



Little Rapids Corporation

Optimizing Lean Performance with Business Intelligence

By Jim Lein, November 2009

Disciples of lean manufacturing know that it takes more than eliminating waste in a process to improve production. Identifying real savings and performance improvement requires rigor, ingenuity, and progressive insight in capitalizing on the benefits of great technology. Little Rapids Corporation is committed to improving performance by 50% every time a process is reengineered. They realized their legacy business intelligence solution was not keeping pace with their innovation because you can't improve what you can't measure.

Snapshot

Little Rapids Corporation

Location: Green Bay, Wisconsin

Oracle Products

- Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition Plus
- Oracle's JD Edwards EnterpriseOne application suite

Partner: CD Group

Little Rapids Corporation is an innovative producer of disposable paper products starting out as a traditional paper-producing company over sixty years ago. Early on, the founders purchased a groundwood pulp operation in the community of Little Rapids on the banks of the Fox River south of Green Bay, Wisconsin. The founders soon divested the pulp producing operations to focus on what would become Little Rapids Corporation's hallmark — quality products, manufacturing efficiency, and superior customer service. Most providers of similar products source finished goods via global supply chains, importing and stockpiling huge inventories in anticipation of customer needs. In contrast, Little Rapids Corporation sources only the raw materials, to produce products locally. To contend with competitors' supply chains based on commodity-priced products, Little Rapids Corporation focused on lean manufacturing techniques and providing world-class customer service. Little Rapids Corporation's differentiation requires dedication to deliver real-time performance data to business and operational managers without compilation or interpretation. But when their legacy Business Intelligence (BI) solution could not intuitively and thoroughly measure the results of innovation, it was time to select and implement a BI solution platform to deliver robust dashboard analysis tools.

Capitalizing on Change

Little Rapids Corporation implemented the applications of what is now known as Oracle's JD Edwards EnterpriseOne in 1996, and has benefited from the stability resulting from Oracle's acquisition strategy in several mission critical ways.

Confident in Oracle's commitment to JD Edwards EnterpriseOne, Little Rapids Corporation upgraded to a newer version of the software in 2007 and plans to stay on the upgrade path. Peter Cyganiak is Director of IT at Little Rapids Corporation. "We have a strong lean and six sigma culture," says Cyganiak. "We've made significant investments to train over 100 associates in lean and Six Sigma methods and techniques, including me and my IT staff. We've successfully applied those techniques in our IT environment, including the new release of JD Edwards Enterprise One."

Cyganiak also wanted the company to benefit from other products in Oracle's broad portfolio. Before Oracle, JD Edwards EnterpriseOne was already renowned for its core financial management and deep industry capabilities, but the application suite lacked sustainable paths for BI solution areas. Over time, Little Rapids Corporation's legacy BI solution was not keeping pace with the demands being placed on it in striving for growth through innovation and a commitment to metrics-driven performance improvement. Now as an Oracle customer, Cyganiak had a full quiver of industry-leading BI products to optimize their performance analysis. However, Cyganiak wondered how a company of their size could address the perceived high implementation cost as well as the complexity of the products in supporting the organization.

When a Partner Must be a Mentor

Little Rapids Corporation is a privately owned company governing itself much like a public entity. The Leadership Team decided that key performance metrics were needed to run the company.

"There is a lot more to being a lean company than just the manufacturing line," says Cyganiak. "Sure, we've moved machines around but we also look to improve administrative processes in order to decrease customer response time and increase profitability. Our goal is to automate all processes, and our efforts to improve never end."

The continuous improvement culture is taken seriously by Cyganiak's productive and efficient IT staff. "We don't use a lot of consulting," comments Cyganiak. "We aim to be self-sufficient in everything we do."

Net, net—Cyganiak needed a partner that understood their data strategy and the JD Edwards source system, so that he could effectively mentor his staff to be self-sufficient and get Little Rapids Corporation up and running quickly and economically.

Cyganiak didn't immediately zero in on Oracle. "We looked at Cognos, Microsoft SharePoint, and the updated version of our legacy product. But CD Group had the BI Accelerate Solution, a key consideration that helped us make our vendor decision."

CD Group is an Oracle Certified Partner with a long history of implementing JD Edwards and related products. They leveraged many years of JD Edwards and BI experience to build a bundled Oracle Business Intelligence solution that is specifically designed to accelerate the time to value of midsize companies running JD Edwards EnterpriseOne and Oracle Business Intelligence. Key to the approach is building direct links between specific EnterpriseOne tables—such as general ledger, sales, or inventory—and Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition Plus. This approach aligned perfectly with Cyganiak's BI philosophy.

"CD Group delivered a presentation of the Oracle tool to the LRC's leadership team—mainly the president and vice-presidents of the company," comments Cyganiak. "We followed it up with another presentation to key users. That sold the Accelerate approach right there."

After the selection process was completed, the project kicked off in May of 2009. The CD Group's Accelerate solution provided exactly the data model head-start Cyganiak had envisioned. "We understand that you can get at different databases seamlessly via a data warehouse," says Cyganiak. "And we hassled back and forth about using Excel. We know we can go directly into an Excel spreadsheet and get the information. But then that breaks down the minute someone doesn't update it, or moves the spreadsheet, or adds a column. We made the decision to grab live data from JD Edwards tables using CD Group's Accelerate framework, and so far it's turned out to be a good one."

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A Journey—Not a Destination

This project approach provided Little Rapids Corporation—a midsize company—with an affordable BI product also used by some of the largest corporations in the world. All IT projects have a start date and most, an end date. But for Little Rapids Corporation, their foray into Oracle BI is a never-ending experience. And they want it that way.

Cygniak explains this philosophy. “Our first priority is a package of about 65 key daily and monthly metrics for the Leadership Team. Less than three months from project start, we’re well into that, with some up and running now.”

The future is wide open. Some uses of the BI tools have been defined. Canned dashboards will be built, ones that only the IT department will be able to change. But with the product’s ad hoc query capabilities, not all uses have been defined.

“It’s an unbelievably powerful solution,” says Cygniak. “I’ve had some sales people in my office and have been able to answer some of their questions that they couldn’t get out of our existing product. They were just astounded. They can’t believe they can get that much information.”

“The biggest point is that it’s real time information,” adds Cygniak. “We run some of the programs and calculations to maintain fast response time. Then users are actually drilling down into the real live data. People are going to want more and more. Our intention is to actually put it into the users’ hands so they can create their own dashboards and get their own answers.”

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Wrapping Things Up

This open-ended timeline does not eliminate the need to measure the value of the solution. “We have to put a dollar value on everything we do,” states Cygniak. “Remember—we’re fanatics about operating lean. We will measure the value of Oracle’s BI solution by improvements in the company’s key performance metrics. The visibility the tool provides will help us to measure things we couldn’t measure before.”

Could Little Rapids Corporation’s IT group have done this on its own, without a partner? “Sure, says Cygniak, but it wouldn’t have been as easily or as cheaply and certainly not as fast.”

“CD Group’s Accelerate option got us going quickly,” says Cygniak. “And they’re a resource we know we can always tap into. Their consultants have been fantastic. But at this point we are basically self-sufficient.”

ABOUT ORACLE ACCELERATE

Oracle Accelerate is Oracle’s approach to provide business software solutions to midsize organizations. Oracle partners deliver complete software and services packaged in rapid, low cost implementations. The keys to this approach are Oracle Business Accelerators. They allow solution providers to deliver industry-leading practices gained via more than 24,000 implementations in a low cost fixed-scope implementation

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