ActivReporter compared to Jet Basics/Jet Reports

White Paper

ActivReporter (AR) and Jet Basics/Jet Reports (JB/JR) both use Excel to report from Dynamics GP data. This white paper describes the basic differences in the two products. There is a companion document that compares the Jet Basics product to ActivReporter on a more granular basis.

The Jet products are generic report writers for all Dynamics GP tables. ActivReporter is focused on the Dynamics GP General Ledger tables to produce financial statements and ancillary GL reporting. We will cover these aspects of the products as they relate to the Dynamics GP General Ledger module.

Financial Statements in Excel

Tabular data extracted from the Dynamics GP database

Trial Balance

Financial Statements in Excel

ActivReporter and JB/JR both utilize Excel in creating financial statements from the transaction data held in the Dynamics GP GL database. However the approach and implementation are quite different.

Fundamental Difference

JB/JR is an application written "on top" of Excel and profoundly alters the user experience in Excel. This is demonstrated by the two modes: Design Mode and Report Mode. Jet formulas exist only in Design Mode, and any change to the design must be in Design Mode. Any changes made in Report Mode are lost when reverting to Design Mode. The result of imposing modes on Excel results in an abnormal experience for the Excel user.

ActivReporter is **unadulterated Excel**. Functions have been added to retrieve information from the financial database. The result is an expected experience for the Excel user.

The bottom line in this fundamental difference is that in JB/JR you are limited in these ways:

1) The GL function that returns financial data exist only in Design Mode.
2) Date changes (period changes) for the financial design require reverting to Design Mode in JB. JR has a feature to add options that are available at view-time.
3) Removal of the standard F9 (Shift-F9) calculation.
4) Column A and Row 0 are reserved for exclusive usage by JB/JR.
5) Best Practice in JB/JR to have only ONE workbook open at a time.
6) Best Practice in JB/JR is to limit spreadsheets to only 2 or 3 worksheets.
7) Performance Issues if you use the functions Now()or Today(). These are frequently used to add timestamps to reports.
8) Performance issues if you use manual page breaks, outline mode or off-sheet cell references.

9) Performance issue because the process of going from Design Mode to Report Mode must create extra hidden worksheets in addition to retrieving the numerical amounts and account information.

Missing Features in JB/JR.

These features are not missing in ActivReporter!

1) Missing account analysis .
2) Row definition mechanism that is independent of a specific workbook. The row definition mechanism that does exist is extraordinarily cumbersome and error prone. Row "expansion" cannot be used when using account aggregation (other than the GP "Categories").

Other issues.

These are not issues in ActivReporter (see AA exception below)!

1) JB has no drilldown capability to the underlying detail.
2) JR drilldown is to period totals, and then to the underlying detail by period. There is no way to see a single comprehensive list of underlying transactions.
3) Reporting Trees are essentially missing.
4) There is no ability to iterate over an account segment to get departmental/division reporting without building (and maintaining) specific worksheets.
5) GL function does not support Analytical Accounting or MDA. AA support will be in a future release of ActivReporter.
6) JB does not support versioning or preserve historical Excel financial designs. Jet strongly recommends keeping multiple copies of Jet workbooks in case of corruption.
7) "Row expansion" necessitates a design where rows contain charts of account (or Categories) and columns must contain period references. You cannot create designs with period data in rows and account data in columns.
8) GL function does not support multicurrency.
9) GL function does not support debit and credit amounts by account or account aggregates.
10) Excel supported in Citrix full desktop mode only, not in "published application" or Virtual Apps mode.
11) GL function does not support Reporting Ledgers (IFRS, Local).

Tabular data extracted from the Dynamics GP database

ActivReporter and Jet (JB/JR) both support extracting tabular data from the GL financial data in Dynamics GP. This includes the following tables:

- Chart of Accounts
- Account Segments
- Account Transactions (Unposted, Current, Historical)
- Accounting Periods (Calendar)

Fundamental Difference

JB/JR is a tool that allows you to build tabular data from the Dynamics GP data. Just like in the financial reporting, there are two modes: Design Mode and Report Mode. The NL functions exist in Design Mode only. The NL function is used to select the tables and fields you want on your report. All filters must be selected in the design mode.

ActivReporter already has all information from Dynamics GP tables built. It is NOT in Excel but resides in the ActivReporter HD (**H**igh **D**efinition) pane which in many ways is better than Excel. The contents of the ActivReporter HD pane can be exported to Excel at any time.

You do not have to design any report layout as in JB/JR. All the information is presented logically and thoroughly. The only thing you need to do in ActivReporter is to filter and sort the data as you desire. The presentation of tabular data in ActivReporter is very fast and renders 100,000+ items per second to the screen (much faster than Excel).

You can arrange columns in any order with drag and drop. You can filter with pre-defined filters or create your own filters. You can scroll rapidly through millions of lines. You can select any subset of lines on the screen. Totals appear at the bottom of the screen for numerical columns instantly.

In most instances, you will not need to view this data in Excel. However that option exists for any HD (**H**igh **D**efinition) pane (up to the limit of 1,048,576 rows). The "export" of HD pane contents is to an Excel Table.

The bottom line in this fundamental difference is that in JB/JR you are limited in these ways:

The same items apply as listed in the Financial Statements in Excel above.

Additionally,

1) There is a natural limit of 1, 048,576 rows because of the limits in Excel. Journal Entry Detail transactions will exceed these limits in many companies.
2) Sorting and Filtering must be determined at design time.
3) You are required to understand the internal structures of the Dynamics GP tables and the naming conventions. The field names you select from (even with "friendly names") are not always understandable.

Other Issues

These are not issues with ActivReporter

1) Excel Table filtering is limited in the number of distinct values that exist in the column. There is no such limit to the filtering capability of the ActivReporter HD pane.
2) JB has no drillback capability into Dynamics GP

Advantage ActivReporter

1) There is no need to store Excel workbooks for reporting. The reporting is innate within the ActivReporter application. (We call this "non-report reporting!) Filters not only hold row filtering information, but also column layouts.
2) You can drillback to Dynamics GP for any Chart of Account, Journal Transaction or Journal Detail transaction regardless of whether it is in the current year or a historical year.
3) You do not have to worry about eliminating void entries.
4) You do not have to worry about eliminating BBF entries from the data.
5) ActivReporter HD panes are much faster than Excel extraction of data.
6) Columns can be dynamically added (or eliminated) to any ActivReporter HD view almost instantaneously.

Trial Balance

ActivReporter and JB/JR both support utilizing Excel to produce a trial balance using the data from the Dynamics GP GL database.

JB/JR uses the "row expansion" technique with Charts of Account (or Categories) to produce a Trial Balance very quickly.

ActivReporter has a built-in "financial design" that produces a Trial Balance with no design effort (built-in) and very quickly.

Fundamental Difference

ActivReporter will list beginning balance, debit activity, credit activity, net change and ending balance. JB/JR does not have the ability to distinguish debit and credit activity!

Trial Balance on Steriods (Activ Trial Balance)

ActivReporter also offers another Trial Balance product that is much more than a static report. There is no similar feature in Jet or any other reporting solution.

The Activ Trial Balance is a product you will use every day in your research activity in your accounting system.

Primary features of the Activ Trial Balance are:

1) Trial Balances are presented in the ActivReporter HD pane.
2) Any Dynamics GP posting is immediately reflected without the need to regenerate the page or hit F9 in a spreadsheet
3) All numerical data presented in the Activ Trial Balance drilldown-able to the underlying transactions, and drillback-able to Dynamics GP source documents.
4) The Activ Trial Balance is extremely fast.
5) The Activ Trial Balance can be customized for reporting in both row and column data
6) The Activ Trial Balance information can be exported to Excel.

Conclusion

Jet uses Excel in an unconventional manner and fundamentally alters the users normal Excel experience.

ActivReporter uses Excel in a conventional manner that does not alter the normal user experience.

Activ Trial Balance is a daily use application that will greatly simplify your operations in the Dynamics GP application.