

# Taconic Takes Charge of Oracle Reporting with GL Wand from Excel4apps

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*Rodney Tillinghast, Corporate Controller, Taconic*



# After installing Oracle R12, managers at Taconic Inc. lost access to vital transactional details they were accustomed to from legacy system reporting. This innovator in health care research critically needed an efficient reporting solution to fill the gaps in financial information that Oracle left behind.

As a provider of life sciences solutions to researchers worldwide, Taconic Inc. offers innovative animal models and scientific services to support living cell studies and drug discovery. Founded in 1952, the company delivers a portfolio of rodent models and services through seven breeding facilities and three service labs in the U.S. and Europe, supported by more than 750 global employees.

To better understand its business and financial status, Taconic implemented Oracle R12 throughout its U.S. operations during 2009, but soon realized some shortcomings in its reporting capabilities. For example, the Finance team at the Hudson, NY, headquarters could no longer provide site and functional managers with the details they needed to understand revenue and expense general ledger (GL) performance. The team critically needed solutions for filling gaps in reporting and information access that Oracle had created and to

replace functionality that the management group had traditionally relied upon using Taconic's previous systems.

A year after implementing Oracle in the U.S., Taconic discovered GL Wand, an Excel-based financial reporting tool from Excel4apps. Via a direct link between Oracle and a user-friendly Excel front end, GL Wand provides immediate access to real-time GL data without a data warehouse, as well as instant drill down functionality for accessing the transactional details managers were requesting. After a free trial, Taconic recognized GL Wand's potential for accelerating its month-end and management reporting processes.

## Oracle Introduces Data Gaps

As new users of Oracle E-Business Suite (EBS) R12, Taconic's Finance team found that creating standard monthly reports was a challenging multi-step process. It involved use of standard Oracle Financial Statement Generator (FSG) reports to access GL data, which was then published to Excel for further manipulation and formatting. While this process was less than optimal, the company's even bigger frustration came when creating relevant management reports.

"Standard Oracle FSGs were limited and difficult to use in general, and they were often too high level for our managers, who preferred information about underlying transactions to compare actuals vs. budget for individual sites and functions," said Rodney Tillinghast, corporate controller. "This forced us to populate our old F9 data warehouse with specific GL balances for managers, which were then pulled into Excel for manipulation and analysis using pivot tables."

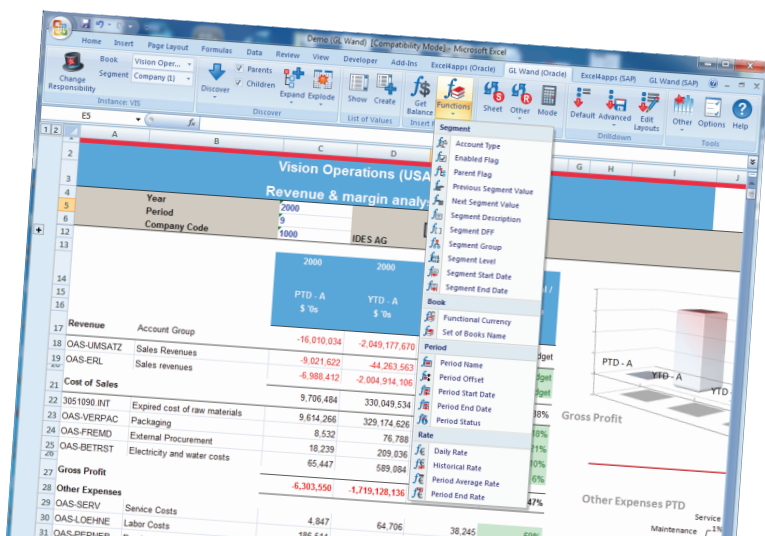
Even with the cumbersome workaround through F9 software, managers still did not see the level of detailed information they were accustomed to before Oracle was implemented. Finance also tried "cobbling" pivot tables out of FSGs, which were difficult to export, along with other attempts at extracting data.

"Managers were astounded that we'd just implemented a state-of-the-art ERP system and they had difficulty tracking why certain costs varied from month to month," said Peter Siatkowski, manager of Financial Planning & Analysis at Taconic. "Finance struggled month after month to close the gap in information, even using an intern for three months to pull Accounts Payable transactions from Oracle, but we simply didn't have access to all of the data we needed in any efficient manner."

## Comprehensive Trial of Excel-Based Tool

In addition to needing faster access to detailed data, Taconic had no additional F9 licenses for its Danish and German facilities, where Oracle implementations were underway during early 2011. When Tillinghast heard an employment candidate rave about GL Wand, he researched its potential for closing some of the more glaring reporting gaps, but first had to overcome internal pushback.

"In addition to concerns that GL Wand might impact general Oracle performance, there were many who felt that Oracle should do everything for us," Tillinghast described. "We were excited to take advantage of the free trial from Excel4apps



GL Wand for Oracle shown

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*Peter Siatkowski, Manager of Financial Planning and Analysis, Taconic*

so we could address these and other concerns, including security, the impact GL Wand upon our IT group, and whether the tool could do what we needed.”

Because its Oracle installation resides in a hosted environment, Taconic had to work through a third-party to install GL Wand on a dedicated application server. This proved a challenge, according to Suzanne Hazelton, manager of Database & Oracle Systems Administration for Taconic, even though GL Wand is an Oracle Validated Integration solution. These problems were not due to Excel4apps, and Taconic has since switched hosting companies. Once past these third-party hurdles, GL Wand installed quickly, and initial concerns were soon put to rest.

“Since GL Wand uses the Oracle security level directly, we were able to overcome security concerns fairly quickly, and numerous tests in a non-production environment proved that Oracle performance and stability were not an issue,” said Hazelton. “Lastly, when assessing the tool’s effectiveness, multiple presentations from Excel4apps helped us understand how to use the tool correctly so we could see that Finance would not have to call on IT every time a report needed changing.”

### Reaping Reporting Rewards

A user test group of five quickly picked up on using GL Wand, with the help of webinars and training conference calls from Excel4apps. The team realized that the GL Wand not only could replace and improve upon FSGs for monthly reporting, but also delve into GL details for managers. The Finance test group helped train other users as GL Wand was rolled out to the Danish and German subsidiaries during their final Oracle go-live process, with excellent results.

“We created static templates in GL Wand so that, with push of a button, 80% of our monthly reports are prepared and ready for review,” explained Tillinghast. “From a corporate standpoint, we have access to all journal ledgers, so even if it’s the middle of the night in Europe, we can still access all data in a transparent and efficient manner to continue developing monthly packages along a tight deadline. GL Wand provided an immediate improvement in both quality of information and efficiency, helping drive at least 4-5 days out of our monthly closing process, especially due to GL Wand dashboards and related reports for monitoring the quality of our subsidiaries’ closing processes.”

Taconic’s global financial package is now principally based in GL Wand, which automatically updates as needed. Finance developed additional executive level sales reports in GL Wand to run after transactional closing for a period, providing early indications of monthly perfor-

- ★ Taconic Inc. was founded in 1952 in Germantown, NY.
- ★ Products include innovative animal models and scientific services for helping advance health care through research.
- ★ The company’s global footprint includes five facilities across the US, four in Denmark and one in Germany.
- ★ Taconic began rolling out Oracle E-Business Suite (EBS) R12 to U.S. facilities in 2009.
- ★ GL Wand was installed one year after Oracle’s implementation to expedite financial reporting and fill data gaps.

mance. “Since we are a medium-sized company running Oracle, these ‘automated’ solutions were not in place during the original implementation of R12,” Tillinghast said.

For management reporting, the improvements were even more dramatic. Within hours of basic GL Wand training, Taconic’s financial analysts had access to information that the IT group had struggled to drill into with Oracle Discoverer.

“It takes us just minutes to pull the transactional details our managers need with GL Wand, which we publish as an Excel file through SharePoint for our managers to review,” said Siatkowski. “Because of easy access to the targeted transactional data like indirect cost allocations, plus support for quality checks and high level reviews, GL Wand has taken up to a week out of our management reporting process. Our original Oracle FSGs simply did not provide this flexibility.”

GL Wand supports a range of management reporting needs. “We take three or four different looks at a single set of data to support not only individual site locations but also our two distinct lines of business, as well as our functional responsibility groups for both production and administration costs,” Siatkowski explained. “Because of the segments we

defined within the global GL and the ability of GL Wand to pick out discrete activity for those segments, we can easily create reports with different views of the data."

### Unexpected Audit Benefits

Because Taconic's auditors recognized that GL Wand is an Oracle Validated Integration solution, the Finance group can provide them a trial balances for any set of global books directly out of GL Wand by simply setting up a GL criteria sheet, updating it, and sending it back to them.

"GL Wand gives auditors the assurance that they have as much mastery over every balance as we do," Tillinghast said. "Before GL Wand, we were doing Excel pivot tables out of a text report from Oracle. Every refresh took an hour to prepare, including time for quality checks. Now, it is a five minute job from beginning to end."

GL Wand also supports other requests that auditors have throughout the year, providing Taconic's auditors an Excel record of every manual journal entry for a given time period. "GL Wand provides auditors the comfort that they are capturing all entries that get made to the GL so they see the batch source information—whether it is coming through the General Ledger, Receivables, Payables, etc.—and have a complete picture of the transactional data," described Tillinghast.

### Customer Support Goes the Extra Mile

"As a support organization, Excel4apps has been one of the most impressive and responsive I've dealt with," said Hazelton. "We haven't had many complicated issues, but some have confounded us. We appreciate that Excel4apps digs deeper into how our Oracle system operates than expected. They diagnosed issues we didn't think they could solve."

As an example, Hazelton cites a drill-down performance issue in GL Wand that occurred after an Oracle database patch. After running queries and trace files, Excel4apps support discovered an inefficiency in how an index was used on a table. As a workaround, Excel4apps and Taconic created a different SQL profile for the query instead of its normal path, cutting the drill down from 2 hours back to the four minutes it typically had taken.

"Excel4apps quickly diagnoses and walks our end users through their Excel and GL Wand environment, reducing the involvement of IT to only 10-15% of the problems we've encountered in 18 months after going live with GL Wand," said Tillinghast. "Because of their commitment, we view Excel4apps as a business partner not just a vendor. They understand that if we have problem, now is now—not a fix two weeks later."

### Bright Future for "Business Critical" Tool

"We've reached a level of stability in our reporting now where almost all of our reports are standardized and it's just a matter of refreshing them, so our 'super-users' can now focus more effort on extending the usability of GL Wand through dashboards and other features," said Tillinghast. "GL Wand allows us to continually improve our monthly reports, as well as the level of information provided."

GL Wand has more than addressed initial concerns about its stability and usefulness with exceptional performance. "We never intended it as a 100% uptime reporting solution, but when it was down one day due to a problem with Oracle, it was obvious that GL Wand has evolved from a nice tool we could play around with to a business critical system we can't live without. It has helped us maximize our significant Oracle investment," said Tillinghast.

### About Taconic

Taconic Inc. is a leading provider of life sciences solutions to researchers worldwide, offering innovative rodent animal models and scientific services that facilitate in vivo studies and advance drug discovery. Taconic's wide range of advanced solutions include custom model design; generation and production; off-the-shelf model repositories; contract research; custom breeding; genetic monitoring; health testing and other laboratory services. Headquartered in New York's Hudson River Valley, Taconic operates seven breeding facilities and three service laboratories in the U.S. and Europe and maintains a staff of over 750 professionals connected to technological innovation in drug development sciences.

**excel4apps**

Excel solutions for Oracle and SAP

Excel4apps is a best-in-class provider of Excel-based reporting, inquiry, and budget-loading software for Oracle and SAP. Designed for finance professionals, its award-winning GL Wand, Reports Wand, and Budget Wand products easily and securely deliver real-time ERP data using Microsoft Excel® to save reporting time and effort. Excel4apps serves over 16,000 Oracle and SAP users in 62 countries, with offices in Australia, the United States, United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, and South Africa.

### For More Information

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