

March 28, 2002

# Equal Time

## Who says the customer is always right?

by Justin Kestelyn

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To: Business intelligence (BI) and analytic software companies

From: Your current and future customers

To Whom It May Concern:

We would like to offer our heartfelt thanks for all your efforts to make BI and analytic technology appreciated by, and available to, decision makers of all stripes — not just power users, data and business analysts, and statisticians. Not only have you sold us on the strategic importance of BI applications, but you've made the entire BI process more accessible by making your technology easier to use and manage, reducing the IT department's need to be constantly and directly involved. You deserve credit for that.

That's the good news.

The bad news — and there's plenty of it to go around — is that most of you have been reading too many of your own press releases. Perhaps you've repeated the "business user-focused BI" mantra for so long that you've forgotten who we, your current and future customers, really are: the IT professionals who plan, build, deploy, and manage strategic business applications. Doing all four of those tasks is now much easier than ever, but they're still not plug-and-play as you virtually profess, and they probably never will be.

## The Road More Traveled

Instead, many of you have fallen in love with "packaged analytic applications," and you're marketing them heavily toward business users, as if you were truly selling shrink-wrapped solutions. In fact, you are so concerned about maintaining the appearance of success in that effort that some of you are playing games with your numbers by shifting reported revenue away from the tools side of the house toward the applications side, even though the distinction is dubious at best. Why?

The truth is that you can't put ERP adapters, UI components, canned reports, and business rules into a box, call it an "analytic application," and expect us to think that it will solve all our marketing, supply chain management, and e-business problems without breaking a sweat. In fact, when we hear the words "turn-key" or "out of the box," we get very, very nervous.

Let's face it: A lot of us deployed so-called packaged CRM solutions at the height of the dot-com craze. We were so desperate to stay "competitive" that quick deployment superceded business value and ROI, even at some bigger companies. Now, we're spending a fortune on application integration infrastructure because those solutions changed into stovepipes overnight, like Cinderella's carriage into a pumpkin. Some of us are even saying to heck with it and farming the whole process out to managed services providers such as DigiMine Inc.

The enterprise application vendors — SAP AG, Siebel Systems Inc., and PeopleSoft Inc. — understand all this. They're busily integrating (although we always take that word with a grain of salt) analytics into their suites because they already "own" our operational data. They know that your foray into analytic applications is faltering because, despite your marketing messages, IT still needs to be heavily involved. So why should we add another strand to the spaghetti?

## What We Need

If you really want to help us, here's what you can do: Make your technology even more powerful, extensible, and easy to use. Help us build communication channels to our business users so that we can build strategic applications more quickly and with less risk. Make it easier to make internal data available to partners and bring external data behind our firewalls (and do both securely). Give us a greater say in your product planning process so that the tools you eventually deliver are a better match for our real-world needs. But above all, don't make promises you can't keep.

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