

# NEED ADVICE?

Ask the experts! We would all like to have experts on hand when we need information. This month, *Nick Southcombe* from Frontier Software outlines why the reporting function of your HR Information System is so important

## Questions?

Got a tough question to ask our panel of HR and people management experts? Send your question through to: [editor@hcamag.com](mailto:editor@hcamag.com)

**Q** *We are about to go to market for a new HR Information System. We have identified 'Reporting' as a key requirement. What should we expect from a new system?*

**A** You have correctly identified the importance of 'Reporting'. It is one thing to process the pays and manage HR data. It is quite another matter to be able to report on that data in a meaningful manner as determined by the user to understand and manage the business.

Reporting typically covers standard reports and ad hoc reports which tend to be specific to HR and payroll. There are also Business Intelligence reports which may combine and compare HR and payroll data with data from other business systems. Users should take a critical look at the full reporting suite of each HRIS under review, to determine which offering best suits their specific business needs.

Firstly, it is perfectly reasonable to expect your system to include a wide variety of standard management reports to meet the majority of any organisation's reporting requirements.

Your research should highlight those HRIS vendors laying claim to 200+ inbuilt, pre-designed standard reports within the basic system. These standard reports should also satisfy your statutory reporting requirements.

Users should be able to schedule reports to run at a pre-determined time and automatically e-mailed to nominated staff. Alternatively, users may locate reports by selection through the HRIS system itself or from an Employee/Managers Self-Service kiosk.

Secondly, an Ad hoc Report Writer should be available. Ideally, the system will have its own inbuilt report writer rather than relying on third party reporting tools. The key attribute of the report writer should be ease of use. Users should be able to design reports tailored to meet their exact requirements, in the required format, using data information selected from the database with a minimum of effort.

As an example, *chris*<sup>21</sup> (a widely accepted HR and payroll system), allows users to drag and drop data fields into the report layout and the creation of bespoke menus to suit reporting objectives. There ought to be no boundaries to the scope or number of reports one can create.

In addition to printing, it is also common practice to be able to view reports on the screen. A good reporting tool will allow reports to be exported to, and published in any word processing and spreadsheeting software. An advantage of publishing reports in Word and Excel is that a user can further manipulate them and add additional comments and information as required.

A third level of reporting may be available through the use of XML reports where users have the opportunity to export the report output into a predefined spreadsheet template. This way, data can be presented as plain spreadsheet data, a

formatted report or even as a pivot table and pivot chart.

The ability to further manipulate reports may be seen as a risk by raising concerns about security and the integrity of the report. To get around this legitimate concern, it should also be possible to publish your reports in an indelible format such as Adobe™ Acrobat's PDF format.

In this instance, the predefined template can also be in a format appealing to those seeking 'board or executive' reports through the use of colour, charts, logos and special fonts. Again, this option should be available within the basic system.

Finally, for those seeking to enter the world of Business Intelligence, the availability of reports presented in spreadsheets or XML will allow external business intelligence software such as WebFOCUS, Crystal, Impromptu and Business Objects to be utilised, allowing drill down and slice and dice analysis. Many vendors will also offer integration tools to enable direct access to HRIS data.

Reporting? It is perhaps the single most important criteria when sourcing a HR Information System. **HC**

## About the author

Nick Southcombe is general manager of Frontier Software Pty Ltd. For more information on Frontier Software and *chris*<sup>21</sup>, visit: [www.frontiersoftware.com](http://www.frontiersoftware.com)

