

Take control of IBM Cognos with a few mouse-clicks

Rapid deployment and streamlined administration of an IBM Cognos environment with NewIntelligence ICI



Executive summary

Thousands of organizations around the world rely on IBM® Cognos® solutions to turn raw data into valuable decision-making insight – but deploying and maintaining a Cognos environment can be challenging without ICI.

Whether your business already uses Cognos or is planning a new implementation, the NewIntelligence ICI solution can reduce most Cognos maintenance and administration tasks to a matter of a few mouse-clicks.

NewIntelligence clients are already benefiting from complimentary access to this unique solution, which is bundled in their services offering. ICI helps to accelerate their Cognos implementations, cut administrative time and costs, reduce reliance on skilled technical staff, and put more power in the hands of their business users.

Introduction

IBM Cognos solutions are powerful tools for any organization that needs to deliver timely insight to its decision-makers and create accurate, detailed plans and forecasts.

However, while these Cognos solutions are generally owned and used by line-of-business, deploying and maintaining them still requires a considerable degree of technical skill.

Even relatively routine tasks (such as user administration, license management, and SQL job automation) can be a headache for business users – forcing them to rely on help from the IT department, rather than taking control for themselves.

NewIntelligence recognized its clients' appetite for a solution that would facilitate administration and provide a user-friendly control panel to simplify Cognos management.

Working closely with one of its existing clients, the company developed ICI, a solution that has now become part of its standard offering for any organization that uses or plans to deploy Cognos.



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Capabilities of the ICI solution

ICI's capabilities come in two categories: core features, which are available for all clients out of the box; and custom features, which NewIntelligence can configure or develop for individual clients, depending on their unique requirements.

Core features

License management and compliance

A simple graphical interface within ICI helps Cognos administrators solve a common issue: understanding how many licenses they have for each different license type, and how those licenses are assigned.

Using an intuitive “traffic-light” visualization, the license management interface highlights potential issues for easy identification and resolution. For example, a red light indicates that the number of users exceeds the number of licenses. Administrators can instantly click through to a full list of users (derived from Active Directory), and decide whether some users should be removed, or if additional licenses are needed to maintain compliance.

Staging and table synchronization

To give Cognos users access to the reports and analyses they need, live data from production ERP systems and other databases must be regularly replicated to a staging environment, before it can be loaded into the data warehouse and analyzed in Cognos.

In addition to these staging environments, most Cognos landscapes also include separate environments for production and testing/development. Database tables often need to be replicated from one environment to another.

The task of synchronizing tables between environments traditionally depends on the skills of database administrators – but ICI puts this ability in the hands of business users. Business-as-usual synchronizations can be performed instantly, simply by selecting the required tables and environments, and clicking to synchronize them.

ICI even supports incremental synchronization, which means it only replicates the data elements that have changed since the previous synchronization, instead of copying the entire table each time. This can cut reload times significantly – in some cases, from more than 120 minutes to less than five.

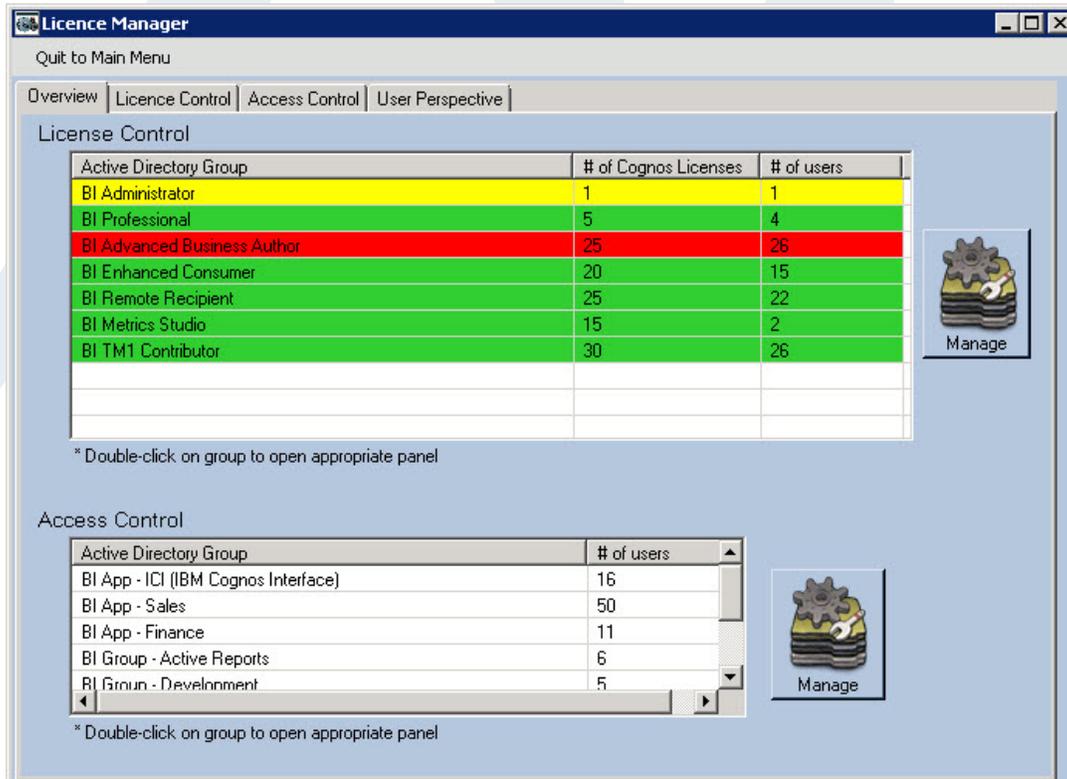


Figure 1: ICI License management window

Access management, security and auditing

The powers that ICI can grant to users are extensive, but they are also tightly controlled. A highly granular approach to user management allows administrators to limit access to specific areas of the Cognos environment (such as access to applications, folders and reports), and to control permissions for certain ICI features and functionality.

For example, a member of the company's finance team might only be given access to some finance-specific Cognos applications, while a member of the IT or Analytics team might be allowed to use both Cognos and ICI to their full potential.

The solution also keeps a full log of every action taken by every user within the ICI environment, providing a search-and-filterable audit trail that helps to track down problems and makes it easier to satisfy auditors and regulators.

SQL automation

SQL jobs are a cornerstone of managing any Cognos or data warehousing environment, but many users are uncomfortable with SQL and lack the confidence to run jobs for themselves.

ICI allows companies to create a custom library of common SQL jobs, and specify which groups of users may access them.

The authorized users can then run the jobs at the touch of a button, without any need for specialist technical knowledge. This push-button approach reduces the need for training and empowers business users to take greater control of the Cognos environment, without waiting for help from IT.

Report bursting

Cognos' report bursting capabilities are very powerful, but managing and updating all the groups and recipients within Cognos itself can be a time-consuming, manual task.

ICI integrates user information from Microsoft Active Directory to make this a much simpler exercise. Users can easily create, update or delete a distribution group. Recipients can easily be added or removed from distribution groups, and report bursts can be initiated or scheduled with a few mouse-clicks – saving time and effort, and ensuring that everyone gets the information they need, when they need it.

Custom features

The flexible, modular design of ICI means that the NewIntelligence team can quickly and easily develop new features to meet specific business requirements. In particular, custom-built master data management capabilities have helped several clients realize significant benefits – especially in terms of enriching data from ERP systems before bringing it into Cognos.

For example, if an ERP system only supports English, but the Cognos environment needs to be available in multiple languages, ICI can map the English data to translated equivalents – allowing Cognos to display information in the appropriate language for each user. Equally, if a company wants to slice data by regions or departments that the underlying ERP system does not natively support, ICI can be used to add this new metadata during the ETL process. The correct categories then become available in Cognos, without the need to make changes to the ERP system itself.

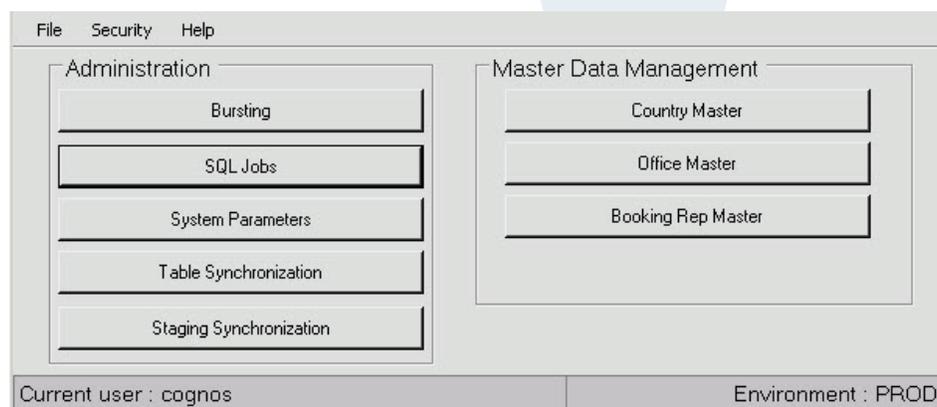


Figure 2: Main interface of ICI

Conclusion

By automating many of the manual administrative processes that surround most Cognos environments, ICI can dramatically reduce workload for IT and analytics teams, while helping business users to be self-sufficient without technical support.

The solution can also accelerate new Cognos deployments by providing a simple way to manage integration between the Cognos environment and its data sources, and set up and execute common SQL jobs and synchronization processes.

NewIntelligence provides complimentary access to the base version of ICI for all its clients, and grants each client a perpetual license for the use of any custom-developed modules that they have commissioned. Clients may request customization at a cost, but the ICI software itself is complimentary, so every enhancement it delivers will create an instant return on investment.

Case study: Stella-Jones

Stella-Jones, a leading North American manufacturer of pressure-treated wood products, was among the first clients to adopt ICI, and has been benefiting from the solution for several years. The company has been so impressed with ICI's core functionality that it has commissioned NewIntelligence to develop several custom features.

Robert Miele, IT Director, comments: "ICI gives Cognos admins all the tools they need in a single place, and turns day-to-day management into a matter of a few mouse-clicks. Even end-users with no knowledge of SQL can be empowered to perform a huge array of tasks, without support from technical specialists.

"The development of ICI is typical of NewIntelligence's approach as a partner to our business. They don't just set up Cognos and walk away – they are genuinely interested in building long-term relationships with our team and finding innovative solutions to our problems. We look forward to working with them to continue to customize our ICI toolset for the needs of our business."

About NewIntelligence

With offices in Montreal, Quebec and Toronto, Ontario, NewIntelligence is a leading provider of IBM solutions for business intelligence, performance management and data warehousing. Its experience over the past twenty years has led the company to work with several hundred unique customers.

NewIntelligence delivers solutions that are both cost-effective and delivered in a timely manner, thereby providing customers with solutions that add value to their business. The company is passionately committed to helping clients achieve rapid results from their investment in IBM Cognos solutions by using the latest technologies and industry best practices. NewIntelligence's expertise is sought out by many organizations, as the company has a reputation for delivering what they need, when they need it.

Next steps

ICI is a unique offering from NewIntelligence – the solution is not available from any other IBM Business Partner. To learn more about ICI and Cognos, or to ask for a demo, please:

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