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## NGS-IQ™: Business Intelligence Molded for Success at Pacific Steel Casting

By MaryLynn Treadwell

Exact specifications are critical in the manufacturing of precision-engineered products at Pacific Steel Casting of Berkeley, California. The sixty-three year old company operates three separate plants for the production of shell-mold, green sand and air-set castings. Ranging in size from one ounce to seven thousand pounds, the castings undergo complex testing to ensure they meet the specifications of their customers, who are primarily in the automotive and oil industries. Pacific Steel Casting knows it is critical to these operations to have accurate, timely and readily available information from their B&L Information Systems' BLIS 400 applications.

Three years ago, the company was using IBM Query 400 and BLIS 400 for canned reports, when they realized they needed to further support their custom reporting requests with a solution that offered advanced functionality. Database Administrator Jennifer Freeman remembers that an important criterion in their evaluation process was ease of use in developing the queries and enabling users and managers to produce their own reports. Since Jen's main concern is the end-user side of the reporting process, she focused on solutions that would allow them to access and analyze the data, without compromising their BLIS 400 applications. After evaluating several products on the market, Pacific Steel Casting selected New Generation Software's *NGS-IQ*, a suite of integrated, modular applications for query and reporting, desktop multi-dimensional analysis, customized data marts and data warehouse development.

Today, Jen states they have over four hundred active *NGS-IQ* queries, several users at all three plants, and most departments using *NGS-IQ*'s client module, *Qport Access*, to seamlessly download real-time data directly to their screen or Windows applications, in particular their

Excel spreadsheets. Jen reports that most *NGS-IQ* queries are created with the run-time prompting feature, so users can select the records when they run their reports.

"By writing our own reports with *NGS-IQ*, we have cleaner data, which is readily available for our users," says Jen. "We can have a customized report or a one-time usage report, and our time is used more efficiently. Using the *Qport Access* module, our users need no query experience or training."

Jen has created *NGS-IQ* validation queries to ensure that departments have completed data entry correctly and thoroughly, so other departments have accurate information such as the shipment and completion of orders. For example, Jen explains that if shipping does not mark the order closed on the packing slips, the customer order and shop order stay open, resulting in confusion and wasted time for scheduling and shipping. Within five minutes, Jen created a *NGS-IQ* query, which allows the invoicing staff to easily catch the items that shipping did not mark as complete. The report shows which invoices need to be marked as complete to allow the BLIS 400 invoice update procedure to kick off several programs in BLIS 400 to close open shop and customer orders.

Jen especially appreciates *NGS-IQ*'s functionality in creating analytical tables, such as for calendar and fiscal year-end sales analysis. Before *NGS-IQ*, it took Jen two weeks to load several years of data into five spreadsheets; different filters then had to be used to finally get the report as it was needed. Creating a table to satisfy this analysis was the first thing Jen did when the company purchased *NGS-IQ*. As she says, "I



wanted to get back those two weeks in my life every year.” She now creates this report in a fraction of the time with four mouse clicks and fifteen keystrokes. The report is run overnight in four hours and creates five tables where users can look at the information by customer, SIC code, region, state, and casting size. Jen has also created other sales analysis tables that prompt users at run-time to plug in customer codes and see what percentage of a product is produced in which of their three plants.

Jen now saves considerable time in producing the “Heat Report.” It used to take two to three hours daily to compile information from handwritten “pouring” reports, details from materials specifications, heat treat instructions, and product master requirements into a spreadsheet that was used once a day and then discarded. *NGS-IQ* easily brought this information into a report that takes two minutes to produce. Because the data is so readily available, this report is now run at will to determine what needs to be done in that department for each casting. The user views the information in an Excel spreadsheet and can quickly determine a casting’s requirements. Jen relays, “He’s now a happy camper! Before he had to wait and wait to get this information from the lab. Now he has current information in front of his eyes within minutes.”

Another critical *NGS-IQ* report is for the Nondestructive Testing Department who need to know what is on their schedule and what is coming their way. They run this report weekly to see: operations that are scheduled; the status of castings in the completion process; castings that are postponed; castings that are past due; and which castings are required to undergo nondestructive testing. “The unique key field feature in *NGS-IQ* is essential in creating this report; without this feature, the report would be useless,” states Jen.

Jen also appreciates the conditional calculations functionality within *NGS-IQ* that allows her to substring up to thirty-two conditions on an existing or new field. Before *NGS-IQ*, she had to create “ugly-looking” queries or perform multiple passes of the data to get the report she needed.

A recent concern for Pacific Steel Casting arose when the state of California started requiring state notification for 1099 recipients when year-to-date payments total \$600 or more, or when purchase order totals amount to \$600 or more. Jen states, “When the state started requiring this notification, the people in AP nearly panicked. They were not sure how they could satisfy the state’s requirements, without taxing the BLIS 400 application to the limit.” Jen’s reply was, “No sweat. With *NGS-IQ*, this one is easy.” Jen easily produced a *NGS-IQ* query for accounting to run periodically to see if they need to send out this notification to the state of California. The user can run a report that shows which vendors to include on the report, send the correct paperwork to the state, and manually update the user-defined fields in BLIS 400 attached to the vendor master file. This report has saved considerable time that would have been spent collecting the data and making the calculations.

Pacific Steel Casting is equally satisfied with their recent purchase of *IQ SeQure*, *NGS-IQ*’s security management application, which restricts user access to the field and record level. This product was viewed as critical for the Web reporting that the company will soon implement. In addition, the Personnel Department requests Jen to create queries with a high liability if someone without authority views records of such sensitive information. *IQ SeQure* allows Jen to limit who gets to see what queries, records, and fields. Jen reports that an unexpected, added convenience is for the users, since *IQ SeQure* only allows them to see the queries they are authorized to view and/or run, thereby making it easier to find their query selection.

Jen concludes that not only has *NGS-IQ* simplified the query and reporting process, it also has passed the test in meeting Pacific Steel Casting’s precise requirements for business intelligence.



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