

BI Nugget O'Knowledge

BI Component	Web Data Visualization and Dashboarding
Description	First look at Xcelsius -- Data Visualization and Dashboarding Tool
Date	May, 2008

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Overview

With the recent acquisition of Business Objects by SAP, Knowledge Workers and Business Users have a reason to rejoice. The ability to access and display data from SAP BI 7.0 in a Rich User Interface (RUI) is available with the acquired Business Objects tools. SAP announced that several tools are available with a Premium Package for SAP BI 7.0. The Premium Package includes (refer to [SAP BI/Business Objects Roadmap](#) presentation on SDN):

- Crystal Reports -- Formatted Reporting
- Web Intelligence -- Web Based Adhoc Reporting
- Voyager -- Interactive OLAP Analysis
- Xcelsius -- Data Visualization and Dashboarding

Xcelsius the Data Visualization and Dashboarding tool will ultimately (IMHO) replace the existing BEx Web Application Designer (BEx WAD). Future versions of Xcelsius (code named Xcelsius+) will become the flagship product for Data Visualization and Dashboarding. An important comment from SAP is that the BEx WAD will no longer be enhanced beyond Release NW 7.1 in 2008.

Xcelsius provides a Best-in-Class Data Visualization and Dashboarding solution to Knowledge Workers and Business Users. Next, let's take a first look at Xcelsius and its design interface.

Xcelsius Design Time User Interface

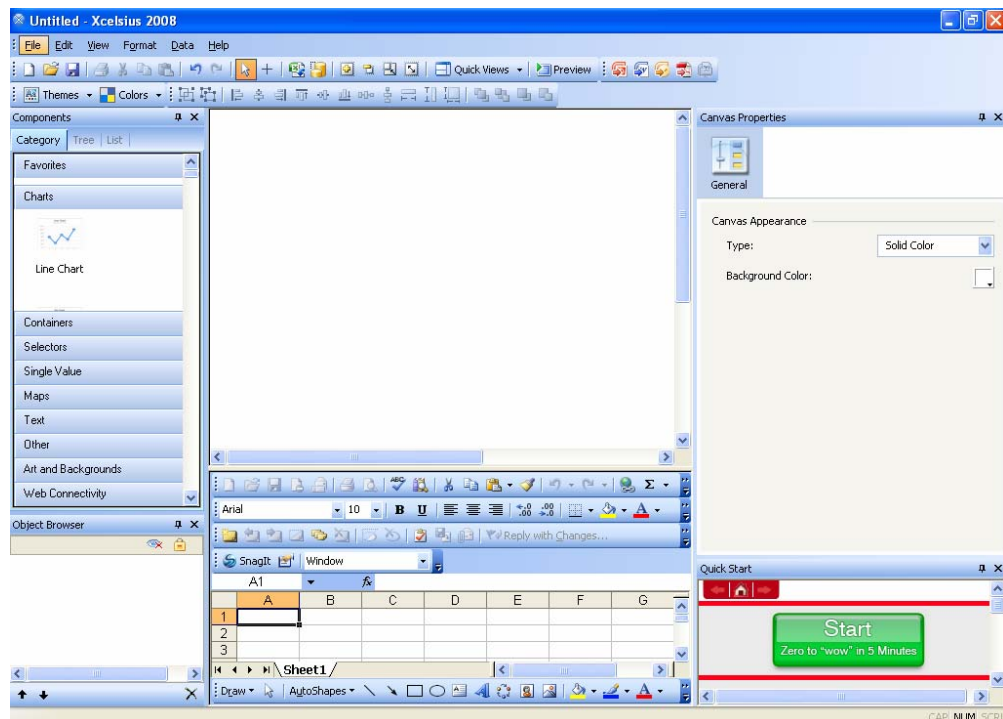


Figure 1

Figure 1, shows the Design Time User Interface of Xcelsius. Upon initial view of the application, immediately there is a sense of familiarity with the application. The layout is well laid out with a highly polished user interface. When navigating, all menu items and functions are easily recognizable and right where you would expect them to be. The design layout consists of the following Toolbars, Elements, and Browsers (refer to Figure 2):

- Toolbars
 - Standard -- Handles create/save, undo/redo, connection settings, canvas sizing, and quick previewing.
 - Themes -- Select and apply a consistent color palette to the application.
 - Export -- Export and embed the flash application into MS-PowerPoint, MS-Word, MS-Outlook, Adobe-PDF, and Business Objects.
 - Format -- Object grouping, spacing, positioning, and alignment.
- Components Browser -- Select from the available components that can be added to the model (e.g. Charts)
- Object Browser -- A single dockable window pane for easy access to any component in the model. Also allows access to properties of a selected component.
- Canvas -- The white workspace that is used to place, position, and create the data visualization.
- Embedded Spreadsheet -- A fully functional MS-Excel spreadsheet used as the source data for the visualization model.
- Properties Panel -- Contains the available properties and settings of the selected component within the canvas.

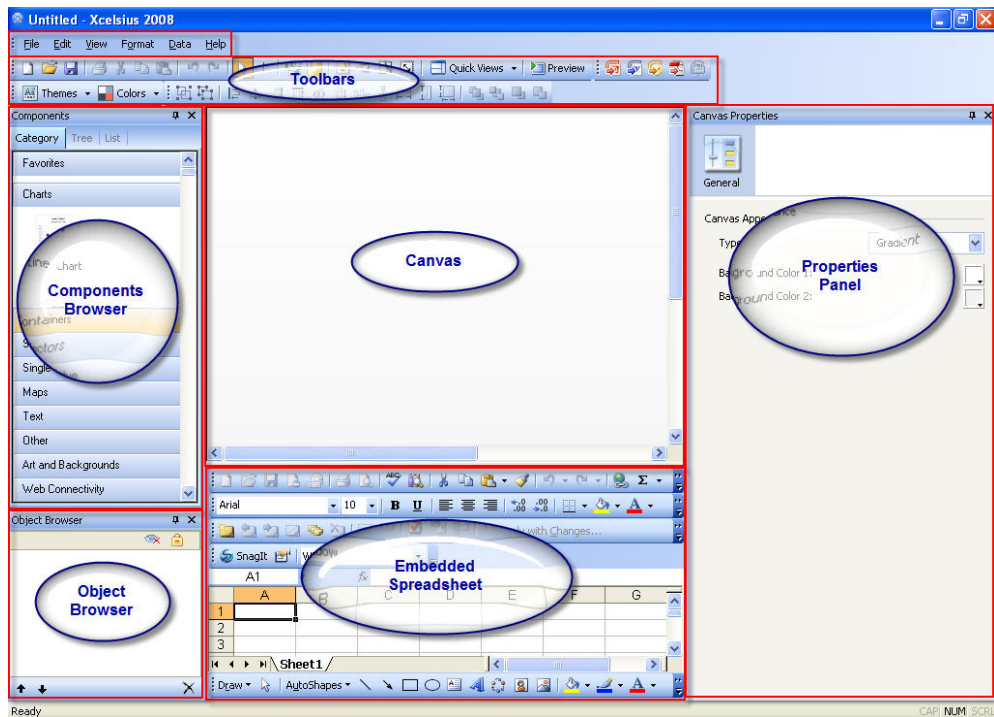
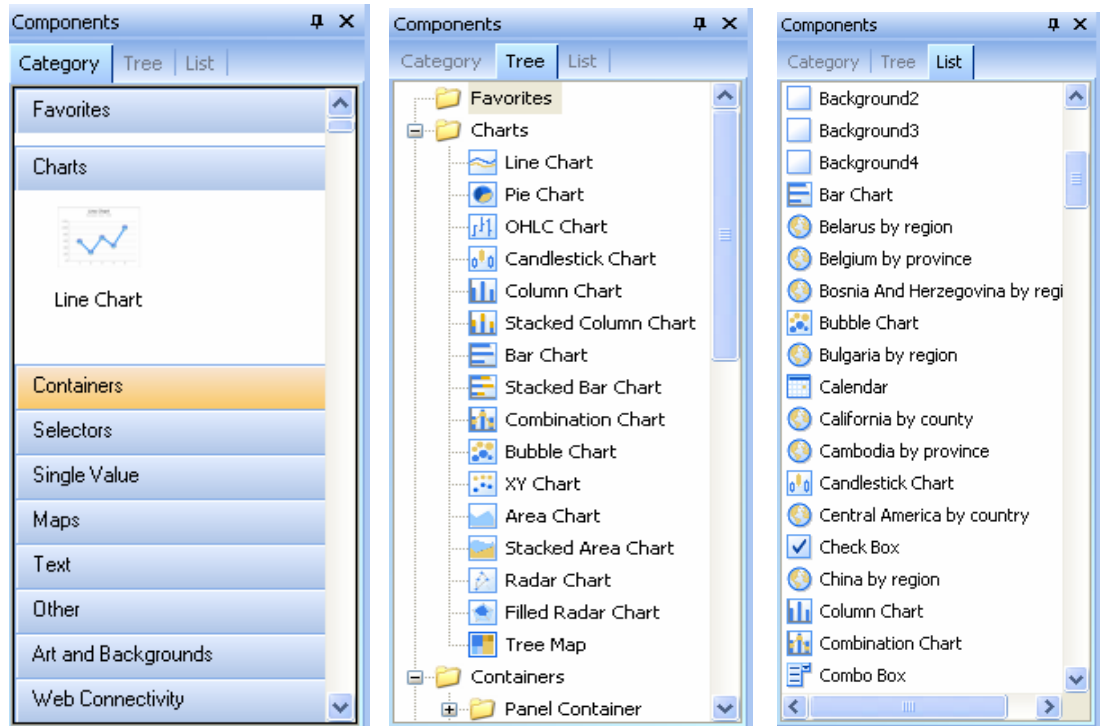


Figure 2.

Navigation within the tool is intuitive and offers many different view options. The Components Browser can display the components in Category, Tree, or List View. The multiple views make it very easy to find what you are looking for.



And each Browser can be positioned as a floating window pane or docked in any quadrant of the design window by dragging the window pane onto a screen docking "helper"--which is extremely useful.

By far the most impressive part of the design time interface is the true What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get (WYSIWYG) visualization (Refer to Figure 3).

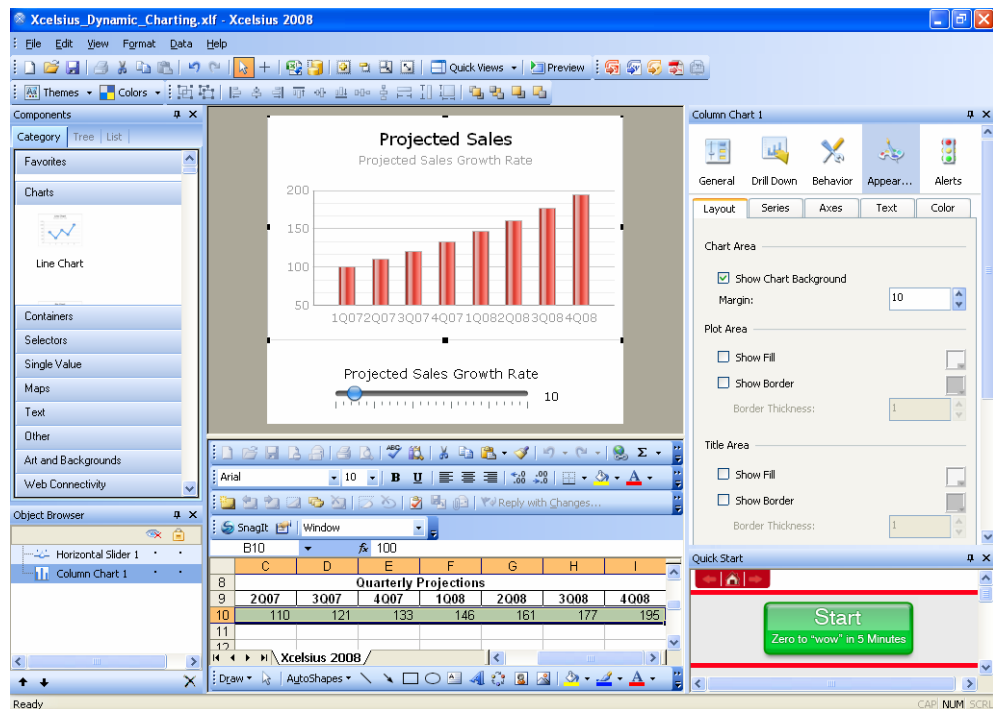


Figure 3.

Figure 3 displays a data visualization model in design mode using Chart and Slider components. Within the WYSIWYG design mode some visual cues are immediately apparent. The chart is configured for alerting and displays the visual alerts even in design mode (e.g. Red when below value of 200). The chart also displays the titles, scaling, x and y axis values based on the data available within the Embedded Spreadsheet.

This true WYSIWYG interface allows a Knowledge Worker to have a high degree of confidence of what the final Data Visualization will look like—even in design mode. This dynamic representation will significantly reduce iterative design times and improve user adoption. The ease of use is amazing; interacting with the application is smooth and effortless. You don't try very hard at what you want to do—you just do.

Wrap-up

This introduction to Xcelsius just scratches the surface of the application and what it has to offer to the SAP BI user community. It is clear though from the initial tour of this tool that this tool is highly deserving of the bestowed Leader status in the Gartner Magic Quadrant. With the incorporation of the robust data visualization toolset from Business Objects, the often passionate debate of what front-end to use is over and the answer is clear—SAP & Business Objects!