

# How Vanilla Differentiates Itself from the Competition

## The Vanilla Value Proposition

Vanilla develop bespoke reporting systems for non-standard raw data sources, typically serving the needs of managers on the commercial side of the organisation.

## Non-standard raw data sources

Large organisations accumulate a lot of data, much of it generated by large applications that don't have built-in reporting capabilities. These applications will normally generate some form of log file data, but this data will not be in a format that is easily accessible or comprehensible to managers on the commercial side of the business. Typically, it will be stored in flat files, rather than in a database format.

## Approaches to turning log files into reports

One approach to getting at the commercially useful information contained in this data is to ask a technically competent person to query it from time to time using grep or Perl. This approach may be acceptable in some cases, but where the information is needed on a regular basis, it generates an unnecessary resource overhead.

Another approach is to get internal developers or an external consultancy to build a reporting system for this data from scratch, or using commonly available shareware software, such as Sawmill, MTRG etc. Again, this can be time-consuming and costly, because without a library of customisable log processing tools and expertise at their disposal, the developers are likely to get the reporting requirements wrong and develop a system that produces reporting artefacts – resulting in a system that requires extensive re-development before it can be relied upon.

The key difficulty here is in processing the log files into a reasonably sized database, which can be queried with standard reporting software such as Business Objects' Crystal Reports. Non-standard log file formats, multiple log file types for a single application, distributed log files, and the sheer volume of data in some cases all present problems to the developer wishing to generate a reporting database.

## The Vanilla solution

Vanilla look at the problem of turning raw, non-standard data sources into reports holistically, and we do it from the point of view of the end-users of the management information those reports contain: managers on the commercial side of the business.

We build systems that collect and process the raw data from multiple sources into compact, queryable databases with graphical front-ends that are tailored specifically to the needs of the users of that information. The model we employ is analogous to that adopted by manufacturers of software designed for processing standard log file formats – such as http logs – into reports. The difference is that Vanilla’s systems are custom-built for any log file data source – not just web logs.

Most importantly, Vanilla provide complete solutions to the reporting problem. We do whatever it takes to get that management information into the hands of the right people – everything from retrieving, collecting and collating the logs from around the business using a log file retrieval system, through processing, to delivering that information through an easy-to-use interface, in whatever format the client requires.

## Vanilla’s place in the value chain from log files to management reports

