

AXLE Studio Success Story



Metal components manufacturer's CMA no longer dancing in the dark thanks to multi-database connectivity of AXLE Studio BI software

Before discovering AXLE Studio Business Intelligence (BI) software, Stephen Clark's adventures trying to produce meaningful financial information from his Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system played out like the lyrics from Bruce Springsteen's 1985 Grammy award-winning song "*Dancing in the Dark*".

"I ain't nothin' but tired" was exactly how Clark, a Controller with \$100-million-a-year, 111-employee metal components manufacturer Firth Rixson, Inc., was feeling after spending 60 to 70 percent of his time doing Microsoft Access queries through an ODBC connection to his Visual Manufacturing ERP software.

Clark's fatigue was compounded by what he identified as "info fiefdoms" across his Rochester, NY-based facility, an operation that offers a hybrid of custom precision and regular manufacturing.

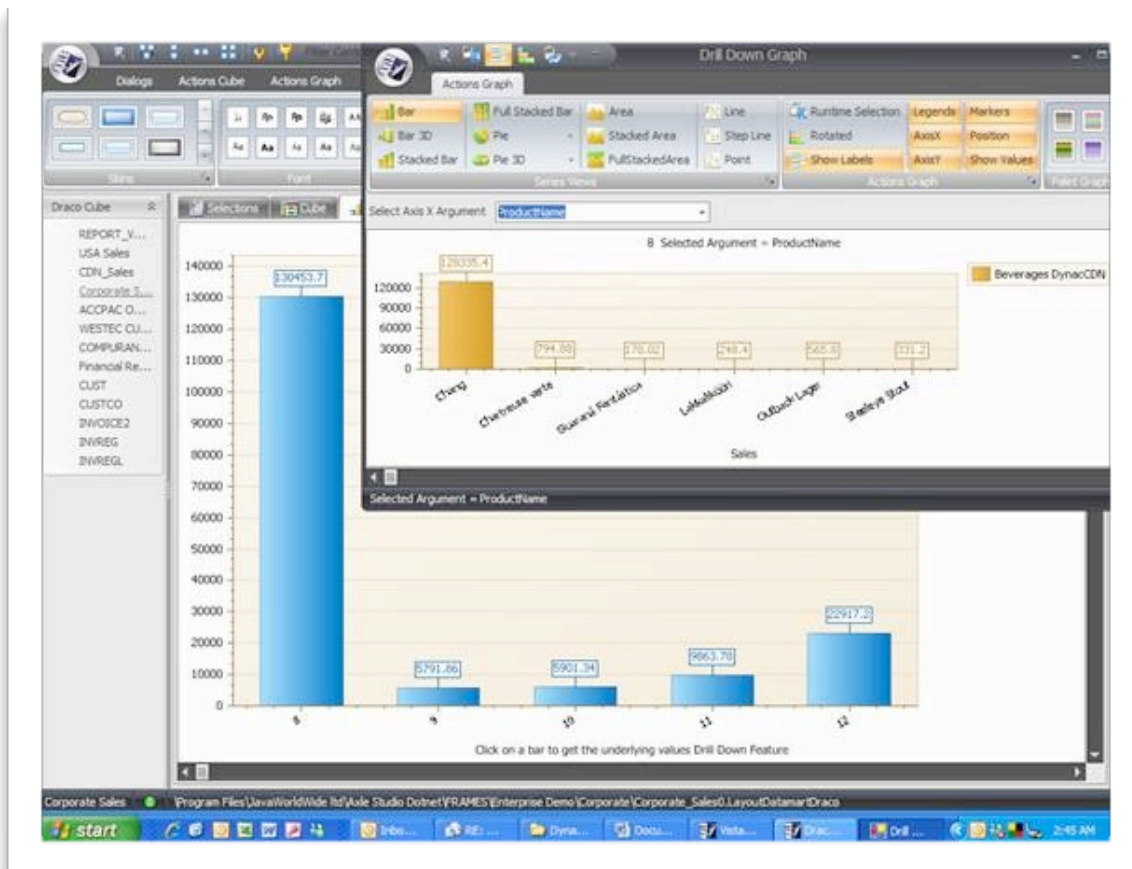
Firth Rixson fabricates engine and turbine components including rings, forgings and metal products for customers such as United Technologies Corp., General Electric Co., Pratt & Whitney Canada Corp., and Rolls-Royce Corp. from operations in Rochester, the UK and China.

"When I became Controller two years ago, I'd say we were typical of a manufacturing organi-

zation our size," says Clark, a Certified Management Accountant. "Everyone took the data law into their own hands and created their own versions of the truth. If they were good at doing their own queries and skilled at building their own spreadsheets or Crystal Reports, you had a good version, but the fact was we were managing our departments in the dark."

"Just in the finance area AXLE Studio is saving me one salary a year. When I arrived here it took me six days to close a month and now our closing cycle is down to half a day."

"There was nothing unified or clean. This is not a place where we sell pork and beans in cans. Because of the customized nature of much of what we do, we knew our margins fluctuated



AXLE Studio allows managers and analysts to have simultaneous interaction with multiple databases. No programming knowledge, dedicated server hardware or software is required

dramatically from part to part, yet we couldn't get an exact fix on what they were. I lived with not being able to get a decent financial report eight or nine months and then decided enough was enough."

In 2005, Clark hired a database developer at \$200 per hour for 10 hours to produce a rudimentary financial statement from his ERP system. This proved the data Firth Rixson needed did indeed exist.

Next, Clark needed a BI tool that his finance group — as well as teams in manufacturing and sales could use without I.T. assistance. "Our ERP vendor offered proprietary report-writing software," says Clark, "but it was both expensive and when we looked at it, very hard to master."

To find a solution, he turned to a trusted I.T. supplier, Gary MacFarlane, the Founding Partner of Kitchener, Ontario based Dynac Inc.

MacFarlane's company had successfully implemented the DynacTools suite of budgeting and reporting software applications at Firth Rixson to create a comprehensive financial reporting system. His team had earned Clark's respect with excellent support that turned raw technology into a trusted relationship delivering consistent results.

"I was looking for some kind of answer in the field of business analytics and knew I didn't have the time or money to implement something like Cognos or Business Objects that demanded a huge data warehouse project," says Clark.

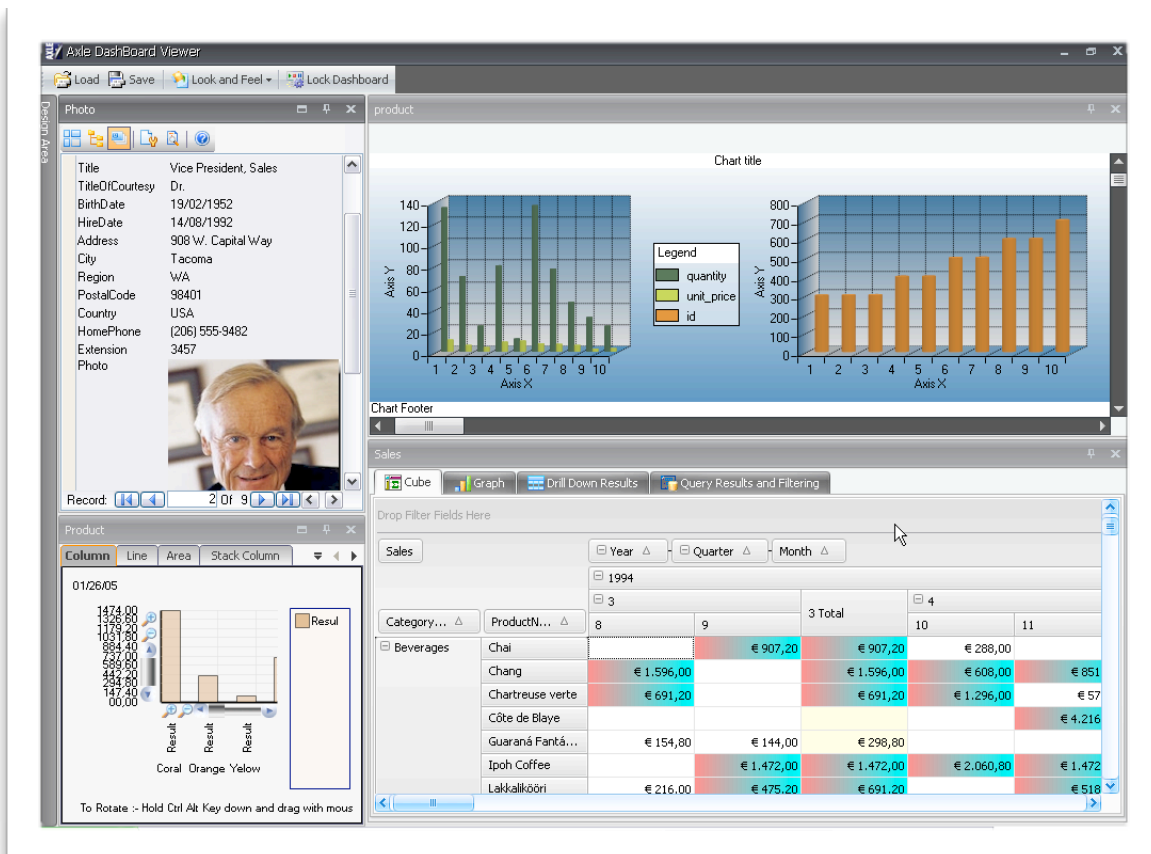
“So I was sharing my pain one day, and Gary said he was evaluating several new products. Ultimately, he advised us to try AXLE Studio, a German product that had just been introduced to the North American marketplace after several successful deployments at European companies like BMW.”

AXLE Studio offers real-time synchronization across multiple databases and/or ERP, CRM and SFA systems — a boon to companies like Firth Rixson that by necessity have operational data stored in different systems. AXLE Studio also configures to deliver end-user reports, dashboards and ad hoc multi-dimensional cube analysis for a highly competitive per seat cost of US\$1,095. No server software or dedicated hardware is required.

“What AXLE Studio offers isn’t just a nice-to-have capability,” says Clark. “Like just about

any business today we are growing and morphing and changing constantly. New products, competition, and mergers — this is the nature of business, so you have to think and move on your feet. Today’s analysis report isn’t going to cut it tomorrow. You need software that can adapt to the changing environment and doesn’t require a multi-year cost justification.”

“Just in the finance area AXLE Studio is saving me one salary a year — that alone pays for the \$48,000 on software plus associated implementation services we’ve spent so far with Dynac. But that’s just the beginning. When I arrived here it took me six days to close a month and now our closing cycle is down to half a day. I can also see all my product shipping information in one spot — one table with all shipping information, invoice number, how many units shipped et cetera and most



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important, how much money we make on each order!”

“In our sales area,” continues Clark, “our VP was an ardent Crystal Reports user. With AXLE Studio he has Sales Order information at his finger-tips that he had been struggling to get for 10 years with Crystal. He’s so pleased he threatened to send flowers to Dynac’s lead programmer!”

Clark is no longer dancing in the dark. “The days of linking tables or extracting a bad report out of our ERP and then reconfiguring it in Access and then repeating those processes over and over again are long gone, thank goodness.”

Clark explains that working with Dynac’s I.T. support team, Firth Rixson created abstraction layers on his ERP, sales and manufacturing data to combine five or six tables together from different data sources so he can create a

multi-dimensional cube in order to ask his own questions.

“I didn’t appreciate AXLE Studio until I started working with it,” says Clark. “Gary kept talking about the power of cubes. I understand now. One cube can generate an infinite array of information. I can work a report a different way. You can look at information by year by day. I’ve never been exposed to anything like this, and it’s a pretty nice change. I have added untold number of cubes in the finance area.”

While AXLE Studio’s now a permanent fixture on Clark’s toolbar and he can’t close a month-end without it, what he appreciates most about his new BI software is how he’s recaptured a significant swath of his working day. “I spend 10 to 15 percent of my time working with data as opposed to 60 to 70 percent. That time’s spent getting answers about my business versus tackling technology. At no time did I ever claim to be an I.T. guy.”

AXLE Studio licenses are permeating Firth Rixson as news of the software’s success and ease of use spreads. There are several new BI converts in finance, sales and inventory departments, with most people requiring no more than two or three days of hands-on use to get the answers they need from the company’s data.

Clark’s next objective is to get AXLE into the hands of senior management via dashboards.

“We still need to get to the point where reporting can be simplified via dashboards, so our senior people can go there and find out how much money we’re making on any given order without the need to come to the Controller for that information. AXLE can respond like a [Just-In-Time] JIT system for data, so we’re going to work with our partners at Dynac to make that happen.”