

Oracle Forms - Oracle Reports - Oracle Designer: Statement of Direction

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INTRODUCTION

Oracle customers have a considerable level of investment in applications developed using the Oracle Forms, Reports and Designer products, and, frequently, ask questions about Oracle's strategy and commitment to these products. This article aims to answer these questions by summarizing Oracle's Software Development strategy for Oracle Forms, Oracle Reports, and Oracle Designer. The document is structured in three parts:

In the first section, we discuss Oracle's software development strategy for Oracle Forms, Oracle Reports, and Oracle Designer.

In the second section, we discuss Oracle's support policy and timelines for specific releases of these products.

In the third section, we provide specific technical recommendations to customers who are using these products.

ORACLE'S PRODUCT STRATEGY

Development Tools Product Strategy

Oracle's development tools strategy is to offer software development tools that enable the development of enterprise applications on an Internet model. The software development tools consist of two parallel product offerings:

Traditional development tools

This solution set consists of the modeling environment provided by Oracle Designer, the application development framework provided by Oracle Forms, and the batch/scheduled reporting solution offered by Oracle Reports. The programming language and execution environment for these tools is PL/SQL.

Java development tools

Recognizing the rapid growth and adoption of Java/J2EE technologies in the industry, Oracle also offers customers the choice of a UML-based modeling environment and 3GL development within Oracle JDeveloper, an integrated J2EE

Application Development Framework (Oracle ADF), and a Java-based end-user reporting solution that will be provided in a future release of Oracle's business intelligence tools. The programming language for these tools is Java and the execution environment for applications is any J2EE container

Oracle continues to invest in and evolve both technology offerings and the specific focus for the investments are different based on the market needs for each solution.

To allow customers to use applications developed with either of these two sets of technologies together and benefit from a common deployment and operational environment, Oracle has also integrated the design time environments for both these offerings within Oracle Developer Suite and the runtimes within Oracle Application Server.

Integrating Forms & Reports with Oracle Application Server

Oracle Application Server is an integrated infrastructure to deploy and manage enterprise applications on an Internet model. The application server unifies several runtime facilities including application runtime environments to deploy J2EE and Forms applications as services, to access the services via an enterprise Portal from fixed and mobile devices, to integrate these applications with legacy systems, and to deliver business intelligence both query and analysis and reporting. Additionally, Oracle Application Server provides a common deployment environment with common security services, common management facilities, and a common scalability and availability architecture.

Oracle has integrated the runtime environment of Oracle Designer (Web PL/SQL), Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports within the Oracle Application Server for three reasons:

Deploy applications to 3-tier architecture

Oracle has provided its customers with the ability to move seamlessly from character-mode to client-server and from client-server to a 3-tier Internet Model for applications. Oracle provides features and migration utilities to allow its Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports customers to upgrade their applications from client/server to the web without having to recode their applications or migrate to any alternate technology. Many hundreds of customers, including Oracle E-Business Suite, have successfully completed this migration – information about them can be obtained from www.oracle.com.

Interoperate and extend applications

Additionally, Oracle provides specific facilities to allow Forms and Reports applications to co-exist and interoperate with other applications deployed to Oracle Application Server. Specifically: Oracle Forms has a runtime interface to invoke Java/J2EE applications or Web Services, Oracle Forms and Reports applications can be exposed into Oracle Portal, and other such facilities. These services are

designed to allow application developers, using either set of development technologies that Oracle provides, to build enterprise applications that can interoperate with each other.

Exploit a common operational and administrative environment

Finally, by integrating these services within Oracle Application Server, Oracle also lowers the cost of administration for its customers. Specifically, some of these common administrative facilities including integration with a common security architecture (Oracle Single Sign-On and Identity Management), a common administration architecture (Oracle Enterprise Manager), a common scalability and availability architecture (Oracle Process Management and Notification, Oracle HTTP Server and mods), and a common technology stack (installation into a single Oracle_Home, a common set of database required support files (RSF), a common JDK and JRE environment, and other such facilities.

Specific Focus Areas for Oracle Designer, Forms and Reports

In addition to integrating Oracle Designer, Forms and Reports runtime environments with Oracle Application Server, Oracle also continues to focus on addressing the most important three issues that have been raised by the user groups for these products:

Smoother Version-to-Version Upgrade

First and foremost, many customers have indicated that the most complex challenge limiting their ability to uptake new versions of Oracle Forms and Reports is the need to re-compile all their Forms applications each time they upgrade. This need for re-compilation is driven by incompatibility between PL/SQL versions and Database Required Support Files (RSFs) between Database Releases. This incompatibility has made it difficult for Oracle Forms and Reports to quickly pick up new RSF versions and made it difficult for customers to quickly exploit new PL/SQL facilities. Oracle is focused on addressing this issue by allowing compatibility changes to only occur across major releases of the Database (e.g. 9i Database to 10g Database), and maintaining PL/SQL and RSF compatibility within maintenance releases (e.g. Database 10g R1 to 10g R2).

Forms and Reports Standalone Installation

Second, while several customers have begun to use Oracle Forms and Reports in the context of the Business Intelligence and Forms installation model, other customers who are upgrading from a standalone 6i environment have wanted Forms and Reports as a standalone installation. This requirement has been addressed with Oracle Application Server Release 10g (v 9.0.4).

Product Stability

As established products on which thousands of applications have been built, Oracle continues to improve the stability and quality of these products with each

release. For instance, Oracle has drastically improved the stability of the Forms and Reports Builders in Oracle Developer Suite 10g (v 9.0.4) compared to the previous release and continues to improve the stability of mod_PL/SQL for Oracle Web PL/SQL applications.

These specific technical efforts are being focused on to ensure that the Oracle Designer, Forms, and Reports customers can upgrade their applications more quickly and easily, and exploit new features in the application server and database more efficiently.

According to the product strategy, all new features and enhancements for Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports will be focused primarily on:

Making the upgrade to the web and to new releases as smooth as possible

Allowing Forms and Reports applications to take full advantage of the application server services and inter-operate with J2EE applications

For Oracle Designer, starting with Oracle Designer 10g, no new features or enhancement requests are planned. The product will be fully supported and the focus will be on product stability but won't include any new functionality.

ORACLE'S SUPPORT POLICY

Commitment to the long-term support of the products

Oracle Forms, Oracle Reports, and Oracle Designer have a large and very active install base, with applications developed with these tools being the cornerstone of many businesses including Oracle's own E-Business Suite. Oracle recognizes this considerable investment and remains committed to the long-term support of these products.

Oracle has no plan to desupport these products. Furthermore, new version of Oracle Forms, Oracle Reports and Oracle Designer will continue to be released and integrated with the future versions of Oracle Application Server and Oracle Developer Suite.

For each release of Oracle Forms, Oracle Reports, and Oracle Designer, Oracle's support policy for these products is designed to support them for the same time period that it supports the specific version of its Developer Suite, Application Server, and Database Server. For example, the specific releases of Oracle Forms, Reports and Designer that have been delivered with Oracle Developer Suite 10g (9.0.4) and Application Server 10g (9.0.4), will be supported for the same time period that Oracle supports that version of the Application Server. This also applies to subsequent releases of the Oracle Developer Suite and Oracle Application Server.

There are two specific reasons for Oracle's strategy in aligning these timelines:

Database RSF support

First, several bug fixes in Oracle Forms, Reports, and Designer also require fixes in Oracle Database RSFs. Oracle has followed a policy of desupporting a specific version of its database server, followed some time later by desupporting a specific version of its application server that has a dependency on that version of the database. During this period, Oracle continues to provide one-off fixes for issues discovered with the database to application server customers.

Application Server support

Second, several bug fixes in Oracle Forms, Reports, and Designer also require fixes in other aspects of the Oracle Application Server such as the servlet engine, Single Sign-on and security services, or Portal. As a result, following a consistent policy allows Oracle to provide maintenance for these products in a consistent fashion.

In this context, Oracle provides two periods for support of every one of its products. These support periods apply to Oracle Designer, Oracle Forms, and Oracle Reports as well. They are:

Error Correction Support

During this period, Oracle may provide program updates, patches to correct problems, general maintenance releases, backports of fixes from later versions, and certification with supported products, new OS releases, and new compilers.

Extended Support

During this period, Oracle provides assistance with service requests, known workarounds and existing product fixes. Oracle also provides assistance with migration to fully supported programs and versions.

Oracle's Support Policies and Timelines

Based on these guidelines, the table below provides the specific time periods for the error correction support and extended maintenance support for Oracle Designer, Forms, and Reports 6i and 9i and 10g Releases. Support dates for subsequent releases of the Oracle Developer Suite and Oracle Application Server will be reflected when those products near their production dates.

Product	End of Error Correction Support	End of Extended Support
Oracle Forms, Reports and Designer 6i	01/31/2005	01/31/2008
Oracle9i Developer Suite (9.0.2)	Same as Oracle9i Application Server v9.0.2	
	07/01/2005	07/01/2008
Oracle Developer Suite and Application Server 10g (9.0.4)	Same as Oracle Application Server 10g (9.0.4)	
	12/31/2006	12/31/2009
Oracle Developer Suite and Application Server 10g (10.1.2) Phase 2	Same as Oracle Application Server. See below for a URL to document containing current dates ¹ .	
Future releases of Oracle Developer Suite and Application Server	Same as Oracle Application Server	

Support Implications for Oracle Forms, Reports, and Designer

The specific implications of the support periods for specific releases of Oracle Forms, Oracle Reports, and Oracle Designer 6i and 9i releases are discussed below.

Oracle Forms and Reports

Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports 6i

Given that the version 6i is the last version to support client/server and character mode deployment, the desupport dates for this release have been extended to allow customers to upgrade their applications to the web and migrate to the latest version of the product. Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports 6i are supported until 01/31/2008 (entering in Extended Support phase on 02/01/2005). For more information on Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports 6i desupport, please refer to Metalink.

Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports 9i, 10g and beyond

Oracle remains committed to Oracle Forms and Reports and as such has no plans to stop development of these products. Since Oracle9i Application Server and for the future releases, Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports are components of the Oracle Application Server. As such, Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports are following the same support cycles as the entire application server platform. For

¹ For end-dates see [this whitepaper](http://www.oracle.com/support/lifetime-support-policy.html) (www.oracle.com/support/lifetime-support-policy.html)

more information on the Oracle Application Server releases and desupport dates, please refer to Metalink.

Oracle Application Server will continue to include Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports components in the future releases and will ensure that the upgrade from one release to another is as smooth as possible, for all components of the application server. Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports will continue to be enhanced and will introduce new features in the future versions of the application server. Oracle's development teams are already working on features for Forms/Reports 11g and beyond. This aligned with the commitment outlined above means that Oracle is already committing development resources that will take Forms and Reports through to, at least, 2017. There are no plans to desupport Oracle Forms and Reports after 2017.

Oracle Designer

Oracle Designer 6i

Aligned with the desupport of Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports 6i, Oracle Designer 6i will be supported until 01/31/2008 (entering in the Extended Support phase on 02/01/2005).

Oracle9i Designer and Oracle Designer 10g

Since Oracle Designer 9.0.2 and for the future releases, Oracle Designer is a component of the Oracle Developer Suite. As such, Oracle Designer is following the same support cycles as the entire suite, aligned with the support cycle of the Application Server. For more information on the Oracle Developer Suite releases and desupport dates, please refer to Metalink. Customers on any release of Designer are encouraged to upgrade to Designer 10g (9.0.4) or any of the follow up 10g maintenance releases as soon as possible in order to continue to take advantage of the ongoing bug fixing and regular updates.

Oracle Designer will not introduce new features or enhancements but will continue to be fully supported and part of Oracle Developer Suite future releases.

ORACLE'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO CUSTOMERS

Recognizing that its customers who are using Oracle Forms, Oracle Reports, and Oracle Designer are looking to Oracle for specific recommendations on their application development strategy, in this section we provide specific guidance based on our own internal use of these technologies within Oracle's E-Business Suite of applications.

Oracle E-Business Suite

The Oracle E-Business Suite of applications makes extensive use of Oracle Forms for its "Professional User Interface", Oracle Reports for Reporting, and Oracle

Designer for database schema design and is pursuing the following product strategy:

Move from client-server to the Web

The entire E-Business Suite of applications that was developed in client-server mode has now moved to an Internet deployment model. This provides customers with a much lower cost model of deployment and management without having to migrate their technology stack or applications. When moving to the Internet deployment model, the E-Business Suite of applications is now using Oracle's Application Server as its runtime platform.

Upgrade to the latest versions

The E-Business Suite is also upgrading to the most up to date version of Oracle Forms 10g and Oracle Reports 10g in order to exploit the stability benefits they provide, to use the latest version of the Oracle Database (RSFs), and to pick up the new features in these versions.

Interoperate with Java/J2EE

Finally, by moving to the Internet model and upgrading to the latest release of the application server, the E-Business Suite can also co-exist and interoperate its Forms and Reports applications with modules built in Java/J2EE.

Develop new modules using JDeveloper

"Self Service User Interface" and new E-Business Suite modules are now J2EE applications developed using JDeveloper. These new applications are deployed on the same application server as the Forms and Reports applications allowing them to inter-operate and share the same infrastructure and common services. In addition, Forms and J2EE applications are able to share existing business logic by using database PL/SQL stored procedures.

Since Oracle E-Business Suite has significant amounts of its code base built using Oracle Forms, Oracle Reports, and Oracle Designer, customers should remain certain that Oracle continues to support current and future versions of these products for the appropriate time frames.

Recommendations for Oracle's Customers

Oracle recommends that Forms, Reports and Designer customers follow a similar path that it took with its own E-Business Suite of applications: (i) Move to the Internet, (ii) Upgrade to the latest versions of Oracle Forms, Oracle Reports, and Oracle Designer; and (iii) Interoperate and co-exist these applications with new J2EE applications using Oracle's Application Server.

For customers who are facing new requirements such as a move to a self service model or a market pressure to provide an HTML user interface, the Java2 Enterprise Edition (J2EE) specification has opened up a whole new set of options

for application development not previously available to the developer. As such, we fully expect customers to be exploiting these opportunities and to take advantage of J2EE to build extensions to their applications. Thus, our strategy is also to provide a modeling and J2EE development environment familiar to Forms, Reports and Designer developers.

Oracle JDeveloper 10g provides a visual and declarative development experience as well as an end-to-end application development framework (Oracle ADF) designed to simplify J2EE development and bring the productivity and ease of use of Oracle forms to the J2EE platform.

The Oracle E-Business Suite has successfully standardized the development of all the J2EE applications on this development environment.

Oracle JDeveloper 10g with ADF is the tool of choice for Forms, Reports and Designer customers because it carries over a similar development model. However, given the architecture difference between J2EE and Forms or Reports, Oracle has no plans to offer a complete migration solution that would attempt to migrate applications built with these tools to J2EE.

Instead, Oracle's strategy is to provide a J2EE development environment exposing similar concepts as Forms and Reports, giving to Forms and Reports developers the opportunity to become productive in a new, but familiar environment.

CONCLUSION

Oracle is fully committed to support Oracle Forms, Reports and Designer for a very long period of time. The support cycle will now be aligned with the Oracle Application Server and Developer Suite. While Oracle Designer will not include new features, Oracle Forms and Oracle Reports will continue to evolve to allow customers to easily upgrade their applications to the web and benefit from the centralized deployment and shared services that the application server provides.

Given the rapid growth and adoption of Java/J2EE technologies in the industry, Oracle's strategy is also to provide a productive J2EE development environment (JDeveloper and ADF) allowing Forms, Reports and Designer customers to embrace J2EE development while still using a familiar RAD, visual and declarative approach.

Following the successful example of the Oracle E-Business Suite, Oracle recommends customers to web deploy their existing Forms and Reports applications, consider the opportunities of new development in J2EE using JDeveloper and ADF and integrate these applications together on the application server, sharing common services and business logic.

With this strategy, Oracle allows customers to continue to leverage their existing investments for many years while offering a path to incrementally move to J2EE, at their own pace, using a productive and familiar development environment (JDeveloper and ADF).



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