

EXECUTIVE BRIEF

5 reasons to modernize reporting and analytics with Infor Birst

To accelerate the value of data, many Infor® customers are moving to a hybrid cloud approach to take advantage of an on-premises investment and, at the same time, utilize cloud innovation. For example, the expansion of business processes to include edge applications requires a modern data architecture to quickly integrate and analyze data across all on-premises and cloud applications while providing centralized management, data governance, and security.

Infor industry ERP customers that have upgraded to a multi-tenant Infor CloudSuite™ already possess a modern data architecture provisioned out-of-box for immediate use of in-context analytics and role-based, industry-specific analytic dashboards. There is also an opportunity for Infor ERP customers that need to remain on-premises for the time being to gain tremendous value in leveraging Infor's modern data architecture with Infor Birst® and an analytics-first cloud strategy.

Whether combined with legacy business intelligence (BI) or modern data visualization tools, Infor Birst provides the flexibility to integrate with heterogeneous applications to support modernizing data and analytics at your own pace. Through proven Infor customer deployments that demonstrate significant value, this executive brief describes the top five reasons Infor customers should standardize on or move analytic workloads to Infor Birst.

1. Rapid rollout of industry-specific business analytics

Moving ERP or business applications to the cloud will inevitably have an impact on current reporting and analytic applications. A business application vendor is the best equipped to provide ready-to-use reporting and analytics embedded or integrated into these business applications—saving the time and money of developing it yourself.

From day one, Infor has been laser-focused on industries. An Infor solution for the dairy industry was one of the first ERP systems fully built out to manage end-to-end operations. Today, that emphasis on industry is infused into all of Infor ERPs and edge applications, and billions of dollars have been invested in adding in-depth industry knowledge to these solutions. It's clear that Infor is the best equipped to apply analytics to complex and diverse industry process data to improve operations.

With Birst, an industry-leading cloud BI and analytics platform, Infor has developed ready-to-use analytic data models and content for over twenty-four Infor CloudSuite and on-premises applications. With integrated analytics, Infor customers save tens of thousands of hours of development and gain a faster time to value. For example, Infor ERP customers have access to out-of-box, role-based dashboards to ensure every level of the organization is looking at the same numbers.

Infor understands that each organization has distinct business needs that change rapidly. Through Birst's multi-tenant architecture, virtual tenants or teams can leverage self-service capabilities to quickly customize and extend analytic models and content iteratively, without disrupting the business or impacting the governed enterprise-wide semantic layer.

When Midwest Wheel, one of the largest automotive parts distributors in the Midwest, moved from on-premises Infor SX.e to CloudSuite Distribution, the company saved a year's worth of analytics development. Infor provided pre-built data models and dashboards, helping the company automate and accelerate report creation and distribution. Additionally, with Infor's modern data architecture underpinning its CloudSuite, Midwest Wheel replaced a time-consuming, spreadsheet-driven process with real-time, governed insights.

“ I think a big advantage is being able to apply something as powerful as Birst without having to have someone spend 40 hours a week on it for a year. This just works, and you can get it right out of the box.”

STEVE MCENANY

Vice President of Marketing and Technology, Midwest Wheel

2. Pervasive analytics increase user adoption and competitive advantage

Leveraging data to make better business decisions requires insights that are easy to consume or learnings that exist within the context of a business workflow. When non-technical users have to log in to separate systems to make sense of the data to gain insights, going with gut-based decision making becomes the norm. For this reason, the business intelligence and analytics market is witnessing a shift from deploying standalone analytic applications to embedding analytics at the point of decision making.

Infor recognizes that embedding analytics into its cloud business applications not only delivers more value to customers it also enables them to improve productivity, differentiate, and compete more effectively through a modern analytics platform. Infor selected the leading cloud-based embedded analytics vendor Birst to deliver on the promise of an easy-to-use, self-service analytics experience. Today, Infor provides in-context analytics wherever business users spend most of their day—Infor applications, homepages, the Birst mobile application, or custom applications.

For example, CloudSuite customers will find analytic widgets embedded directly within a transactional screen to promote data-driven decision making. Productivity is also improved as the widget allows for further ad-hoc analysis and drill back to the individual transactions, all within a single user interface.

When Pilot Flying J, a Berkshire company and largest operator of travel centers in North America, embarked on an IT modernization program to replace 25 different IT systems with Infor CloudSuite applications, the goal was to provide all 28,000 employees easy access to real-time business performance. Infor Ming.le® now acts as the single portal its team members can use to access all Infor and third-party applications. A Birst widget embedded into the portal provides employees with an at-a-glance view of how the company is performing. By clicking on the widget, employees can open one of the first Birst dashboards developed by Pilot Flying J, which provides detailed information on sales and how sales are tracking against targets for fuel, deli, and restaurant.

Pilot Flying J's goal is for team members to spend more time with its retail guests and spend less time sifting through reports. The company rolled out Birst mobile analytics to its store, restaurant, and regional executives to make data-driven decisions, while on the retail floor where they can ensure key products are on the shelves, talk to customers, and help operations run smoothly.

3. Simplify with a full-stack modern data architecture

It's clear that digital transformation improves the customer experience, increases agility, streamlines business processes, and enables innovation—however, it also brings complexity. Digitization introduces new cloud data sources that need to be integrated with existing systems for complete visibility. For example, adding additional customer data from online channels into a single version of "customer" may require time-intensive and error-prone extraction, transformation, and load (ETL) processes.

Infor Birst was built from the ground up expressly for the cloud by technologists with strong BI pedigrees. Bearing a deep understanding that enterprise data is complicated, federated, and inconsistent, Birst developed patented automation to reduce manual processes and dramatically shorten the time to develop analytic-ready data. In a matter of days or weeks, Birst's Automatic Data Refinement can both map and model data from a wide range of data sources and create a common, governed semantic layer across all data sources.

“ Our lifeblood is the front line of the retail store. By providing our front-line workers with reporting at their fingertips, sales and customer service have improved. All our employees, including executives, look at the same numbers and make better decisions as a result. All of this value has definitely contributed to a positive ROI.”

DAVID CLOTHIER

Vice President of Finance Treasurer & Controller, CPA, Pilot Flying J

Birst distinguishes itself in the industry by offering a full-stack cloud BI solution, not merely reporting. With a single Birst Enterprise license, customers receive ETL, data warehousing, pixel-perfect reporting, interactive dashboards, smart insights, data discovery, ad-hoc query and visualization, self-service data prep, mobile access, and machine learning (ML) integration. Having a single solution with automation for BI and analytics means that IT saves time and can allocate resources to serve the business with strategic projects better.

Infor's modern data architecture underpins the Infor Birst cloud BI platform and provides a set of integrated data and application services to centralize data in the Infor Data Lake and bring new analytic, ML, and artificial intelligence (AI) applications to market faster. Business intelligence, artificial intelligence, process intelligence, performance management and governance, risk and compliance are all sourced from a single, scalable data lake, and managed through the Infor OS operating service (OS).

Built on Amazon Web Services® (AWS®), Infor OS provides a digital cloud gateway for integration, collaboration, analytics, and innovation as a service.

For example, Infor CloudSuite customers gain a trusted view of all CloudSuite application data, which can be easily extended through Infor OS to include on-premises or non-Infor data sources. This is critical for customers that are migrating to the cloud, want to build a digital gateway or simply need to move data assets to a central repository where it can be governed and re-used by other Infor OS application services, in addition to Birst.

When Miller Industries, the world leader in towing and recovery equipment, embarked on its digital transformation journey to move Infor LN on-premises to CloudSuite, CEO Will Miller spearheaded the effort to modernize analytics first. The company implemented Birst as its enterprise-wide BI and analytics standard after learning about this next-gen cloud BI platform, which integrates with a wide variety of data sources, including LN, and is the analytics standard for all Infor CloudSuites. The goal was to gain better visibility and insights from a single source of trusted data, including mobile access to that data so management could improve and accelerate decision-making yet still manage day-to-day, routine business operations.

In the future, Miller Industries will consolidate its data strategy by bringing its internal and external data into the Infor Data Lake to replace direct access to on-premises databases. The company will utilize the Infor Coleman® AI services to mine this data to anticipate future demand in its chassis program. Coleman's findings can be available in Birst's automated dashboards, providing the company with a real-time picture of its current and anticipated demand.

4. Birst delivers data as a service (DaaS) to minimize information chaos

Organizations often suffer from a 'data chasm' between centralized IT and decentralized analytic teams, resulting in dangerous analytic silos and inconsistent information. Birst delivers data as a service (DaaS) to minimize the chaos and expand the usage of data. By removing the tension between centralized and decentralized teams, Birst offers a "networked" approach whereby trusted KPIs are shared and maintained collectively across IT and the business. Balance is achieved by having IT control core components of the semantic layer while offering departments or business users the freedom of self-service to extend semantics and innovate.

A fundamental catalyst of DaaS is multi-tenancy, which supports the creation of virtual—not physical—tenants that relate to each other. This allows decentralized teams to work independently while staying networked to a central, governed data set.

“ Before using Infor Birst, it was difficult to make business decisions quickly because we had to extract the information manually. Once we had found the information, employees would have to download and analyze reports. Investing in Birst gives us the most flexible and reliable solution for every business problem we have.”

WILLIAM G. MILLER II
President and Co-CEO, Miller Industries

Different teams such as finance, customer support, operations, sales, and marketing use their virtual instances of the data to access centralized information and customize and extend for newer insights. These new insights can be shared or promoted to the body of governed data, once the value is proven. Networking expands the use of trusted data and facilitates organically grown or "crowdsourced" intelligence in an organization.

DaaS is delivered today to empower decentralized CloudSuite users to access existing data objects and data pipelines, and for sharing new data objects. Infor data engineers and modelers have often already taken the time to build and operationalize the most important Infor data assets. This includes ETL processes and subsequent augmented and extended data sets. These data sets (or objects) reside in the Infor Data Lake, which can then be consumed by Birst, and other applications to deliver new use cases.

Understanding that innovating with data is key to a company's competitive advantage, if not survival, the strategic direction for Infor is to continue focusing on building out DaaS for Infor CloudSuite customers. This frees the customer from spending time and resources to manage the complexities of data, but instead, concentrate on empowering the business to generate value from data.

When Watami Co, a leading restaurant chain and food supplier throughout Asia, moved to Infor CloudSuite to drive business standardization, it also wanted to build a modern platform for data analysis. Watami adopted Infor Birst to visualize production management data that has been standardized with the Infor multi-tenant cloud ERP solution. Birst links data residing in Infor CloudSuite and external data across the whole organization and builds dashboards that automatically collect the required data for the business.

Watami has the data to cultivate important customers and promote sales to acquire new customers, leading to increased customer lifetime value (LTV). Consumer-grade dashboards give teams immediate access to view the number of products made for each center, compared to the budget, and easily compare productivity by center and by product. Users can see the manufacturing cost and compare the theory with the actual results.

Watami can now digitize inventory management of raw materials/products at food delivery factories, eliminating the need for weekly ordering work from a catering factory purchaser. Handwritten traceability information is no longer required, and the large amount of paper printed at each factory has been reduced to nearly zero. With the COSMOS manufacturing/supply chain project, Watami achieved a cost savings of 33,600,000 yen in 2019 (\$313,136.88), and it predicts a total cost savings of 312,700,000 yen (~ \$3 million) in 2020.

5. Design methodology zeroed in on business outcomes

An executive dashboard designed for business outcomes does two key things. First of all, it creates a data-driven culture from the top-down. Then it ensures the entire organization is working off the same numbers and goals to improve business performance.

“ Every morning, we have the latest information available, and it's consistent and accurate for all users from the CEO down, designed to allow information to be viewed as it relates to their area of responsibility. With Infor Birst, we can access and analyze a long history of information for answers we need for any business question in an instant, through any device.”

WILLIAM G. MILLER II
President and Co-CEO, Miller Industries

Executives embrace well-designed dashboards because this platform greatly reduces the cognitive load or processing of information, freeing the mind to make more strategic and less tactical decisions. When top executives see value in data, it has a ripple effect, and suddenly everyone in the organization wants access to the same information through role-based dashboards.

Infor has cultivated a business-outcome design approach that applies business context to data; it helps people improve the most critical metrics in their roles. Birst Value-Based Design Methodology is being used to develop the pre-built analytics content for Infor CloudSuite customers—as well as by hundreds of organizations worldwide.

For each industry-specific CloudSuite, the design begins with the most important KPIs for executives and then identifies the subsequent metrics that drive the KPIs. These drivers, when changed in one direction or another, have the most impact on KPIs. The pre-built dashboards are flexible enough to present information in meaningful ways targeted towards several metrics that executives care about or are measured on.

Additionally, Infor CloudSuite pre-built analytic dashboards can be configured to deliver relevant or filtered information by job roles so that everyone works together to improve business performance. For example, a CFO may only access a top-level view of a dashboard to understand the value of closed contracts from the day before, while a VP of Sales may drill to a specific agreement for more details to address a sales issue.

You don't need to be an Infor CloudSuite user to take advantage of the benefits of a business outcome-focused dashboard. The Infor Birst platform is specifically designed to integrate with any application, cloud or on-premises and offers native connectivity for all Infor applications, and industry-specific data models and solution accelerators for LN, M3, S3, EAM, and Syteline.

Miller Industries recognized that data was king and that it didn't need to wait for the CloudSuite implementation to be complete before leveraging Infor Birst. Instead, the company deployed Birst to cull insights from Infor LN on-premises using value-based design methodology. The first dashboard was live within three months after the finance and information technology departments conducted meetings with individual department managers to determine the most critical data elements required to monitor activity and results.

Conclusion

Modern analytic capabilities make organizations truly data driven. And now's an optimal time for digital transformation because Infor Birst not only makes the change seamless, it's more affordable, with Infor integrations to accelerate the time to value of data.

Infor customers continue to upgrade or enhance parts of their core business application to digitize important processes better, and then analyze the results to refine strategies. This requires agility with Infor's modern data and analytics architecture, and deep industry knowledge from our product teams to apply the right analytics to each customer's most relevant and pressing needs.

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641 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10011

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250 East 96th Street, Ste. 525
Indianapolis, Indiana 46240
Phone: 888-308-6940
www.guidetechnologies.com
info@guidetechnologies.com