

Chris Webb's BI Blog

MDXtreme Programming!

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Profile



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Blog

28 February

RSInteract

I had a good time at the PASS European conference last week - had a few drinks, met a lot of people, and learnt a lot too. One of the sponsors of the event was a new company who have a product for Reporting Services that I hadn't heard of: <http://www.rsinteract.com/>
 What their product does is offer a user-friendly way of creating Reporting Services reports. At this point you're probably saying, hold on - isn't that what Report Builder does? Well, yes, and even though in their marketing materials they go to great lengths to say that they aren't competing with Report Builder (a great example of the 'big lie' theory applied) anyone with half a brain can see that they are. Which, of course, might be a big problem if Report Builder didn't suck... well, maybe that's harsh, but I've yet to meet anyone who actually likes it. Its big problem is its confusing UI, which is in turn linked to RB's ability to create queries which span multiple tables - it's not easy to convey table relationships, which fields it makes sense to display next to each other etc. Bob SQL Reporting Services blog has some good detail on this: <http://blogs.msdn.com/bobmeyers/default.aspx>

Having seen some demos of it - although not actually used it - RSInteract has a slick AJAX-y UI, quite smart-looking and clear, so I'd put it that down in its favour. It achieves this through not being anywhere near as ambitious as Report Builder - you can only write reports which are based on one table, view or stored procedure as I understand it. On one hand this is quite limiting, and it does push work back to the IT guys to make sure all the data you want is available in that table/view/sp, but if you genuinely do want a tool that non-technical users can use then I think that's a necessary sacrifice because it removes a lot of complexity.

One downer, at least from my point of view, is that I understand that their Analysis Services support isn't ready yet, although it's coming soon. Overall though, definitely worth checking out.

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It is possible to join tables using RSInteract so you're not restricted to just the one when building a report. However we would agree that this is not something a business user would typically do - better to get IT to work this out first in most cases. More importantly it is possible to produce "mixed" reports that draw on different data sources - so one section of an RSInteract report can be from a table or view and another from a stored procedure or SQL statement, for example. The end user interface is the same for all so it doesn't get too confusing for the business user.
 Analysis services support on its way..... will keep you posted.

Published By **Christian Smyth** - 28 February 14:22

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Configuring and Connecting Analysis Services 2005 Webcast

I still haven't watched last week's Excel 12 video, and now there's another webcast on 'configuring and connecting' AS2005 I need to watch too: <http://www.microsoft.com/events/EventDetails.aspx?CMTY5vcSource=MSCOMMedia8&Params=%7eCMTYData5vcParams%5e%7earg+Name%3d%22ID%22+Value%3d%220B827A92-2BC3-4B37-86E9-328CC64D277F%22%2f%5e%7earg+Name%3d%22ProviderID%22+Value%3d%2222410041-8480-4EDD-8B25-D25ACEA82169%22%2f%5e%7earg+Name%3d%22lang%22+Value%3d%22en%22%2f%5e%7earg+Name%3d%22cr%22+Value%3d%22US%22%2f%5e%7esParams%5e%7e%2fsParams%5e%7e%2fCMTYData5vcParams%5e>

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Excel 12 BI Video on Channel 9

Even though I'm sure many of you subscribe to the Excel 12 blog (a masterclass in how to disseminate technical information in a product's beta phase - other product teams in MS would do well to follow its example) I thought I'd relay the news that a new Excel 12 BI video is available on Channel 9: <http://channel9.msdn.com/showpost.aspx?postid=164396>
 I've not watched it yet but it should be interesting. I also noticed today that a whole bunch of introductory BI videos are available here: <http://www.microsoft.com/sql/solutions/bi/videos.aspx>
 Again, I've only fast forwarded one or two of these so I can't comment, but they're worth a look for the creepy female android voice-over alone. It made me think of 2001 and what a conversation with speech-enabled BI system might be like:

I know I've made some very poor decisions recently, but I can give you my complete assurance that my work will be back to normal. I've still got the greatest enthusiasm and confidence in the mission. And I want to help you.

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Microstrategy Can Now Generate MDX

I saw this announcement a while ago and somehow didn't blog about it, but it's an important one: Microstrategy can now generate MDX as well as SQL, and this means it can connect to OLAP servers such as Analysis Services and Essbase (at least those were the only ones mentioned - what about other platforms that support MDX? I wonder if they've been tested). See the press release here:

http://www.microstrategy.com/news/pr_system/press_release.asp?ctry=167&id=1272&CID=2435a

This can only be a good thing for the MDX language and XMLA as a standard, although from Microstrategy's point of view it's probably intended to encourage shops with a mixture of OLAP tools in place using anything other than Microstrategy (such as Office 12, perhaps?) as the client tool for all of them.

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MDX Solutions Sample Chapter

You can now download chapter one of the second edition of 'MDX Solutions' (which I'm a co-author of), along with the table of contents and the index, here: <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0471748080.html>
 The book itself is coming very soon - place your order now! Although there are several other good Analysis Services 2005 books out there now, this is the only one which covers the new MDX features and functions in depth.

UPDATE: the sample chapter has been changed to chapter 6, which is rather more meaty in terms of content. And I believe that the book is now published! George at least has a copy, and I guess I'll be getting one soon. Hurrah!

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