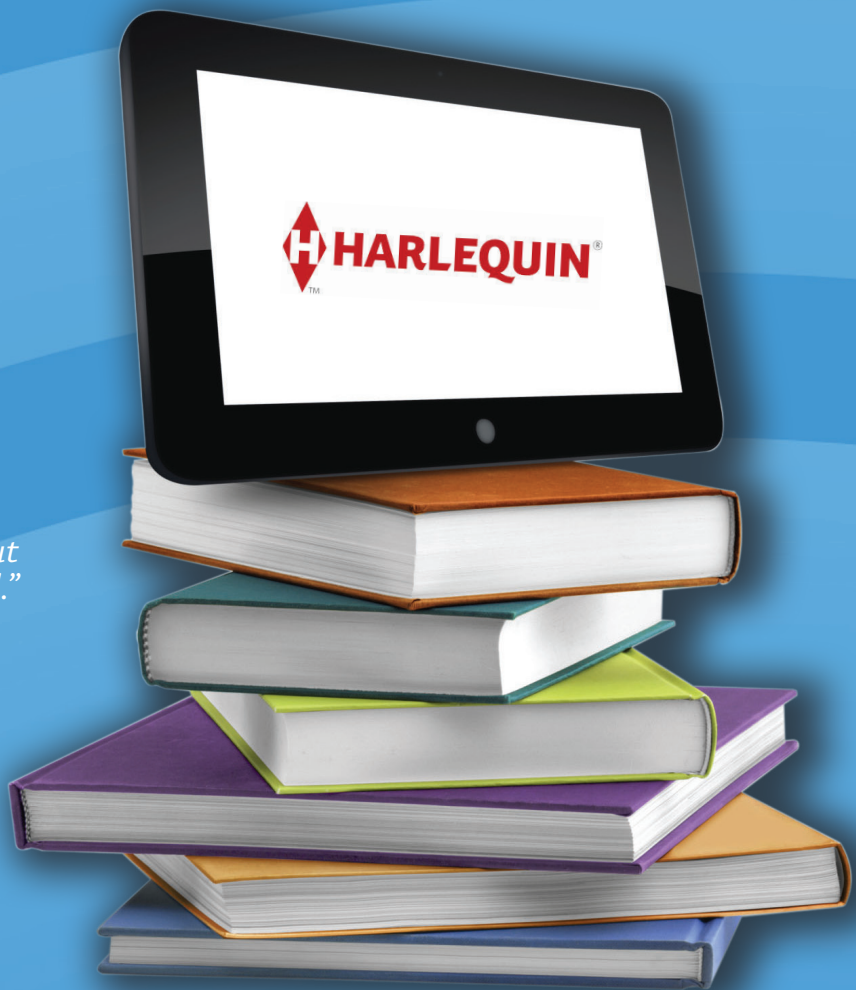# Harlequin Simplifies Financial Reporting and Global Oracle R12 Acceptance with GL Wand 5

"Reporting is now the best thing about being on Oracle because of GL Wand."

Kirk Marshall, Director of Overseas Finance
Harlequin Enterprises Ltd.

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Harlequin Enterprises ran into user complaints about Oracle Financial reporting, especially when it rolled out their R12 system to overseas offices. The main criticism was related to the appearance of financial reports as well as the difficulty in creating them.

After deploying GL Wand 5, an Excel-based reporting solution, reporting is now viewed as the most positive aspect of being on Oracle and the tool is currently used in North America and globally.

As one of the world's leading publishers of women's fiction, Harlequin Enterprises sells books in 34 languages on six continents. The Toronto-based company publishes more than 110 titles monthly. With half of its books sold overseas, Harlequin is Canada's most successful publisher and one of its most international businesses.

Given its complex business structure and goals, Harlequin needed a clear picture of its finances. The company installed Oracle E-Business Suite in North America to provide such data, but when it began implementing Oracle at larger overseas offices, it became clear that more was needed to capture a better view of financial details.

"A year into having our German and Japanese offices on Oracle, the number one complaint was that reporting was extremely frustrating," said Kirk Marshall, Director of Overseas Finance for Harlequin. "On top of being unattractive, these reports from the Oracle Financial Statement Generator (FSG) were difficult to create and maintain. We agreed not to put another country onto Oracle until we found a reporting solution."

As Harlequin began searching for another financial reporting tool, Marshall heard how GL Wand from Excel4apps empowers end users by offering a powerful Microsoft Excel front end to live Oracle data. He was so impressed with the software's capability to create attractive reports and drill into transactional details that Harlequin became a beta implementation site for the pre-lease of GL Wand 5, a new version of the software.
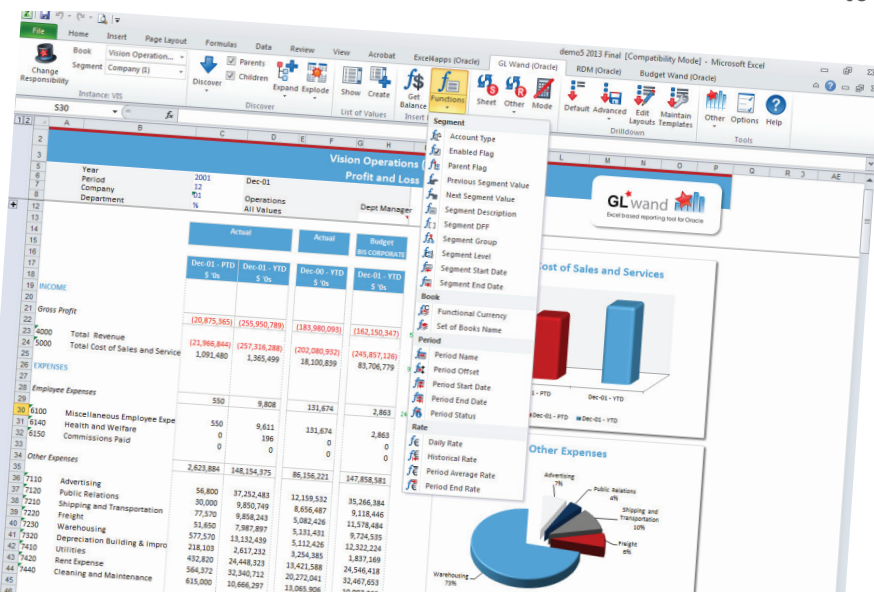
Financials Up To Speed

Though its North American offices had used Oracle for more than 10 years, Harlequin's satellite offices around the world used their own legacy financial systems until the larger Hamburg and Tokyo offices implemented Oracle R11 in 2011. Despite the company's upgrade to the R12 version in 2012, Oracle's standard financial reporting capabilities continued to be its primary criticism.

"We had what is touted as a world-class system in Oracle, yet the reports coming out of it weren't sophisticated looking," said Marshall. "The standard Oracle FSG reports passed around corporate-wide looked like they had been done on a typewriter. Making them presentable was cumbersome and labor intensive, so we just learned to live with them as they were."

Harlequin considered a data warehouse project to gain access to data that could be better formatted, but that scenario presented a different set of drawbacks. "The data would still have been static," Marshall said.

"The fact that we can send out snapshots of relevant data to people not in finance makes me very happy with our investment in GL Wand."

GL Wand 5 for Oracle shown

"It was a few months into using GL Wand—and already happy with the product—that I investigated more the customized drill-down, which is now one of my favorite features."

Kirk Marshall, Director of Overseas Finance, Harlequin Enterprises Ltd.

Excel4apps contacted Harlequin in late 2012 while it was trying to determine a reporting solution. Marshall quickly recognized GL Wand's benefits and decided to take advantage of a free trial of GL Wand 5, a new, pre-release version of the software that offered specific advantages for R12 users. With its Java-based framework, GL Wand 5 was quickly installed—too easy to be called an "implementation," Marshall said, a fact that was appreciated by the IT department.

"Happily, the Excel4apps sales pitch lived up to its selling points during trials of the GL Wand 5 beta version at our German and Japanese offices," Marshall said. "Above all, GL Wand is simple to use. I am not an Excel super-user, and yet I was able to go onto YouTube and watch Excel4apps videos, as well as the ones on their site. I knew within an hour or two of watching demos that I could build a report I could use. Because of GL Wand's Excel interface, you can make a report look exactly the way you want it."

He also appreciated the fact that GL Wand works off live data and not a static cube. "It means that you can get constant updates without having to refresh a cube," he said. "The fact that you can drill into the Oracle data is incredible."

Users Save 10-15 Minutes On Each Account Query

Today, Harlequin's GL Wand users can produce attractive, readable financial reports faster than ever. The tool is used for standard month- and year-end financial reports, as well as management reports.

"Being on GL Wand 5 saves 10-15 minutes each time someone questions a number or queries where a coding error is and how to fix it," he said. "Because we can perform a drill down on a number—and an advanced drill down in particular—as opposed to going into Oracle to perform account inquiries each time there's a question, we are seeing considerable time savings."

The figure is hard to quantify, but Marshall knows the benefits are substantial, especially as other international offices implement Oracle. "As a new country switches to Oracle, there will probably be 30-40 questioned transactions at 10 minutes each as users get accustomed to the system, so the time savings from GL Wand is considerable," he said.

Harlequin has principal offices in Toronto, New York, London, Tokyo, Milan, Sydney, Paris, Madrid, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Budapest, Granges-Paccot, Warsaw, Rio de Janeiro, Mumbai and Istanbul, as well as licensing agreements with businesses in another 12 countries. After Tokyo and Hamburg, the company's Madrid office implemented Oracle R12 with GL Wand 5 in January 2014.

★ Harlequin's North American offices have used Oracle for more than 10 years.

★ In 2012, the Japanese and German offices were the first overseas offices to implement Oracle. The company installed GL Wand 5 in late 2012.

★ Installation of GL Wand in the company's Spanish and North American offices followed soon thereafter, for a total of 25 users.

★ GL Wand is helping Harlequin get greater value from Oracle and provide better service to its business managers around the world.

★ Since its founding in 1949, Harlequin has sold 6.28 billion books.

Word got around quickly about GL Wand's time-saving and drill-down features, so Harlequin also bought licenses for its North American offices, bringing its total number of users to 25. "After installing GL Wand, our feedback from Japan, Germany, and now Spain, is that reporting is now the best thing about being on Oracle instead of the worst thing," Marshall said.

Business Managers Happy With Better Service

In addition to the time savings, one of the biggest benefits GL Wand 5 provides is better service levels for Harlequin's business managers. "The advanced drill down goes into all the journal-level and subledger detail within a manager's cost center, and you can send it easily each month as part of their Excel reporting package," said Marshall.

"The managers can review the report online or print it in a format that is user-friendly with just the level of detail they need—no excess as with the Oracle reports," Marshall continued. "This is something we were not doing before. We were waiting for them to ask questions instead of giving them the information. It's hard to say how much time this has saved us, but certainly our quality of service for business managers is much higher in North America and overseas."

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> *"One of the strikes against going onto Oracle for another region—financial reporting capability—is now an asset."*
>
> *Kirk Marshall, Director of Overseas Finance, Harlequin Enterprises Ltd.*

Marshall especially likes how GL Wand enables financial users to send snapshots of relevant reports to non-financial executives, with advanced drill downs into data that will be of the greatest interest to them.

GL Wand Fits Unique Business Requirements

Harlequin's business requires reports with many parameter settings for products, channels of distribution, etc. With GL Wand 5, users can easily change the parameter to isolate one product, or one channel of distribution, for example.

GL Wand enables easy isolation of detail through Chart of Accounts. "In the Chart of Accounts, we have a business channel segment, product segment, geography segment, and then natural accounts," said Marshall. "Given the combination of all those, we can isolate any level of detail we want through GL Wand, because it uses our Chart of Accounts. The fact that it is reading off the Chart of Accounts directly from Oracle, with the hierarchies already created in Oracle, is very handy."

The drop-down feature adds greater flexibility. "You can also get the exact detail you want through a drop-down feature to find parent accounts or parent values or a smaller value. You can choose one, choose multiple or a range of values with an exclude—GL Wand is very flexible for getting the exact detail you want," Marshall said.

Advantages Over Oracle FSG

Existing FSGs can be exported into GL Wand 5, where they populate quickly with minimum repetitive work. Harlequin, however, chose to build new reports in GL Wand 5 instead because the process is easy and the format could be much improved over the existing FSGs, according to Marshall.

"GL Wand is about creating the first perfect formula for one cell," Marshall explained. "It might feel like the first formula takes a while, but the time is minimal—5-10 minutes to get the first formula perfect—and then the rest of your report starts to populate itself incredibly fast. Then, once you have that first report perfectly designed, you can explode it and create a workbook of a whole set of reports very quickly, whereas in FSG, it feels like you are repeating that smallest executable thing that has to be perfect each time."

GL Wand: An Oracle Selling Feature

According to Marshall, many financial users at Harlequin never sign into Oracle any longer. "Everything they do is in GL Wand, so for them Oracle has ceased to exist and life is better for it. There is no reason to go into Oracle for an account inquiry—you just do a drill down or an advanced drill down or expand. It is much more efficient and effective to use an intuitive tool like GL Wand rather than going into Oracle."

In addition, ongoing customer service has been excellent, according to Marshall. "We switched to the release version of GL Wand 5 when it became available, but even when using the beta version, Excel4apps was extremely responsive," described Marshall. "They never said, 'Oh, this is beta. We'll fix that a year from now,' and our comments were always taken as great feedback that they acted on immediately. From a service level standpoint, the reactions of Excel4apps have been exactly what you hope for in a partner."

For Harlequin, however, the best news is that GL Wand gives the company the ability to extend Oracle around the world, without reservations about its reporting limitations. "One of the strikes against going into another region with Oracle—the financial reporting capability—is now an asset. It doesn't drive the decision to go onto Oracle, but it definitely is now a selling feature."

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