



## Business Objects XI Release 2: A New Riff on Ease of Use

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As companies try to expand deployment of Business Intelligence (BI) to very large user communities, software selections are increasingly coming down to ease of use. To address this growing concern, **Business Objects' XI Release 2** will include a new feature, *Intelligent Question*, aimed at simplifying and streamlining the casual BI user experience.

**The Bottom Line:** By investing in easier to use products, Business Objects is betting that expanding users within existing and/or new clients will require a new metaphor for BI, not just more functionality and capability crammed into a single product.

**What It Means:** We've written a lot in the last 12 months about ease of use and its power to sway software selections. In his recent *Above the Noise* column ("Innovative IT and The New Economy"), Tony Friscia, AMR Research president and CEO, stressed that company demands for easy-to-use products are steering the software market, not technology enhancements pushed by suppliers. In November 2004, we also wrote "Functionality Is Dead," with the takeaway being that ease of use trumps features and functionality more often than not.

And if its new release is any indication, Business Objects seems to agree. Based on the company's well-established semantic layer, *Intelligent Question* allows users to ask simple, yet extremely practical questions, such as "Who are my top customers?" or "Which are my most profitable stores year over year, and which have the best sales increases in the same period?" and receive the answers quickly through a simple interface. The product also includes sections for favorite and/or recently asked questions, which reflects the way we naturally think and behave. The data can then be displayed in a simple table or pushed to **Microsoft Excel**. The simple interface should appeal to the super casual BI user, but Business Objects will have to remain vigilant. Our expectation is that customers will like *Intelligent Question* so much that they'll pressure the company to extend it to include bells and whistles that overlap with *Web Intelligence*. **The Takeaway:** *Intelligent Question* is a great start toward expanding interactive BI to the masses.

The product release also delivers comparable Microsoft *Windows* client functionality to traditional Business Objects users. That segment of the customer base now has one less barrier to upgrade to the XI platform. We expect the product to be generally available in mid-4Q05.

**Conclusion:** The Business Objects XI Release 2's *Intelligent Question* should draw in the casual BI user and increase the presence of the XI stack within its customers' deployments. As we've stated many times before, ease of use is often vital in product selection and adoption. Those vendors like Business Objects that are ready to take advantage of this perspective will likely see their penetration in new and existing accounts increase.