

already, a proprietary SQL system with a reporting tool.

But answering management's questions with qualified information usually meant asking experienced developers to code new custom reports. The casino needed something else.

"Silverstar understood that the cost of BI isn't always in the licence or the direct upfront costs," says Kevin van der Merwe, MicroStrategy account manager, "but the resources needed to run the system."

By September 2008, Langa invited solution providers to show Silverstar what they could do. Each would do a demo or small Proof-of-Concept (POC). Silverstar was a startup, needed more BI for the same buck, and needed to reduce its IT overhead.

Complex reports

With its existing system, Silverstar had to pull data out of BI, then put it into a separate mapping tool, to get a full set of reports about its customers. So it was key for Silverstar to get GIS (Geographic Information System) integration in its new BI solution, says Van der Merwe.

"We're well integrated with a GIS tool called Visual Crossing," continues Van der Merwe. "With that you look at data on a grid, or a graph, or as a GIS map."

Langa says MicroStrategy caught Silverstar's eye for other reasons as well.

"The self-service component on a platform should allow a user to log on for their daily tasks like reporting. It should be easy to use, and easy to scale to other users in terms of training. With MicroStrategy's self-service component, users can create reports easily on a drag-and-drop web interface,

without needing desktop software installed."

Silverstar needed to combine several sources of information for its BI reports, add ad hoc data sources and run complex reports across the whole lot without waiting hours for the results.

"We source data from our gaming system, from property management for hotel stays and so on, and from the Point-of-Sale (POS) system for the gaming floor and restaurants," says Langa.

The underlying technology in the MicroStrategy solution met this need.

ment. We can analyse which parts of the database get hit often, and then pull that out of the warehouse and put it into in-memory. But if what you are looking for in an ad hoc analysis is outside of this 'in-memory cube', MicroStrategy will fetch what's in the cube, fetch the rest in the warehouse and then join these dynamically."

Promo post-mortem

Silverstar implemented MicroStrategy in a deep rather than a wide fashion.

"We started with revenue-generating departments: tables and slots," says Langa.

and summarised reports, dashboards and colours. They want to look at the results from the top down, and then drill down in areas of interest.

"Operations want to know the details that made up those results.

"The baseline we created caters for both worlds: senior management and operations management. Then there is a gap between the two. To address this, we and MicroStrategy train managers to create their own reports and dashboards, then customise and enhance them, using the self-service component.

"Now, before we run a promotion, before we plan a strategy, we have the information we need to qualify that. Once you've thrown an investment at a promotion, you anticipate certain revenue out of it. We can put a promotion post-mortem together, qualify it, look at what went well, what didn't and what can improve. A typical post-mortem will take less than an hour, using three months' revenue data, visitor data, and data on who took up the offer."

With its MicroStrategy BI implementation, Silverstar Casino has given its managers the freedom to create their own ad hoc reports, without having to ask a developer to do it for them. Silverstar is slowly adopting iPhones and iPads for executive reports and dashboards. Using Facebook information will happen, but first they will source various forms of customer data to get a consolidated view of customer worth. Says Langa: "Then we will know what the customer is spending at this property, versus what we are spending on him." ■

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STANLEY LANGA, SILVERSTAR CASINO

Adds Van der Merwe: "If data is not structured the way you want it, you can create metrics on the fly. Let's say the data is in months, but you want rolling weeks instead. If you have the weeks available, you can create your own new rolling week metric. You can create reports as needed. MicroStrategy is not a cube technology where we extract the data, then put it into a structured cube. This is RO-LAP technology, or Relational Online Analytical Processing. If the source exists in the data warehouse, you can query it.

"We use in-memory technology for performance enhance-

"With slots and tables information, you're able to assist marketing to drive business with qualified effort.

"With MicroStrategy's consulting, we created a baseline for reporting for tables, slots and marketing – the minimum reports required for operations. Then we handed it over to the users. Users can share reports on the self-service component. They can modify and enhance the reports: put in our logo, put in a pie chart, or source other information from external sources.

"Senior management think in pictures, rounded numbers