

# DATABASE

## TRENDS AND APPLICATIONS

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## Mid-market Company Improves Performance Management

**By David Lifschitz**

Gehr Enterprises is a privately held, multi-national business consisting of a group of companies, under common ownership, engaged in a variety of industries over three continents. The group is headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, with businesses engaged in manufacturing, wholesale and distribution, direct marketing, international trade and real estate.

Gehr found itself in a situation that many other mid-market entities encounter: a pressing need to better coalesce various databases in order to track, measure and evaluate key metrics and proactively manage performance. At that time, we primarily used Excel to export data from various applications. This time-consuming process involved many spreadsheets and often resulted in data that was fragmented, outdated and sub-optimal for critical decision-making.

### Requirements

Gehr researched a number of leading packages with the goal of finding a solution that fostered a dynamic, strategically and tactically connected approach for managing performance-- while still maintaining a level of user friendliness that would appeal to a non-technical staff. Additionally, we wanted a solution that leveraged our current systems, including complete integration with Excel, while providing the ability to tap into originating databases and drill-down to the most detailed level.

For example, we required the ability to view an actual line item on a given

invoice--a requirement that could not be met by a number of "big name" solutions. This requirement alone took a number of leading players out of the running, including one vendor that claimed it could achieve this with additional SQL programming if Gehr was willing to invest an additional \$10,000 into the proposal.

### Little Known Solution

An intensive search process led us to KCI Computing, a relatively unknown player with an impressive offering. We challenged KCI's holistic corporate performance solution, CONTROL, to deliver on the promise of analytic transparency and end-to-end capabilities for closed-loop performance management.

KCI proved that CONTROL could, right out-of-the-box, tap into voluminous amounts of disparate data, dynamically consolidate it, and give us the key financial and operating indicators needed--how and when we wanted them--and the insights not only around the *what* but the *why*. KCI proved beyond a reasonable doubt that they met our criteria and provided strategic value.

It was equally important for Gehr to choose a solution that included the built-in functionality for every financial management challenge--from modeling to forecasting to consolidating and reporting actuals from disparate systems to decision support. We also required information to be delivered in a familiar, readily accepted environment--in our case, Excel. We were pleased to find all of the traditional functions and capabili-

ties of Excel retained within the solution. This greatly eliminated the learning curve among our staff and helped us get up and running quickly with the solution. Plus, CONTROL offered the flexibility to keep pace with our evolving needs and provided Gehr with the best ROI.

### Implementation Benefits

Once Gehr licensed CONTROL, we implemented the solution in approximately four weeks, enabling us to trim our multi-divisional budgeting cycle from three months to three weeks, proactively analyze and continuously forecast.

### Future Plans

Gehr plans to expand its use of the application to reach a new dimension of cross-functional performance management with even more powerful "what if" scenarios so we can better address pressures from the marketplace and predict the impact of our decisions.

A performance management solution should enable you to look at your business from every conceivable perspective in near real time, do sophisticated analysis, and get it out to the people who are actually managing the business day-to-day. Ultimately, it should give you the ability to drill into any level of detail to find out what is going on behind the numbers in order to hone in and make knowledge-based decisions.

*David Lifschitz is CIO and CFO of Gehr Enterprises.*