

# DATABASE

## TRENDS AND APPLICATIONS

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## APPLICATIONS INSIGHT



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### Commercial Vendors May Embrace Open Source Reporting

Over the years, improvements in some areas of computing, such as reporting, have remained stubbornly elusive. Even today, almost every report is hard-coded by a programmer. Kind of sad when you think about it.

Commercial products, such as Crystal Reports, have been available for many years to expedite the creation of reports from application systems. However, as long as development environments like .NET or J2EE do not include a fully integrated reporting system, only a lucky minority will have access to a professional report writing environment. Consequently, most developers continue to create reports from largely custom code.

In the Microsoft development world, SQL Server Reporting Services has become a popular way of creating custom reports against data held in a SQL Server database. In the Java and open source world, a couple of projects are showing promise and increasing in popularity. JasperReports is a Java-based open source reporting engine that allows Java developers to

embed reporting into applications. JasperReports is dual license open source, meaning the intellectual property for the source code resides with a commercial company ([www.jasper-soft.com](http://www.jasper-soft.com)) that makes the product available both under open source and commercial licenses.

A more recent open source initiative is the Eclipse BIRT (Business Intelligence Reporting Tools) project, one of many Eclipse Foundation projects that leverages Eclipse technology and integrates into the Eclipse IDE. Like JasperReports, BIRT provides a non-programmatic way to build rich reports, including business graphics. It differentiates itself primarily through its association with the Eclipse framework and the Eclipse Foundation.

The Eclipse framework confers significant advantages to the BIRT project, since it provides many of the components and services required by the reporting engine. The Eclipse framework also provides established rich client UI controls. Eclipse also offers a very “business-friendly” open source model that allows companies to embed its technology into commercial offer-

ings without violating the open source license.

Actuate, a commercial BI and reporting tools vendor, is one of the key participants in the BIRT project. Its participation in the BIRT project reflects an increasing realization by many commercial software vendors that no matter how uncertain the business model for open source is, directly competing with it is even more risky. Actuate believes that open source solutions, such as JasperReports and BIRT, are going to succeed over time and that its best bet is to provide value-added services on top of the open source stack with commercial add-ons to BIRT (report schedulers, for instance) and by providing support and consulting services around BIRT. Time will tell if business strategies like Actuate’s are viable in the long term. But certainly, if you can’t beat ‘em...

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