

Crystal Decisions vs. SSRS

by John Eck

Below are my observations on some of the differences between CR/CE and SSRS. These observations are based on the use of these software packages for ad hoc report design and web delivery of the reports. I don't do any standalone application development and can't speak to their capabilities in these areas. This list is by no means complete and some things are completely a matter of opinion. I hope this can help you in your decision.

Installation

Both CR and CE are significantly easier to install. No documentation on how to configure SSRS. This could be because it is a trial version of a new product.

Report Designers

1. CR is significantly more user friendly for non programmers.
2. SSRS uses visual studio .NET. If you are intimately familiar with Visual Studio IDE this is not an issue. For those of us unfamiliar with it requires a learning curve.
3. CR has easy to use running totals with a simple interface to design. SSRS I am sure can do this using a VB functions but not as easily. There are running totals but I have not used them so I do not know how easy to use or if they are as flexible as CR running totals.
4. SSRS has dynamic pick lists that can be run off your report data or even an independent table. Multiple parameters can have picklists that are determined by earlier selections. This is easy to implement and dynamic at run time unlike CE which saves the picklists to the published file. This is a very big convenience.
5. SSRS allows you to build drill down cross tabs while CR does not. The cross tabs however do not export to excel as pivot tables that allow drill down. This can be accomplished by exporting to OWC enabled HTML.
6. When you make changes even just formatting changes the data must be refreshed. This can slow down development if you have several changes to make. After you change the layout you can't preview it using saved data.
7. It is easier to repeat column headings on new pages in SSRS.
8. SSRS has a tabular format option which allows you to arrange items in columns. This makes it easier to layout reports and improves export to excel functionality.
9. CR handles calculations with summaries a little easier. Particularly if you want percent of total summaries.
10. SSRS produces multiple group summaries much more easily. Simple cut and paste.
11. SSRS reports are saved in an XML format. I have not worked at it but it should be easy to build a documentation database without purchasing third party software.
12. SSRS Page headers cannot contain Data fields.

13. In SSRS tables if you try to put data in the table heading so it repeats on every page the data does not change from page to page as the data in the table changes.
14. SSRS handles SQL server stored procedures a little better than CR. I have had problems with reports that run complicated stored procedures particularly those that store intermediate data in tables.
15. Drill through reports as well as subreports. Drill through is similar to on demand sub reports except there is no limit to the levels. Each report can link to another report.

Designer Conclusion

If you are developing ad hoc reports that don't require wide or repeated distribution it is difficult to top CR. It is easy to use and very powerful. SSRS does have a few advantages but most of those are in deployment the reporting services web pages.

Deployment Comparisons

1. CE has an easy to somewhat customize interface. End User can set colors, and a couple of other settings like how many reports per page, list view vs. thumbnails.
2. Deploying reports from VS is much easier than publishing them in CE.
 - a. CE gives every report a cryptic name when it is published. SSRS uses a standard file structure naming convention.
 - b. If you made changes to several reports and want to republish them with the publisher the reports must be deleted then republished. All scheduling and shortcuts for these reports must be rebuilt. The other option is to save them into the enterprise folders. This eliminates database passwords and settings for parameters. This is a huge pain when your users tend to run reports on demand. You also must be careful to save the report to the folder the master copy is kept to prevent versioning problems. SSRS you just select deploy and it overwrites the old file with the new one preserving all scheduling info. A huge improvement.
3. Scheduling reports in SSRS is more complicated but more powerful.
 - a. In CE all scheduled reports get saved in the History file. SSRS allows you to set whether or not an execution gets saved and also lets the user save a report they just ran to the History file.
 - b. Changing the schedule is much easier in SSRS. You select the subscription and edit the settings. CE requires a new schedule and then you must delete the old one. This is huge if your distribution lists change regularly.
4. SSRS has data driven subscriptions. CE does not.
 - a. This is a huge deal. If you have a set of reports that all go to the same users you can just create a table with the distribution list and it will send to

- everyone on the list. Add people, Remove people it is all done in the table you created.
- b. You can run the report repeatedly with different parameters for each user all driven by the table and just one subscription.
 - c. All the settings for the subscription can be set in this table even export format so different users can get the same report in different formats. A huge improvement over CE.
5. SSRS has linked reports. If you have a report that runs with a small set of varying parameters you can create linked reports. They look like new reports but just have default parameters set differently. Here is an example. We have a report that can be run for the last workday, last work week, or last work month. In SSRS I can deploy the report than create three linked reports one for the daily, one for the weekly, and one for the monthly. When the end users want to run the report they don't need to bother with entering parameters, they can just run the selected report. (it automatically selects the dates based on which type of report you select.)
 6. SSRS can use cached reports. If you use a non production database for reporting that gets updated once a day you can set reports to cache data for the day. Then when someone runs the report it saves the data on the report server db. If someone comes back later and runs the report again with the same parameters it just pulls the saved data saving on system resources. You can also then set the reports to run during down times and cache data to further save on system resources. Much easier than scheduling and searching history of scheduled reports.
 7. I don't know about other peoples experience but I have had large problems with scheduled reports in CE. I can't compare reliability yet but so far no problems with SSRS.
 8. CE allows you to use date pickers which are not available in SSRS
 9. SSRS does not allow you to print directly from the browser window. CE can even with the HTML viewer in CE 9.0. SSRS requires export to a printable format first.
 10. I have not experienced it yet but I have heard the excel files generated by export from the browser are quite large. I have heard that they are working on a solution.

Conclusion:

CR is much easier to use and seems to be more powerful as a report designer. If you are not planning on distributing reports over the web I would stick with CR. If you are hoping to distribute reports over the web SSRS is a significantly more powerful and usable tool than CE.