You’ve been here before: You walk into an important meeting, where the objective is to make a significant business decision — *Do we expand into Asia Pacific?*, for example. But there’s simply not enough hard data in the room to make an informed choice. People start arguing about their feelings and their propensities, but not about the actual facts of the business.

Yet accessing those facts isn’t an easy feat. You might have the information you need somewhere in your enterprise, but it’s locked away in a data warehouse and no one knows how to access it. You could run a query, but it would take far too long to process. It would take even longer to generate a report based on the questions you’re asking. Before you know it, your competitor has moved into the market, and you’re left behind, still trying to run reports and parse through mountains of data.

The overall market perception (which I agree with) is that business intelligence (BI) has not quite become accessible or applicable to the broader business user audience. Even today, BI is still largely confined to power users and analysts. The desire for easy-to-consume data that’s broadly available in an intuitive fashion for business users goes unrequited. In most organizations, this need is much, much broader than what a BI analyst team can support by crunching, reporting, and publishing data to a dashboard.

That is precisely the need we are filling with SAP BusinessObjects Explorer. The solution helps you get the data you need out of the data warehouse and into the decision-making room. It lets casual business users, who would never have used a BI tool before, effectively view large information sets and make informed decisions based on them. And there’s no training manual necessary.

You Can Incorporate and Analyze Data from Any Source, Not Just SAP NetWeaver BW

Think of SAP BusinessObjects Explorer as a tight-knit family of components, including an intuitive user interface and the in-memory capabilities of SAP NetWeaver Business Warehouse Accelerator (SAP NetWeaver BW Accelerator). We’re enhancing and delivering the connections between these components in waves — and in late 2009, we rolled out an exciting, game-changing development: Whereas previous versions of SAP BusinessObjects Explorer required customers to use SAP NetWeaver Business Warehouse (SAP NetWeaver BW) as their data warehouse of record, we’ve now opened up SAP BusinessObjects Explorer to any data, anywhere, and in any shape or size. Users can directly access and accelerate non-SAP sources of information — a Teradata, IBM DB2, or Oracle data source on the back end, for instance, or even information from an application like PeopleSoft — as efficiently as they could an SAP NetWeaver BW data source. Now, with access to all enterprise data, not just BW data, users can truly get a 360-degree view of their business. (See sidebar at the end of this article for a detailed look at our wave rollouts.)

The Customer Experience Is Unmatched

SAP BusinessObjects Explorer is not some random science experiment — real customers are getting meaningful insight into their business on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis. Users are learning things about their data and, more importantly, about their business that they previously didn’t know. Customers say the results literally leap out of the page.

One company said it was able to load 83 million records into the solution and access it with sub-second response times. Then, a week later, the same company loaded in almost 300 million more records and got the very same response times. In the following article, my colleague Jeff Veis will delve more deeply into how customers in four specific industries —
health care, insurance, consumer products, and services — can use the SAP BusinessObjects Explorer tool to exploit their data.

**How Does SAP BusinessObjects Explorer Fit into the Bigger BI Picture?**

Customers commonly ask how SAP BusinessObjects Explorer relates to the rest of the tools in the SAP BusinessObjects portfolio. It’s really a matter of having the right tool for the right job.

SAP BusinessObjects Explorer is geared toward casual users — or even non-users — of BI, giving them a lot more interactivity around their data so that they can search and explore effectively. Analysts can use the product and appreciate it, but the broader use case involves the line of business managers and executives who don’t want to go back to IT for answers to straightforward questions about their business.

That said, SAP BusinessObjects Explorer sits on the same platform as other BI tools in the SAP BusinessObjects portfolio, including SAP BusinessObjects Voyager for OLAP analysis, SAP BusinessObjects Web Intelligence for ad hoc reporting, Xcelsius for dashboards, and Crystal Reports for production reporting (see Figure 1). SAP BusinessObjects Explorer is designed to complement the existing platform rather than sit wholly outside of it. The tool is an essential part of the DNA of how SAP is moving forward with BI — getting large information sets organized in an easy-to-search, easy-to-navigate fashion for any user.

**Getting Started with SAP BusinessObjects Explorer: What Should You Do Next?**

It all depends on where you are in your SAP software life cycle:

- **If you currently use SAP NetWeaver BW as your underlying data warehouse**, you’ll need to make sure you’re on SAP NetWeaver BW 7.0, enhancement package 1 (it’s a prerequisite). Based on what we’ve learned from experience with our pilot customers, the challenge of SAP BusinessObjects Explorer lies not in implementing the product itself or connecting the accelerating technology, but rather in the data source. If you want to take full advantage of the ongoing investments we’re making in SAP NetWeaver BW Accelerator and SAP BusinessObjects Explorer, then you will want to upgrade to the most recent version of SAP NetWeaver BW.

You may see information on SAP BusinessObjects Explorer that discusses two variants of the product: an **accelerated version** and a **universe version**.

- **When you hear about an accelerated version** of Explorer, think SAP BusinessObjects Explorer plus the in-memory accelerator. This accelerated version can process hundreds of millions of data records in seconds.
- **The universe version** connects directly into BusinessObjects universes, a suitable option for mid-market customers with a few million data records.

For SAP BusinessObjects Explorer, it’s no longer just about SAP NetWeaver BW data; it’s about data of any size, source, and shape.

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**FIGURE 1** Generally speaking, customers can categorize SAP BusinessObjects tools into the use cases depicted above. That said, discussions around which BI tool is right for each business purpose are unique to each company. Readers should contact their SAP account teams to have a deeper discussion around which tools are right for them.
The Waves of SAP BusinessObjects Explorer

To fully appreciate SAP BusinessObjects Explorer from a technical standpoint, it’s important to understand how the solution has evolved. We’ve rolled out the solution’s components — and the various connections between them — in a series of waves (see figure below).

In Wave 0, Explorer connected directly to a BusinessObjects universe, which can effectively handle two to three million records, typically for mid-market customers.

In Wave 1, we saw customers with a lot more data — hundreds of millions, even billions, of records — who wanted to view their data in a similar fashion. So we took the universe-based Wave 0 offering and tied it directly to the in-memory capabilities of SAP NetWeaver BW Accelerator, creating a level of linear scalability that wasn’t necessarily possible through universes. This version required customers to use SAP NetWeaver BW as their data warehouse of record to accelerate and explore.

At the end of 2009, we announced our Wave 2 enhancements. We still leverage the powerful combination of SAP BusinessObjects Explorer and SAP NetWeaver BW Accelerator, but now customers can go after data of any shape and size. Users can directly access and accelerate non-SAP sources of information — a DB2 data source in the back end, for example, or even information from an application like PeopleSoft — as efficiently as they could an SAP NetWeaver BW data source. SAP NetWeaver BW Accelerator truly becomes SAP BusinessObjects Accelerator. And I’m pleased to report that every one of our customers from Wave 1 is in the process of joining us for Wave 2.

Moving forward, we can easily see this acceleration being packaged not just for large enterprises, but for a mid-market audience as well. In Wave 3, we’ll be building an appliance offering for these mid-market and departmental audiences while accelerating all of our BI clients, not just Explorer. (Yes, 2010 will be a busy year!)

### Wave 0 (2008)
- User Interface
- User Interface
- Explorer basic version

### Wave 1 (May 2009)
- User Interface
- SAP NetWeaver BW Accelerator
- SAP NetWeaver BW
- Explorer accelerated version

### Wave 2 (Q4 2009)
- User Interface
- SAP BusinessObjects Accelerator
- SAP NetWeaver BW
- Explorer open accelerated version

### Wave 3 (2010)
- User Interface
- SAP BusinessObjects Accelerator
- SAP BusinessObjects Accelerator
- Data Services
- Any Source
- Explorer appliance version

If you don’t currently use SAP NetWeaver BW — or if you have a lot of information outside of SAP NetWeaver BW that you’d like to accelerate — I recommend that you look into our SAP BusinessObjects Data Services product. Using SAP BusinessObjects Data Services, you can take advantage of any existing connectors that Data Services supports (it currently supports about 150 information sources). And in release 3.2, SAP BusinessObjects Data Services can create the in-memory index for SAP BusinessObjects Explorer directly. What does this mean for customers? Information can come in from any source — including non-SAP, non-BW, and third-party sources — and then go directly into SAP BusinessObjects Explorer’s in-memory accelerator.

Whether or not you use SAP NetWeaver BW, you’ll need to ensure that your hardware landscape is set up appropriately. We have recommendations about what the accelerated Explorer hardware profile should look like. To get the best possible performance results for your business, I’d advise you to work with your SAP account team, choose a preferred hardware partner, and bring in technology that’s sized to your data needs.

Democratizing Access to Business Intelligence

So is business intelligence ready for the masses? We believe that SAP BusinessObjects Explorer is a momentous step in the right direction. If you have not already done so, come explore the possibilities at [http://goexplore.ondemand.com](http://goexplore.ondemand.com).