Systems and Business Integration, who is responsible for maintaining the company's SAP ERP Financials software. "Historically, when performing the monthly close processes that involve our SAP modules for finance and controlling, people downloaded data from the SAP system and then reformatted it or rekeyed the information into Microsoft Excel."

Out of CCBCC's 500 SAP financial systems users, approximately 100 of them are considered power users of financial data. These users were tasked with highly manual processes around exporting data, which introduced the risk of duplicate entries and hampered P&L analysis.

The company's financial reporting processes consisted of a mishmash of manual spreadsheet exporting — with data coming from SAP systems for monthly P&L statements, financial management packages, and other decision-making documents. In addition to the managerial P&L reports, the finance group had to develop other reports to help finance users compile, communicate, and analyze its core management reports.

"We were hand-churning a bunch of Microsoft Excel reports that executives at the company were reviewing," says Billiard. "That was frustrating."

To alleviate these challenges, the finance group began searching for a solution that would ease financial reporting and be intuitive for executives and end users. "We wanted a tool that we could implement quickly, that business and finance users could learn rapidly, and that wouldn't take up

At a Glance

Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated

Headquarters: Charlotte, North Carolina

Industry: Manufacturing and distributing

Revenue: \$1.49 billion

Employees: 5,000+

Company details:

- The largest independent Coca-Cola bottler
- Consumer base of 18 million+
- Products include carbonated soft drinks, bottled water, teas, juices, isotonic, and energy drinks
- NASDAQ: COKE
- 500+ SAP financial systems users

SAP solution:

SAP ERP 6.0, including functionality for financials, controlling, consolidation, warehouse management, and plant maintenance

The SAP Evolution at CCBCC

Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Consolidated has been an SAP customer since 2004. Prior to using SAP software, the company relied on accounting systems that resided on a mainframe system. Billiard describes that environment as providing “nice, fast, and reliable processing, but with nothing terribly sophisticated or real-time about it.” Since its initial SAP implementation, the company has upgraded to SAP ERP 6.0. And according to Billiard, the business hasn’t even hit the tip of the iceberg when it comes to updating and benefiting from its financial systems. “We continue to see more opportunities to leverage the full capabilities of SAP software because many of our core operating systems still reside in that mainframe environment.”

a lot of support and resources from our IT department,” says Ruth.

The answer came in the form of a Microsoft Excel add-in for use with SAP software, called Spreadsheet Server.

Embracing Users’ Spreadsheet Fanaticism

The Spreadsheet Server tool from Global Software, Inc. caught the finance group’s eye because of its familiar interface. “Accountants are such Microsoft Excel fanatics,” says Billiard. “We needed something that had a similar look and feel to it, and Spreadsheet Server fit the bill for us on that.”

The tool retrieves data directly from SAP applications and transfers it into Microsoft Excel. More specifically, it sends out a formula that grabs real-time data from SAP ERP Financials. “Because of the tool’s intuitive interface, users could latch onto it and start using it right away,” says Ruth. “We wouldn’t have to do data exports anymore, and that’s what was really appealing about the software.”

CCBCC has been a loyal customer of Global Software for many years and has a lot of trust in the company’s expertise. “They have been a very good and flexible partner for us,” says Billiard. “And based on the demos of Spreadsheet Server, we were pleased with the capabilities of the product itself.”

To the delight of the CCBCC team, the product’s implementation didn’t require a project at all. “We

received about a day and a half of training, and then we were up and running and ready to go,” says Ruth.

The tool’s 20 or so users are successfully using it daily. “We’re learning more each and every day,” Billiard says. “And there is still a lot of opportunity for us from a user training and utilization standpoint.”

How Financial Users and End Consumers Are Benefiting

The financial users who previously struggled with the manual exporting process are now benefiting from the new tool. These users can view costs across departments more easily and provide more detailed forecasts for individual functions or for the entire company.

Advice from Jody Billiard, VP, Controller, and Chief Accounting Officer, CCBCC

- 1 Establish some preconceived notions of what types of reports you want to build.
- 2 Capitalize on the training you receive from your software provider.
- 3 Select two or three people who can become proficient with the software immediately. It’s helpful to have a few people who can teach others; and this way, you become self-sufficient.

According to Billiard, Spreadsheet Server also has helped the finance group and analysts at CCBCC with their financial data gathering and reviewing. “We’re already realizing gains from getting information in different formats so we can analyze the data much better and more quickly, rather than just spending all of our time compiling,” he says.

While the finance users are seeing great value from Spreadsheet Server, the end consumers are the ones reaping the greatest reward. “The consumers of the reports, the executives, can get data faster and more easily than they used to,” says Billiard. “When they make a request, depending on the nature of the request, we can develop a report and put it in production in hours instead of days.”

He says that CCBCC will continue to improve the way it uses the tool. “As a business, we’ve got to be faster and better with what we do, and Spreadsheet Server is one of the tools that will help get us there,” he says. ■

For more information on Spreadsheet Server (or other Microsoft Excel-based automation tools) for use with SAP applications, call Global Software, Inc. at 800-326-3444 ext. 5423 or email info@glbsoft.com.

