

## Beyond Query/400 – Knowing Your Audience



**Jackie Jansen**

**S**o you are still using Query/400 but think that it might be time to look around and evaluate other options?

As IT professionals, have you considered that using Query/400 directly accessing your production data might not be the best interface for our PC savvy end users?

If you were considering a move to a more productive, user friendly solution you need first to evaluate your primary audience. This article will investigate the different types of users and their respective requirements. In the next issue we will delve into more detail on the actual technical differences that you may encounter between various reporting solutions on the market. Surprisingly though, I would like to suggest that you don't take my list of technical features and create yourself a nice comparison checklist. All too often IT departments evaluate query tools based on their in-depth technical capabilities. When they do this they often forget who the main users will be and what functionality they actually require. IT departments are often smart enough to include end user representation on the evaluation team. This is a great idea but too frequently the end users chosen are the power users who are not representative of the majority of the audience you plan on deploying your solution to.

Your end user community will probably consist of some very non technical users, some business analysts who are usually more technically inclined, your power users and finally IT itself. What you may not give enough consideration to, is in which group the majority of your end users will lie.


Be aware that if you use a very technical checklist to compare various reporting solutions you may end up selecting the most technically complete, and potentially most complex, solution on the market. This may not be what you are looking for and is probably not a good start to your new reporting project. Having power users on your evaluation team is good but if your intent is to implement a solution that will allow the sales reps in the field to keep up-to-date with what their customers are purchasing, you should have some average, probably non-technical, sales reps on your evaluation team.

Different groups have different requirements. Be careful not to overlook the simple, less technical requirements that the majority of your end users may have.

If you are interested in an analytical solution that will be deployed to your management community then you are probably looking at an interactive tool that supports dashboards, pinboards and other graphical representations. In these environments you will often have a power user supporting the executives who should be able to create their own interactive queries.

Another group of users that are often a little different and deserve some individual recognition are the users in the finance or accounting departments. Finance departments often have their own power users and they typically want Excel as their main front end interface. If you are looking for a system to deploy to your external sales reps they will have some very

different requirements from either finance or your executive. One major consideration will be the type of disconnected capabilities these users require. Do you need to be able to automatically email a PDF report or Excel spreadsheet to your sales reps? Do they need to be able to interact with the data when they are off-line? Some query tools have PC versions with the same interface as the System i solution. With these tools you might consider deploying a subset of the data to the business user's laptop. There are some products on the market that support "active reports". These are reports that allow a disconnected user fairly detailed interaction similar to their capabilities when they are connected. This may require sending fairly large amounts of data to the end user's PC to simulate access to the server. If the end users will be accessing their reports through the internet will their reports be scheduled and run ahead of time or will they be run on demand? How much modification and filtering of report data do you want to allow a sales rep? In many companies the reports designed for sales reps are static reports. This is different from the analytical queries that the power users and executives will be using.

Although you may not want to hear this, it is possible that your very different end user requirements may lead you to two different solutions in the long term. Initially, prioritize your users and their requirements and select an appropriate solution. Luckily there are many excellent System i reporting solutions on the market today. 

**Jackie Jansen** is a Senior Consulting IT Specialist. She currently works in the IBM Americas Advanced Technical Support Solutions Centre. Jackie is a frequent speaker at iSeries Technical Conferences and User Group meetings. Contact her at [jjansen@ca.ibm.com](mailto:jjansen@ca.ibm.com).

