



## In this Issue

- 1... Prioritizing Business Intelligence Initiatives
- 3... Using Resource Files to Internationalize Your Applications
- 4... Migrating to Microsoft Office Project Server 2007
- 6... Customer Case Study: Oslers Hoskin and Harcourt LLP
- 6... Upcoming Events

## Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of Agora Insight. At Agora Consulting Partners we have a long held practice of sharing business and technical information with our customers, partners and friends. This newsletter is simply a new format for that same kind of information sharing. In each issue we will provide timely and valuable articles about each of our practice areas:

- Custom Application Development**
- Enterprise Project Management**
- Business Intelligence**

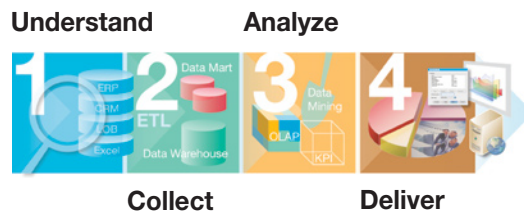
The articles will be on a mix of business and technical issues. This quarter, we have articles on Prioritizing Business Intelligence Initiatives, Migrating to Project Server 2007 and building .NET applications in a way that allows for easy internationalization. We will also include condensed customer case studies and announcements of upcoming events in each issue. For more information on any article visit our website at [www.agorainc.com](http://www.agorainc.com).

**We hope you enjoy Agora Insight and we welcome your feedback and input.**

## Prioritizing Business Intelligence Initiatives

by Craig McQueen

Business Intelligence (BI) is a key enabler for organizations to be responsive to their environments and turn masses of data into actionable insight. In order to reach the ultimate goal of monitoring all vital signs of their organization and understanding where they are heading there are many components that have to be in place. We have found that there are four key areas that an organization must assess to determine the correct focus for their BI initiatives.



### 1 Understand

To provide maximum value to an organization, BI initiatives must be undertaken with a strong knowledge of the business's goals and the user environment. Users and their sponsors need to buy in to BI initiatives. Your organization must have a commitment to fact based decision making and an environment of trust between departments. An overall understanding of the Critical Success Factors for the business is also

vitaly important. Senior Executives need to show support for BI by championing a global BI strategy and roadmap and providing training to all information workers. Senior Executives can best demonstrate their commitment by insisting that all business plans and proposals are backed up by information from corporate BI systems.

### 2 Collect

**Data Capture and Quality** - The very beginning of the data life cycle is capturing the data that will eventually be analyzed and studied. Some data, such as sales orders, is typically already captured in transactional systems. More qualitative information, such as customer satisfaction, is often captured in a more manual, less rigorous fashion such as in Word templates or emails. External information from suppliers and industry or demographic data is playing an increasingly important role in BI. Businesses need to ensure they have access to all necessary data in order to be successful in BI initiatives.

Once the data is captured, in order for business users to make informed, confident decisions

*Continued on page 2 >*



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## Prioritizing Business Intelligence Initiatives

continued from page 1

the data needs to have high integrity. This is becoming increasingly important as some industries are becoming more regulated and data is being provided as part of regulatory compliance. Data quality needs to be considered at many aspects of the data life cycle. This includes an enterprise wide data dictionary and an ongoing strategy for data profiling, cleansing and auditing.

**Data Integration and Storage** - The backbone of a BI system are the datamarts and data warehouse that brings together information from various source systems. Once they are in place there are many applications that can be built on top of them. Analysis of the source system data and understanding the relationships between the source system data is key to making a successful datamart.

### 3 Analyze

**Data Analysis** - Power business users often need to be able to analyze data in a more flexible, dynamic environment beyond reports. Data analysis tools permit them to begin with an understandable data model and slice-and-dice it enabling them to find the answers to the questions they are pursuing.

**Data Mining** - Data Mining provides an additional level of sophistication of working with the data. It enables business users to perform operations such as what-if scenarios and forecast into the future. Data mining is typically performed by dedicated business analysts who are trained in statistical methods, but newer tools are being introduced that bring this analytical power to every knowledge worker.

### 4 Deliver

**Reporting** - Reports are the baseline of applications used to support business intelligence. Reports often grow in an organic fashion within each business unit leading to inconsistent construction and duplicated effort. By having a centralized, standard reporting process, usability and quality of the reports increase. As well, the amount of effort required

to deploy the reports decreases.

**Performance Management** - BI is the foundation on which Performance Management is built. BI provides the information with which an organization can be measured and compared against its critical success factors. This is the stage at which Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are tracked and displayed and performance management methodologies such as Balanced Scorecards are utilized.

**Dashboard** - A BI dashboard brings together all the BI components into one place and combines it with additional business context. It becomes the centralized workspace for the business user. Dashboards are usually deployed within a portal environment so that they are readily available to all knowledge workers.

In each of our BI engagements, we work with our customers to go through a comprehensive questionnaire to assess each of these areas. Although the list seems long and daunting, the good news is that most organizations already have many of the necessary pieces in place. Also, the introduction of more user friendly tools, many of which are integrated into software that organizations already own, means that putting the missing pieces in place can be achieved more easily than ever before.

**For more information, please visit our website at [www.agorainc.com/bi](http://www.agorainc.com/bi)**

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# Using Resource Files to Internationalize Your Applications

by Garry English

## Background

Resource files are utilized by computer applications to display culture and language specific data. The data contained in resource files can be of any non-executable source, for instance, strings, images, and binary data.

There are many benefits of utilizing resource files. With them you can:

- Modify the resource data without having to recompile your application
- Release new culture-specific resource files without having to recompile your application
- Eliminate the programming complexity for supporting multiple cultures
- Reduce the size of the main executable since the resources are stored in a separate file
- Reduce your application's memory usage since the resources aren't loaded into memory with the main executable

## Resources in the .Net Framework

The .Net Framework uses a hub and spoke model for working with resource files. The hub is the main assembly that contains the application's default culture. The spokes are the culture specific satellite assemblies that contain the resources for the specific culture.

When a resource cannot be located in the spoke, the .Net runtime falls back to the hub.

Visual Studio .Net makes the process of creating resource satellite assemblies simple for the developer. It has a built in resource editor that allows the developer to modify resource files.

When compiling an application within Visual Studio that contains resources files, Visual Studio will automatically compile the resource file into a satellite assembly.

For more technical detail we have provided reference links at the end of this article for more information.

## Challenges

Even though resource files have simplified application internationalization enormously, they have also introduced new challenges.

The main challenge with working with resource files is having them translated. In a preproduction scenario, the developer would send the resources files to a translator. Translation can require a significant amount time, and during this time, the development version of the resource files will most likely be modified. When the translator delivers the translated version of the resource files, the developer would have to manually merge the resource files together. This is a costly and time consuming process.

In a postproduction scenario, often the client would like to modify the application's resources. Perhaps they would like to rephrase a sentence, change an image, or even introduce an entire new culture. This is all possible with resource files, however most clients do not have the means to perform these tasks. The client then needs to decide whether they will purchase development tools such as Visual Studio .Net or if they should contract a developer to handle the task. Either way this can be an expensive process.

## Old Solution

In the past, to address these challenges, we would store the resources in a custom Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The Excel spreadsheet contained VBScript code that would handle the merge challenge. Also by using Excel, it allowed our client to view and modify the resources without having to purchase a resource file editor.

On the development side, we created a custom tool that would convert our Excel files into resource files. These resource files were then imported into the project and compiled into satellite assemblies.

Although this solution helped improve the resource file process, there were still some

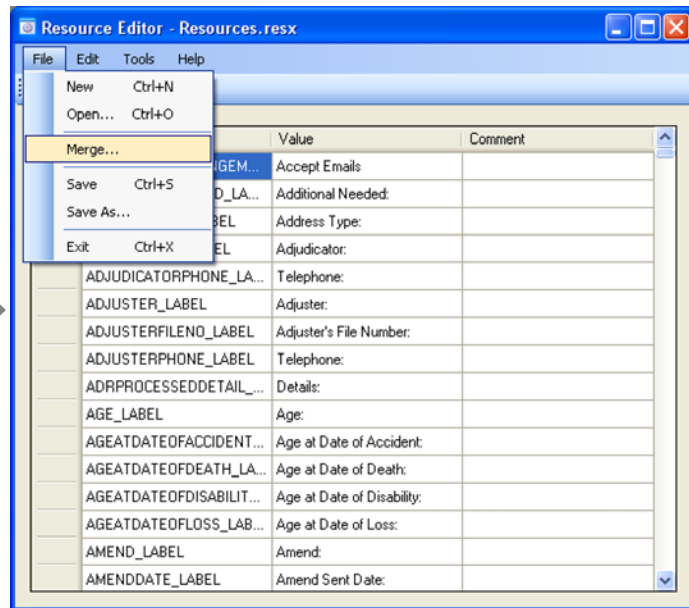


drawbacks. Storing the resources in Excel exposed additional steps in the development environment, which decreased productivity. Also, the client still didn't have the means to modify resources themselves once the application was published.

### New Solution – The Resource Editor

The Resource Editor is a comprehensive Windows application, developed by Agora that allows a user to modify any type of resource file. It also consists of several features that solve all of the above noted challenges.

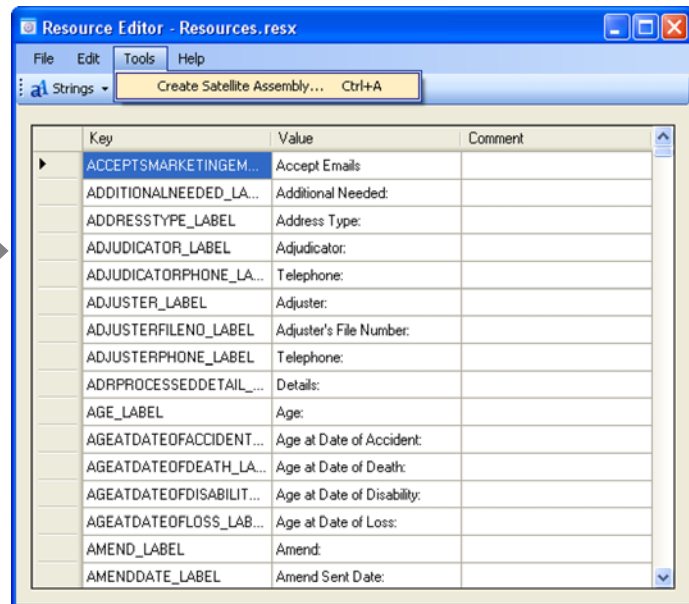
To address the merge challenge, we built a merge feature into the Resource Editor. Simply open a resource file by selecting File > Open. Then to merge another resource file into the opened resource file select File > Merge.



Merge Function in Resource Editor

The Resource Editor was primarily designed for the client. The Resource Editor allows the client to create new resource files, update existing resource files and it also generates satellite assemblies that can be deployed to their published application.

To create a satellite assembly from a resource file, simply select Tools > Create Satellite Assembly



Satellite Assembly Creation in Resource Editor

The client no longer needs to purchase expensive development tools or contract a developer for maintaining their application's resources. It can all be done using the Resource Editor.

The Resource Editor also dramatically increases the developer's productivity, because there is no need for any additional tools or steps for working with resources in the development environment. The developers can continue to use Visual Studio .Net for managing the application's resources.

### References

Resources in .Net

[http://msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/library/f45fce5x\(VS.71\).aspx](http://msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/library/f45fce5x(VS.71).aspx)

ResGen - tool for generating Resource files

[http://msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ccec7sz1\(VS.80\).aspx](http://msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ccec7sz1(VS.80).aspx)

Assembly Linker (AL) - tool for generating satellite assemblies

[http://msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/library/c405shex\(VS.71\).aspx](http://msdn2.microsoft.com/en-us/library/c405shex(VS.71).aspx)

For more information, please visit our website at [www.agorainc.com/development](http://www.agorainc.com/development)

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# Migrating to Microsoft Office Project Server 2007

by Gord Schmidt

Although migrating from Microsoft Project Server 2003 to Microsoft Office Project Server 2007 is well documented on Microsoft TechNet, there are a few items that deserve further mention.

At a high-level, the complexity of the migration increases based on the quantity of SharePoint content; and/or if a partial migration is being contemplated.

A migration always should be well planned and one of the first steps of the planning process should be doing an inventory of the current system. An inventory allows you to verify the success of the migration plus it can identify elements that need to be handled pre- or post-migration. At a minimum, an inventory should include:

1. A **list of projects** with project names, the custom project fields, the start and finish dates, the URL for the SharePoint workspace and whether the project is externally modified. (Note that for a project to be marked as externally modified the last modification must have been made by something other than MS Project. If you modify a project's custom field's value using PWA that would qualify as externally modified.)
2. A **list of resources** with resource names, Windows accounts, custom resource fields and whether the resource is externally modified.
3. A **list of PWA views** noting the grouping and filtering defined.
4. The **security objects**: groups, categories and users.
5. A detailing of the **custom development** including reports, connections with other systems, macros within MS Project, Guides, and so on.

## Revisit Security

Installing Project Server 2007 creates the standard security groups and categories but when the migration utility runs, it migrates the security settings from the 2003 database. This results in two set of security objects. You will need to merge the two sets taking into consideration your requirements and the permissions new to Project Server 2007.

## Update Views

There are a number of data elements that are not moved as part of the migration (see the Microsoft migration guide for more details), but one item that is partially moved is the views. The grouping and filtering for views must be recreated manually after the migration.

## Don't Forget!

### Client-Side Software

Don't forget to co-ordinate the deployment of the client-side software (MS Project 2007, the PWA ActiveX controls and the necessary software to access OLAP views) with your migration.

### SharePoint Workspace

If you are using a customized SharePoint Workspace template in Project Server 2003, it will not be migrated. Instead you need to customize the default 2007 template and deploy it in your new environment.

### Training

One key to a successful migration is training, particularly for Project Managers so they can take advantage of the new features in Project Server 2007.



For more information please visit our website at [www.agorainc.com/epm](http://www.agorainc.com/epm)

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## Customer Case Study

OSLER

Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP

Microsoft Office Project Portfolio Server Implementation

### Customer Profile

With 450+ lawyers in Toronto, Montréal, Calgary, Ottawa and New York, Osler provides integrated legal services with specialists in virtually every area of business law. Osler advises many of Canada's corporate leaders as well as U.S. and international clients with interests in Canada. Their breadth of legal expertise allows them to provide the kind of seamless, integrated service their clients require.

### Challenge

Osler had just completed a formal business case development and portfolio optimization exercise for its 2008 budget using a manual process and were interested in improving and automating the process with the implementation of a Portfolio Management tool.

### Approach

In early February 2008, Osler engaged Agora to implement Microsoft Office Project Portfolio Server 2007. Agora used its proven implementation methodology to guide the implementation. This methodology calls for a focused effort on People Change Management, Processes and Procedures, the Technical Configuration and Training. The engagement began with analyzing the current process and tools as well as gathering requirements for

the new solution. We worked with Osler to develop the necessary processes to support the introduction of Microsoft Office Project Portfolio Server 2007. We also completed the configuration through the use of an iterative process of gathering requirements, configuring the tool, reviewing and validating the configuration, and making any necessary revisions. After completing the configuration and knowledge transfer to Osler's PMO, training sessions were held with key users. The training sessions focused on how to use the new tool in an integrated way with the newly developed processes.

### Solution

The solution was migrated from a development environment to a production environment and is now in use at the firm. It supports the gathering of all relevant business case information as well as identifying the optimal selection of projects delivering maximized portfolio value. Multiple portfolio selection criteria such as strategic value, financials and risk are used in the various analyses.

### Impact

The introduction of Microsoft Office Project Portfolio Server 2007 along with the processes necessary to effectively use the tool has given the firm a much clearer sense of the work being done and its relative importance to the firm's success. Going forward it will make the IT budget and project review process more focused, less emotional and more strategic in its approach and results.



# Agora

Enabling your business through technology

## Upcoming Events

Look for email invitations for the following events to be held in the Fall of 2008.



### Technical Drill-down – Microsoft SQL Server 2008

The latest version of this product will be released this fall and will include significant upgrades in scalability, performance, application integration and business intelligence. Our technical architects will provide information and demos of the most interesting new features.

### Business Intelligence for Sales & Marketing

Winning organizations today are those that can target their specific customers and anticipate their needs. Information within organizations and technology innovations have made this possible today.

The highest value concepts will be illustrated through a real life implementation and additional demos.