RapidDecision® for JD Edwards

The Foundation for a Great Business Intelligence Solution

RapidDecision®

Business Intelligence Realized

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Introduction

Most JD Edwards application users are frustrated. They know that information that could help them make better decisions passes through the database of their JD Edwards software every day. It is not clear how to get what they want without undertaking a difficult, expensive and time-consuming project. Most want the same things:

- More complete and valuable information in scheduled reports.
- Ad hoc reporting without the need for help from IT technicians.
- Dynamic presentation of information through executive dashboards.
- Easy access to the details behind summary reports.
- Data mining – the ability to sift through mountains of data to discover hidden insights.

A confusing array of vendor products are available that claim to help solve these problems, some offered by premier software vendors. Why then have so many organizations that have tried to improve their reporting and analysis capability failed to do so? Why are so many others waiting for something better to come along?

The long wait is over. The key missing ingredient that has led to so much past frustration is now available in the form of **RapidDecision®**. This paper will describe how RapidDecision unlocks the tremendous potential of business intelligence (BI) tools by providing them with the data needed to be effective.

The oldest adage in the information technology field, "garbage in – garbage out," makes the obvious point that the output from software

tools is only as useful as the data that they access. The many large enterprises that did the pioneering in the field of business intelligence discovered a simple truth: the most effective way to provide data to BI tools is through the creation of a properly designed data warehouse. There is no debate among experts – *the path to proper business intelligence passes through a data warehouse.*

Unfortunately, there is a catch – the creation of a data warehouse can be a time-consuming, resource-intensive, expensive, and risky proposition. Not everyone that has tried it succeeds. The failure rate is especially high among those that try to do it by themselves.

Fortunately, it is no longer necessary for JD Edwards users to settle for less than the best. Data warehouse-based BI that follows best practice design has become easy and affordable through RapidDecision.

An examination of all of the benefits of data warehousing is beyond the scope of this paper. A new white paper will be available soon from Andrews Consulting Group that will explore this vital subject in detail.

What Is RapidDecision?

RapidDecision is a body of software that creates the data warehouse needed to unlock the potential of BI tools. Once their power is unleashed, these tools can begin to have a dramatic positive impact on decisions. RapidDecision is thus a necessary foundation for any JD Edwards BI project that hopes to succeed.

RapidDecision has been under development for over ten years by a team of true experts with a deep understanding of BI design concepts and the JD Edwards database. It thus reflects the combined experience of a large number of JD Edwards customers.

Duplicating RapidDecision would take years, millions of dollars, and the efforts of many experts. Collectively they would need to understand every data field in each past release of both the World and EnterpriseOne product lines. The scope of this effort has prevented other organizations, including Oracle itself, from making the necessary investment in time, money, and expertise.

While RapidDecision was time consuming and costly to create, all the hard work has already been done.

Installing and using RapidDecision is fast, easy, and cost effective. Building a RapidDecision data warehouse has become so easy that it is possible to put one in place and prove its value – using your own data – before committing to its purchase.

The alternatives to RapidDecision are not pretty. The simplest is to directly connect BI tools to production databases. Any experienced, independent BI professional can provide a long list of reasons why doing so never leads to satisfactory results. The other extreme is to recognize the need for a proper data warehouse and then try to build it in-house. Those IT departments that have lots of time, money, and expertise are welcome to try, but the odds of success are not great.

Some BI tool vendors and their advocates will argue that RapidDecision is not necessary. They claim that it is easy to throw together a primitive data warehouse with little effort or thought. All that is needed in their minds is to copy the JD Edwards data field by field into a separate database that they consider a data warehouse. The experience of many of their

customers, especially those that have seen the light and moved on to RapidDecision, is that this approach also does not work.

A data warehouse only works well when it is based on a well thought out data model – a principle that holds for the design of software of all types. Many of the unique advantages of RapidDecision come from the advanced data model around which it was designed. In this model, each individual data element from every recent release of all the supported modules has been studied and given a standard name. The names were chosen to make them easy for end users to understand. This is important because the field names that JD Edwards uses do not always remain constant across releases and can be confusing or even misleading.

The data model of RapidDecision is highly stable. It is enhanced regularly over time to meet changing needs. This is always done in a way that maintains the integrity of reports created using past versions. This protects users of RapidDecision from having to recode reports after installing new releases of JD Edwards applications. This advantage alone can justify the full cost of a RapidDecision solution.

JD Edwards applications do not share a stable, common data model. The names and definitions of fields and tables and their structure can change over time.

As a result, the need to rewrite and test reports can be a large cost associated with a JD Edwards release upgrade. This impediment to upgrading goes away when RapidDecision is used.

Even though RapidDecision supports many releases of both World and EnterpriseOne, the data from both rolls up into a single, consistent format within the data warehouse. In a similar way, data from other ERP systems such as SAP, MAPICS, or Oracle E-Business Suite can be mapped into the RapidDecision data model. Many RapidDecision customers use it as the foundation for the consolidation of data from diverse ERP systems.

Some of the greatest value of RapidDecision comes from the design of the data model. Field names are clear and understandable; their structure is logical; tables make sense to non-technical users; and formatting of the data within fields is understandable. In addition, new fields have been added to enhance understanding and usefulness.

The bottom line is that the RapidDecision data model follows best practice BI design concepts that optimize it for reporting and analysis. Proper techniques for doing so have become well established in the BI field, and RapidDecision adheres to all appropriate standards and best practices. Nothing else available to JD Edwards users can make this claim.

How RapidDecision Makes JD Edwards Data More Usable

The JD Edwards database was not designed for use by outsiders. Here are just a few examples (out of hundreds) of how data from it has been made more usable by RapidDecision:

- The table F0911 is given an understandable name – *JDE GA Account Ledger*
- The field name SDDOCO has been changed to *Order Number*
- RapidDecision puts decimals in data fields (they are not in the database).
- The esoteric Century Julian format used to store dates is replaced (102365 in the database becomes *12/31/2002)*
- RapidDecision facilitates the consolidation of data from multiple instances of JD Edwards, even if not from the same version or release.

Numerous fields have been added by the designers of RapidDecision to enhance understanding and usefulness. For example, one field makes it easier to do analysis by fiscal years that differ from calendar years.

Putting RapidDecision to Use

RapidDecision forms the foundation for an effective BI solution. Many sophisticated organizations obtain RapidDecision and then integrate it themselves with the rest of their BI infrastructure. RapidDecision can also be bought as part of a complete BI solution in cooperation with our partner, Business Objects, the industry leader in BI tools. In these cases, the solution consists of the following elements:

- Business Objects XI (eXtreme Insight) front-end tools.
- Business Objects Data Integrator ETL tool.
- One or more servers to host the solution.

- A relational database.
- Assistance getting the system installed and working.
- Training in the use of each element of the system.

When a complete RapidDecision solution is bought, a small team of experts quickly assembles these components and integrates them with the customer's applications. Interfaces to custom applications or other sources of data outside the standard JD Edwards modules are created, installed, and tested. The whole process only takes a few weeks.

More about RapidDecision

RapidDecision is organized by data marts that match the modules provided by JD Edwards. Marts can be bought one at a time or in suites. Additional marts can be added at any time. When appropriate, custom marts for subject areas not covered by JD Edwards modules can be created and integrated into RapidDecision.

RapidDecision buyers have many options available to them:

- Almost any popular server can host RapidDecision.
- The operating system can be Windows, Unix, or Linux.
- The DBMS can be Oracle 10g, Microsoft SQLS, or IBM DB2.
- Data can come from any combination of JD Edwards modules.
- All commonly used releases of both World and EnterpriseOne are supported.

- Interfaces to non-JD Edwards applications can easily be created as needed.
- Data can be extracted from almost any source.
- There is no practical upper limit on the size of the data warehouse.

Data marts and suites offered by RapidDecision

General Ledger	
Job Cost	
Accounts Payable	The Finance Suite
Accounts Receivable	
Fixed Assets	
Sales Order	
Purchase Order	The Distribution Suite
Work Order	
Inventory	
Human Resources	
Payroll	
Property Management	
Manufacturing	
Home Builder	

Building your BI solution for JD Edwards around a data warehouse created by RapidDecision offers numerous advantages:

- Ease of understanding and use.
- Fast installation and a short time to value.
- Access to up-to-the-minute data.
- Industry-standard business intelligence best practices.
- Widely used by highly satisfied customers.
- Designed, installed, and supported by real JD Edwards experts.

Any JD Edwards reporting solution that does not include RapidDecision will have one or more of these fatal flaws:

- Extraction of data directly from JD Edwards files – no data warehouse.
- An unstable, ineffective data model.
- Limited support for JD Edwards modules and releases.

- Long implementation time and expensive customizations.
- Dependence on software components from marginal vendors.
- Based on out-dated information.
- Few successful installations.

All this makes RapidDecision the safest and most cost-effective choice and an investment that never stops paying off.

When faced with the decision of buying a solution, some customers will underestimate the scope and complexity of the task and choose a direction that appears less costly upfront – including doing it them-selves. A high percentage of such projects fail. Some of the most successful users of RapidDecision tried other approaches, including custom development, and failed before discovering it.

Why Direct Connection Just Doesn't Work

History has shown that any approach that attempts to create reports directly from the JD Edwards databases is doomed to fail for a variety of well documented reasons:

- The design of the database is different for each release, making it necessary to rewrite and test reports as a part of every upgrade.
- The data needed for analysis must be obtained from many sources, often including numerous JD Edwards instances.
- Creating reports that summarize data that originated within more than one release of JD Edwards is difficult.
- Field names can be hard to decipher, and the data in them is often in odd formats.
- Data is organized to optimize data entry and performance, making it hard to use for analysis.
- Information useful for analysis is purged from the database when no longer needed for transaction processing.
- There is no good way to add worthwhile data from other sources.

The concept of data warehousing emerged in reaction to the failures that resulted from doing reporting and analysis off transaction system databases. Can your organization afford to try an approach that frequently fails? Investing in a data warehouse-based BI solution using RapidDecision is the only way to insure lasting success.

Evaluating RapidDecision

RapidDecision is easy to try and to buy:

- A proof of concept demonstration using your data can be set up.
- RapidDecision can be remotely hosted making it easy and inexpensive to start.
- The software components it uses come from vendors you already know and like.
- Flexible pricing options make it possible to meet any budget.

It is easy to learn more about RapidDecision:
- Listen to a regularly scheduled RapidDecision webinar.
- Request a personal presentation.
- Ask questions via email at *info@rapiddecision.net*
- Schedule a talk with Joe Guerra, the Chief Architect of RapidDecision by contacting him by email at *info@rapiddecision.net* or by phone at 800.775.4261 ext 5812.

Questions to Ask

Buyers that do their homework end up choosing RapidDecision. Make sure you ask every solution provider all the tough questions:

- Is the proposed solution based on a data warehouse?
- Was it built on a proven, highly stable data model?
- How much work are you expected to do to obtain the necessary data?
- Will it be necessary to rewrite reports if changes occur in the applications?
- Can you see the system working with your data before deciding to buy?
- Can you start to create new reports in a week or less?

- Can up-to-the-minute data be obtained?
- Will custom data marts or cubes need to be created (and at what expense)?
- Are the front-end tool and its report writer industry leaders?
- Will it be easy to drill down and get the details?
- Will your IT staff need to learn new skills?
- Will people with deep JD Edwards skills be constantly available to support you?
- Is remote hosting available from a highly trusted source?

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The Role of Business Objects in RapidDecision

RapidDecision is designed to work with all of the most popular BI front-end tools. When customers began to show a strong preference for Business Objects, a decision was made to propose Business Objects XI as the preferred platform for complete solutions based on RapidDecision. In cases where another BI front-end tool is already in place, the RapidDecision marts can often be implemented on top of it.

Most JD Edwards customers already use Crystal Reports, another popular Business Objects offering. Like many other software providers, JD Edwards decided a number of years ago to provide all of its customers with Crystal Reports licenses in recognition of its nearly universal acceptance as the premier reporting tool in the industry. Crystal Reports is now offered as an integral part of XI, creating a very powerful combination.

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Summary

Your organization should consider a BI solution based on RapidDecision if any of these conditions are present:

- Valuable information within your applications is not easy to access.
- Producing the reports you need is difficult.
- Complying with the newest reporting regulations is a challenge.
- Management wants to monitor performance as it is happening.
- Consolidating results from divergent systems is awkward and difficult.
- You have struggled to get a business intelligence solution to work.

There are three alternatives to RapidDecision – all of them unattractive:

- Continue without a true BI solution.
- Make do with an inferior alternative.
- Attempt to build your own data warehouse.

RapidDecision removes the risk. You know what you are going to get, how long it will take, and what it will cost before starting. RapidDecision makes the otherwise difficult, time-consuming, and expensive process of building a data warehouse fast and simple. By starting now, you begin the process of assembling and storing information that one day will be considered invaluable. In summary, if you use JD Edwards software and want the advantages of a data warehouse-based BI solution, then you need RapidDecision.

Learn More About RapidDecision

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