

Cognos is the right fit for Hobbs

Hobbs has transformed its financial and management culture over the last few years, using business intelligence (BI) software for budgeting, forecasting and planning functions.

An initial management buyout (MBO) at Hobbs in 2002 first highlighted the limitations of the Spreadsheets planning application the High Street retailer was then using; not only in its ability to produce consistent, accurate numbers, but in the lack of scenario planning and forecasting functionality required by the due diligence process.

With a second management buyout looming in 2004 Mike Trotman, Hobbs' then finance director felt that the existing Spreadsheets planning application took a simplistic approach to assumptions on variables such as overhead allocations and did not reflect the newly created departmental structure.

Having examined the market to find the right combination of software functionality, consultancy advice and project support, Inca was chosen to provide Cognos Planning. Trotman said: "The ability to apply a strict audit trail to all adjustments in Cognos provided



Hobbs with a level of transparency that would have been impossible to achieve using Spreadsheets."

In 2007 Hobbs wanted to see how the BI software could work within the operational business. Trotman, having successfully implemented the system, moved

on to another project for a different business, and the task fell to Will Dresner, group financial controller at Hobbs, to further the planning and forecasting requirements of the business. "We still wanted to be able to conduct what-if scenarios, but in a more simplistic operational form," he said.

The model rebuild was used to prepare the budget in January 2008 for the following financial year and integrated with its accounting software from Sun Accounts so information is regularly passed between both systems.

Hobbs now uses Cognos to run quarterly re-forecasts and Dresner noted: "There are a lot less errors in the budgeting and forecasting process now. Having used Spreadsheets for the process it was a nightmare re-checking the data; with Cognos we haven't actually seen any errors." Another benefit of the Cognos model rebuild has been keenly felt by Dresner: "We now have more time to analyse our data and take actions – this was a key issue for us, and the opportunity to slice and dice in Cognos is now fantastic."