B&L NEWS

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New Department for B&L

Joe Harmon

Jay Wigner

**Phil Laney
B&L's President
& CEO**

B&L has formed a new department called Technology and has named Joe Harmon as Vice President – Technology to manage it. Jay Wigner, (from our Client Service group) will serve as Senior Systems Engineer. Joe has been with B&L for a decade serving as a Software Development Engineer in the R&D department. Jay has been with B&L for 6 years as a Business Consultant. Both these guys will do an outstanding job in their new roles.

Why form a new department? The speed at which our business is evolving is extraordinary. Every week, new tech products and services are available to us as an Independent Software Vendor (ISV) and to you, our clients. For example, a year ago we were all just learning about a new product from Apple called the iPad. Most of us didn't initially think this would work its way into the business sector. Fast forward 12 months and B&L is developing an app for the iPad. Additionally, we maintain a myriad of hardware and software systems both at our Bridgman, MI offices and at our South Bend, IN co-location partner site for Odyssey SaaS product delivery. The SaaS servers provide a cloud-based ERP solution to the metalcasting marketplace. SaaS customers simply access their software through a browser and they're up and running. There is no need for internal servers, networking, client-side (PC) software maintenance, backups systems, disaster recover, etc. It's all handled by B&L. And the Technology department will manage these services. So, new Odyssey product research and design and managing all B&L hardware and software systems will fall upon this new department. Prior to this group, these responsibilities were scattered about the company with no over-arching organization.

I am personally excited about this new dimension to B&L. It truly demonstrates our commitment to not only to the metalcasting marketplace, but to developing and delivering the technology-forward products and services that will meet our clients' needs now and into the future. We here at B&L are in this for the long-haul. We know this business is a marathon... not a sprint. As we evolve as a company, we need to think about where we'll be next year, 3 years, 5 years in the future. We're positioning the organization to accelerate our application of new technology to solve the pressing business issues of the metalcasting industry. Thank you Joe and Jay for laying the groundwork in this new adventure we're undertaking. ■

B&L Welcomes New Clients

Brost Foundry Company
Cleveland, OH
Odyssey

Ferroloy Foundry, Inc.
Wichita, KS
Odyssey SaaS

Custom Aluminum Foundry, Ltd.
Cambridge, ON
Odyssey SaaS

Astech Inc.
Vassar, MI
Odyssey SaaS

Rangers Die Casting Co.
Lynwood, CA
Odyssey SaaS

Pier Foundry & Pattern Shop, Inc.
St. Paul, MN
Odyssey

On The Horizon

Joe Harmon
Vice President — Technology

I am excited to be part of B&L's new Technology Department. Although I have enjoyed being a software developer for the last 10 years, I look forward to what the future holds as B&L explores new technologies and services.

The new "Intelligent Views" and "Supplier Portal" products have been released, and the "Odyssey UI" rewrite is currently underway. What's nice, besides my new title, is that I still get to have an active role in the new user interface design/programming which allows me to contribute where needed.

Going to a browser-based user interface has its challenges. I am sure we all love Apple for what they have introduced in regards to the user interface. If you have an iPad, iPhone, or iPod then you probably know what I am talking about. However, a thing you may not know is that Apple does not support Adobe Flash technology. Why is this important? It is because most of the animated and interactive charts that are present in our new browser user interface (UI) and on most websites are all done with Flash.

Well, at B&L we wanted to include all of these neat, cool, animated, and interactive charts within our new user interface even if you are running them on an Apple device. Since Apple technology relies on Javascript (HTML5) markup instead of Flash, we had to make sure that the graph and chart library we chose allowed for both technologies. Now, no matter if you are using an iPad, iPhone, or PC, you will get to see the same animated charts and graphs just as if you were running it on a desktop PC.

Software as a Service (SaaS) is picking up speed, and the technology department is responsible for keeping things running smoothly. Of course, just because you can add SaaS to your IT infrastructure is not by itself a reason to do it; there has to be a viable business reason too. SaaS offers substantial opportunities for organizations of all sizes to shift the risks of software acquisition and move IT from a reactive cost center to being a proactive, value-producing part of the enterprise.

There are a lot of facets of the SaaS technology that our department will be discussing: Should we go to virtual servers? Move to cloud based hosting farms? Install SAN devices? These are just a few of the questions that need to be addressed. No matter what though, you can rest assured your data will be kept safe, secure, and intact. ■

R&D DEVELOPMENTS

Doug Hinman, Vice President — Research & Development

I mentioned at Spectrum 2010 that the new Odyssey Supplier Portal module may be the model for a completely new user interface (UI) for Odyssey. Well, here's what's happening on that front. We recently released the new Intelligent Views which uses the same UI design as the Supplier Portal. It's a big improvement in appearance and capabilities, and we were able to make it available to Odyssey IV and BLIS-IV customers painlessly. If you aren't aware of the new IV, let us know and we'll show you its cool new features.

The new IV is a step toward that new UI for all of Odyssey. The web programming technology we've chosen is working well, and the Supplier Portal and new IV products have proven that we can tap into the Odyssey back end. That means all the complex business functionality of Odyssey is retained while the front end UI is totally revamped. Our user interface experience for B&L products starts way back with text-based screens (green screens) on the AS400 and its predecessors, which is all there was at the time. Next we added "screen scraper" technology (BLIS-GUI) to lay a Windows interface over the top of the green screens. Both the green screens and BLIS-GUI are still used by our BLIS clients. Next came Odyssey with a Microsoft Windows interface in 2001. A couple years later, Intelligent Views was introduced which featured an HTML style web browser interface.

So, why are we taking on this project? I mean, we're talking about a big commitment and lots of work, and the current Windows-style UI works well. There are actually several reasons. First of all, we want Odyssey to stay modern and that means keeping the UI up-to-date. We are working hard to make the new UI appealing, intuitive, and easy to use. Also, it's all about the web now and has been for quite a while. We need a browser based UI, but it must also be rich. That's where the programming technology we've chosen comes in. We can produce an interface that looks and behaves much like a Windows application, but it will run in all popular web browsers – Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox, and Safari (Apple). It will also run on new devices like the iPad and smart phones. All of this is about where human interface technology is going, and we want to be there. The UI will also be completely zero-client. There will be no client side (individual PCs) upgrading of Odyssey, which means less management for you and us.

The new UI will also make our SaaS offering easier for us to manage and for customers to access. We currently use a Terminal Services approach for the technical implementation. The new UI will eliminate the Terminal Services layer, and because it supports multiple web browsers it removes restrictions on the client side. SaaS is here to stay and is the growth area of the information technology industry. We got into it early, which put us way ahead of our competition and also helped carry us through very challenging economic times. It has made us a stronger company positioned for the future, and the new UI will make our SaaS offering even better.

What'll we show at Spectrum 2011 in San Antonio? I know I'll be sure to be there to find out. Wait, I work for B&L so I have to go. But, if I were an Odyssey or BLIS customer, I'd definitely want to be in San Antonio too, partially for the food but mostly to see the new stuff B&L is working on. ■

Dear Brenda

Brenda Povlock
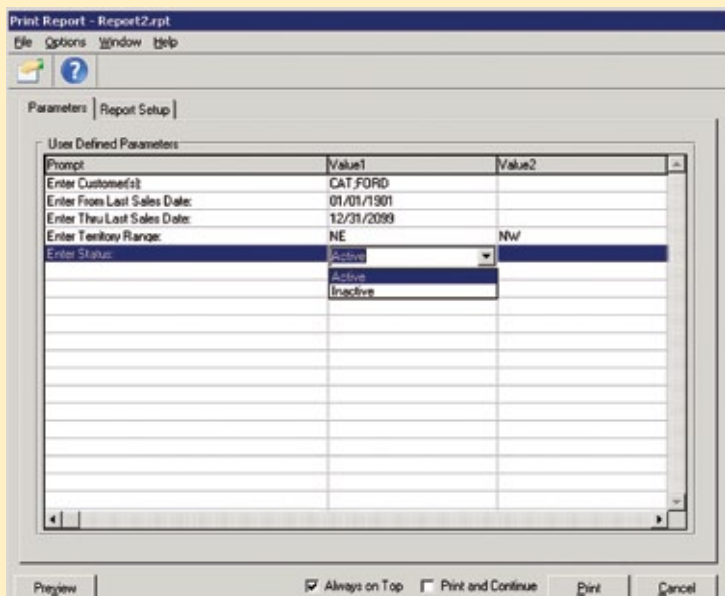Vice President — Client Services

Odyssey

Dear Brenda,

I've created a few custom Crystal Reports completely from scratch, and some of them have parameters like enter a range of dates or enter the invoice number, etc… Now since we upgraded to Odyssey 4.3, the custom report I wrote in Crystal doesn't bring up the old prompt window. Is there anything I can do in Crystal 2008 to bring that back?

Prompt Response Please!!

Dear Prompt Response,

Unfortunately, there is no way to bring the old prompt screen back in Crystal 2008; Crystal Reports eliminated it. Here are some tips on how to use the parameter screen. If you have a parameter defined to allow multiple values, you can enter the list of values in the Value1 column, separating each with a semi-colon (e.g. CAT;FORD – see screen shot). If you have a single parameter that is for a range of values, you could enter the start of the range in the Value1 column and the end of the range in the Value2 column. An example of this is the Territory Range NE thru NW (see screen shot). Note, this could be used for dates or you could list them as a single parameter as shown in the screen shot. Also, for dates you can press the F4 button while in the Value1 column to bring up a calendar. You can also use some hot-keys for dates, like typing 'T' for today. Please note: Custom parameters defined in Crystal that have both a range of values and a list of discrete values is not supported within Odyssey. I hope my response was prompt enough for you and this helps to make prompts a little more user-friendly! ■

BLIS-400

Dear Brenda,

We do physical inventory twice a year and we are running standard cost. There have been a couple of instances, okay maybe more, but one just happened recently where the person who runs the standard cost options forgets to run the close option on the monthly standard cost menu. We don't catch it until he runs the standard cost update along with reports, and then he realizes that last month's production is on the reports. We have a check list, but because different people are responsible for different areas it's really hard to make sure that the steps are completed in proper order. Is there any way BLIS can make sure the process is followed in order. In other words can you force people to follow the steps?

Costly Predicament

Dear Costly Predicament,

*I know each person is trying to make sure they get their particular steps completed correctly, so it can be easily forgotten to check with everyone who's involved. We are trying very hard to make the standard cost options more foolproof, so you will see some changes coming in the future to help. However, there is a new System Control you can get right now if you have upgraded to BLIS 7.2 that will help with your particular problem. It's under Cost Applications and it's called **Allow Physical Inventory when Cost Month is Open - Y/N**. If you set this control to **N**, it won't allow the Physical Inventory Update option to run if standard cost has not been closed for the last month end you ran the update. For example, if you run the monthly update of standard cost month option (CSM310 option 2) for 01/31/11 and didn't run the close, then the Physical inventory Update option (MAM364 option 12) will display an error message and not allow you to continue (see screen shot). Notice at the bottom of the screen you can see the update was run for 01/31/11, but the last close was for 12/31/10. This is what the program checks to determine if the error displays. Note: If you have updated to BLIS 7.2 and don't see the System Control, call support. It was released late as a BTF to 7.2. Hopefully this will prevent future mishaps!* ■

SPECTRUM 2011

On November 13-15, 2011, B&L will hold our 30th user conference at The Westin Riverwalk hotel in San Antonio, Texas. Following is a little history of this conference just to show how far it has come. You may wonder how we came up with 30th when you see the year of our first conference, but keep in mind that when we added the Odyssey product we held 2 separate user conferences that year.

B&L's very first user conference was named BLUG I (B&L Users Group). It was a one-day event held on June 5, 1983, at the B&L offices in downtown Bridgman, MI. There were fewer than 15 attendees, lunch was homemade peanut butter and jelly sandwiches (made by Rene and her mother), and the social event was dinner at a local restaurant. Since then, we have had many changes. The name of the conference has been changed to Spectrum, attendance now averages 100, and the conference has grown to 3 days, making it our premier educational event of the year. It has been held in some pretty great cities around the country including Bridgman, Nashville, Las Vegas, Cleveland, Chicago, Milwaukee, Kansas City, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Louisville, to name a few, and hosted some pretty great dinner events –Atlanta Braves ballgame, dinner and magicians at the Las Vegas Flamingo Hotel, dinner and exhibits at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, dinner and exhibits at The Muhammad Ali Center, several dinner cruises on various rivers and lakes, and much more.

So mark your calendars and watch your Inbox for details; you won't want to miss this one! ◼

**Visit us at the 115th Metalcasting Congress
in Schaumburg, IL on April 5-8
Booth #406/408**

**If your address changes,
please notify
Sandy (swarren@blinfo.com)
so you will continue to receive
your newsletter.**

FREE WEBINAR - Odyssey Shop Floor Manager coming in April

To sign up for this webinar, go to **www.blinfo.com** and click on events.

TRAINING - There are recorded training videos available on-line at no charge to customers.

For access to these videos you will need to sign up for the B&L Community.

Contact support@blinfo.com for assistance. For any other training needs, contact Brenda Povlock at ext. 321.

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