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## Northwest Nazarene University Makes Smarter Decisions with Data Mining and Analysis

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### Summary Analysis

- **Problem** – Northwest Nazarene University wanted to analyze and leverage the data in its consolidated ERP system to make smarter decisions.
- **Solution** – Evisions *Argos* for enterprise reporting and data analysis. Evisions *FormFusion* for document enhancement.
- **Rationale** – Web-based solution with easy installation designed specifically for educational institutions. Graphical analysis tools. Evisions Co-op User Community for report sharing.
- **Results** – Campus-wide installation in a little over one hour. Automated reporting freed up IT staff. Users analyze data themselves. Insight from data analysis has yielded higher return on fundraising efforts and streamlined scholarship program.
- **Observations** – Data mining is the gift that keeps on giving. Analysis leads to insight which leads to smarter tactics and strategies and ultimately a more capable and competitive organization.

According to Eric Kellerer, Executive Director of Information Technology at Northwest Nazarene University, the greatest value of a consolidated ERP system is actively using that information to improve the organization. “It is so important. If you have all this data, you have to mine it. You have to be able to make decisions from it – daily decisions and strategic decisions,” he said.

[Northwest Nazarene University](#) (NNU) is a Christian liberal arts university located in Nampa, Idaho, and with satellite campuses in Boise, Twin Falls and Idaho Falls. NNU offers 45 undergraduate majors, 11 graduate programs and numerous continuing education credits. Its enrollment includes about 2,000 graduate and undergraduate students as well as between 8,000 and 9,000 continuing education students who take classes to maintain professional certifications in education, social work, counseling and other professions.

Ten years ago, NNU consolidated all of its campus databases into a single ERP system from [Jenzabar](#). The new system provided a centralized view and “single version of the truth” for admissions/recruiting, registration, finance, alumni relations and donor relations. For reporting and data analysis, they used a business intelligence

software package from Cognos. Recently they reached a point where the Cognos software needed to be upgraded to a new version. The conversion was going to be expensive and time-consuming, so the university decided to step back and consider other options.

### Switch to Evisions

It was at this point they discovered Evisions *Argos*, a web-based enterprise reporting solution, and

Evisions *FormFusion*, a solution for document enhancement and delivery. “Evisions literally installed on our whole campus in a little over an hour. They told me it would be simple, and I didn’t believe it until I saw it. We have been slowly moving our reports over to that platform. It has gone really well,” said Kellerer.

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- Eric Kellerer, Executive Director of IT,  
Northwest Nazarene University

The Argos report writing and data analysis software is specifically designed for institutions of higher education. Users access it over a secure web interface, so there is no need to install it on individual PCs. The software supports any number of database types and connections. Argos features include dashboards for graphically displaying information trends and summaries, automated report scheduling and delivery, and OLAP (online analytical processing) cubes for analyzing data in multiple (3+) dimensions to spot trends and relationships.

## True Collaboration

After NNU installed the software, Evisions offered to send consultants to visit the campus and help Kellerer and his staff get up and running with the software. “My first response was, how much is that going to cost? These kinds of consultants don’t come cheap!” But Evisions partnered with NNU to make sure cost was not an issue. Three of their consultants spent a few days at the university creating reports and helping IT staff learn how to use the software.

After completing the reports, the consultants uploaded them to the Evisions Co-op User Community. This is a common repository for report sharing that all Evisions customers can access and utilize. “If I need to build a sophisticated report on alumni relations, before I go to all the trouble, I look and see if some other university has already built it. We all have permission to go to this Co-op, download it and use it as we wish,” said Kellerer.

“The whole idea of collaborating together is important in universities, but there aren’t many companies that make it easy to do. I can think of only two companies in my twelve years as IT director that actually have acted like a partner, and Evisions is one of them. I think their concept is, if they can make us successful, if they can get us excited about the product and using it as it should be used, then we are going to upload to this Co-op and all their customers are going to be happier.”

## Keen Insight

NNU leverages other features of the Argos software. They use report scheduling and delivery to help keep budget officers on track while reducing work for the IT department. IT staff no longer have to periodically generate budget reports and mail them to the other departments, since Argos does this automatically each week.

Users can analyze data themselves with graphical interfaces and drag-and-drop data manipulation. Argos is able to create data packs, or subsets of the ERP database with all data relationships intact, for

individual users. Therefore users can access information pertinent to their jobs, sort and filter data and run reports as they wish.

In particular, OLAP cubes have proven to be a power analytical tool for the university. “It allows you to view three-dimensional data from many different perspectives until you begin to see patterns that you can make better decisions from,” said Kellerer. For instance, NNU looked closely at donor demographics and the effectiveness of various types of fundraising events. They were able to discern which event types were most effective in each geographical area. Now they focus fundraising efforts on the events in which donors are most interested and those that yield the greatest return.

In another example, NNU analyzed five years worth of scholarship data to predict scholarship acceptance rates based on factors like the amount of money offered and academic major. “We know if we give someone eleven thousand dollars a semester, the likelihood of them coming to NNU is extremely high because it is a full-ride scholarship. On the other hand, if we give a person one thousand dollars, we can know that a certain percentage of people are not going to come. That allows us to offer a certain percent over what we have because we know who will come and who will not, at least by percentage. And then it allows to start helping people earlier and not waiting until the last minute when someone cancels,” he said.

## Streamlined Processes

Argos and FormFusion have helped streamline other university processes as well. Printing transcripts used to be a time-consuming and fairly costly job because it required careful programming and the paper had to be pre-printed with watermarks and then run through again to print data for each student. With Argos in conjunction with FormFusion, they now use standard reports that deliver a more professional look and include watermarks in a single printing.

The software has simplified the process for keeping track of communication and correspondence with students. When sending out letters where a response is expected, a special code has to be entered into the ERP database. Argos allows users to run a query, print letters and update the database in a single keystroke.

## More to Come

Remarkably NNU has implemented these improvements in only four months since installing Argos and FormFusion. It makes one wonder what they will be able to do over the next four years.

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