

# Banishing Baan Finance Reporting Blues

How seasoned Baan user and Financial Consultant, Ann Hawtin has finally found *the* product to make life easier.

It's not often you come across a product that you know on first sight is going to make a difference to your life. It's even rarer that the first impression is confirmed on closer inspection. Ann Hawtin gives her take on *Essential Spreadsheet Server for Baan*.

Over the past ten years or so, my most painful experiences with the Infor Baan and ERP LN suite of products has been reporting, or rather the lack of it! I can already hear cries of 'me too' from the Baan user population out there, especially those in the world of finance.

Many costly consultancy days can be consumed during the run up to go live to create financial reports using a report writing tool, such as Safari, Crystal, Cognos or BIRT (Business Intelligence Reporting Tool). Of course, the report writer you use depends upon the version of the software you are using. I have seen implementations when the finance reports have taken several weeks to prepare, create & test and still not been ready for the crucial go live date!

The standard alternative within the Baan software is the cumbersome Financial Statements (FST) module. I have spent many a happy hour with finance users writing financial statements to produce their Profit & Loss and Balance Sheet Reports. They say 'no pain, no gain' but using this functionality is more painful than most and is extremely laborious and time consuming.

The financial reports have finally been written and are available for the users, only to find that they can't drill down to the detail behind the reports. I'm sure that you've been in this position more times than you care to remember! Here we go again – document history, ledger history, dimension history, integration transactions, sales orders, purchase orders – the list is endless and goes on & on.

## STOP PRESS!!

I have found a reporting tool that may well be the answer to all of our reporting prayers. I know it is hard to believe but, with Essential Spreadsheet Server (ESS) which is an add-on to Microsoft Excel, there is no longer any need to re-key or download data into spreadsheets. We need only basic spreadsheet knowledge of Microsoft Excel and no programming or query knowledge is necessary. It should be a doddle for any finance user that has an ounce of common sense.

Essential Spreadsheet Server converts familiar spreadsheet software into an integrated tool for financial systems. How cool is it to combine spreadsheet functions (charts, text formatting, sorting, etc.) with real-time financial information from your Baan system? Moving forward, this will be the basis for building Profit & Loss Reports, Balance Sheets and other Financial Statements.

Using ESS, I have been able to create reports quickly and easily, using either templates or cell formulae, and retrieve real-time data based on ledger account balances and/or dimension balances for a given period or range of periods. This tool is ideal for financial reporting and can be used for ledger account/dimension ranges, wildcards, value lists or segment lists. But the pure beauty of all this is that I can drill down in the spreadsheet to details of account balances and related transactions. The drill down data can be copied and pasted into spreadsheets or other documents as required. Should make the monthly/quarterly/annual reporting pack a breeze!

Have you ever been cornered by one of your peers for financial information specific to them or their department? I know that I have and then slogged my guts out to get the information to them. ESS gives you the opportunity to produce *ad hoc* reports in minutes. I would go so far as to say that you will be hoping for Mr Grumpy from the Engineering Department or Ms Snooty from Sales to ask for something really obscure so that you can show off your new found skills!

You will be able to publish executive-quality reports from your current spreadsheet software. Financial users will save time by combining reporting, account inquiry and journal inquiry into one application and, therefore, free up time for true business analysis. Corporate consolidations can be performed with instant access to real time data. Your external audit time can be reduced by allowing easier, instant access to financial data with full drill down capabilities. Spreadsheets can be printed or emailed quickly from a single, central application.

My only regret is that ESS was not available when I first started out on the Baan trail back in the 90's but the 'reporting' future is now looking rosy and bright. No more Baan Financial Statements - YiPEE!!!

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*About the Author: Ann has worked as an IT consultant for Infor and also as a Finance Business Analyst for Mondi Packaging, a division of the FTSE listed company, Anglo American. She has been involved as an end user and has helped many businesses implement Infor Baan and ERP LN.*

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