

# VAI GIVES BERK ENTERPRISES A NEW ANALYTIC VIEW

August 19th, 2014 • IT Jungle • Alex Woodie

Berk Enterprises, an Ohio-based distributor of paper goods and disposable cutlery, is getting good dividends with S2K Analytics, the Cognos-powered line of business intelligence tools from VAI. The folks at Berk cite the ease of use of S2K Analytics and the capability to make modifications as the biggest draw, followed closely by the polished look and feel of reports.

Berk serves a country-wide base of nearly 5,000 customers from its headquarters in Warren, located about halfway between Cleveland and Pittsburg. The company distributes a variety of food service disposables to stadiums, festivals, and other outdoor venues. It imports the merchandise from manufacturers overseas, and adds logos and other customizations for an added fee.

Since 2008, the company has been using S2K, VAI's IBM i-based suite of ERP applications. The combination of an ERP system

designed for midsize companies, a reliable IBM i server, and a big, 250,000-square foot warehouse have enabled Berk to thrive in a competitive business climate.

While the integrated ERP suite automates many aspects of the business, Berk was dissatisfied with its reporting tool. "It's very cumbersome and you have to be a programmer to use it for reports and queries," says Berk's CFO Frank Valley. "I'm the only one who can do that in the company. That doesn't help Berk much or the team if they have to rely on me at all times to build something."

About two years ago, Berk decided to switch to S2K Analytics, an OEM version of IBM's Cognos business intelligence tool that VAI introduced in 2011. While the software runs on Linux, it integrates closely with S2K running on IBM i, and features a number of pre-built reports that automatically pull data from S2K's DB2 for i database. Valley and his team felt

comfortable with S2K Analytics and didn't look at other packages.

The initial rollout of S2K Analytics targeted Berk's inventory and sales processes. While it started with canned reports, Berk needed to make some modifications to match how it calculates items like gross profit. The product's drag-and-drop HTML5 interface proved easy to use. "You still have to have a mindset to navigate and build the reports based on what the request requirement is," Valley says. "But you can do so much more easily than the other solution."

Another feature that stood out to Valley and his team was automatic emailing of sales reports. Every Monday morning, Valley or his financial analyst Katie Kramer would run the reports to let their sales team know where they stood on a month-to-date basis. With the old solution, that required a bit of work.

"It took a lot of manual work off



**Vormittag Associates, Inc.**  
A Leader in Enterprise Management Software  
[www.vai.net](http://www.vai.net)

my plate,” Kramer says. “It’s in my mailbox when I get here and it keeps the salesmen informed of their progress for the month, which they like to see.”

In addition to the automated email function, Valley likes the look and feel of the reports that S2K Analytics generates. “To me, the fact that it’s aesthetically pleasing makes it a little more user friendly to read and decipher,” he says. “It just doesn’t data-dump it where you have to have a keen eye to identify problem areas.”

Berk is still using the other IBM i-based BI tool for some functions, but it will be looking

to consolidate more analyses onto the Cognos-backed tools in the future. Valley hasn’t done an ROI analysis on S2K Analytics, but it’s proved itself invaluable in spotting discrepancies. By checking the reports on a weekly basis instead of a monthly basis, S2K Analytics helped show how a rebate was being applied in the wrong manner, which impacted the profitability metrics for a particular customer. “We were able to fix that and realize it wasn’t the customer [value metric] that was so low, it was really just an error,” Kramer says.

The software also helped Valley spot a problem with how

commissions are applied. “This may not have preserved or increase profit,” he says. “But what it did do is maintain integrity of sales commissions. The last thing want to do is under or over compensate sales representatives or brokers.”

The S2K Analytics software is currently generating static reports, but Berk’s sales people and managers may soon be doing more interactive analysis with the Report Studio. The company will soon begin training its users on that solution, which will give them drill-down capabilities.



**Vormittag Associates, Inc.**  
A Leader in Enterprise Management Software  
[www.vai.net](http://www.vai.net)