

Cognos PowerPlay: Cognos Impromptu and PowerPlay -- what's the difference?

Impromptu is a *reporting tool*; PowerPlay is an *analysis tool*.

A Cognos Impromptu report:

- can be a summary report (totals, counts, averages, etc) or a detail report
- is typically either a **list** (the report designer picks the columns, the database fills out the rows) or a **crosstab** (the report designer selects fields that determine how to aggregate rows and columns, such as by-state or by-month)
- might link to another report (drill-through) so the report user can hop from one report to the next
- is configured in advance by the report author to provide the data in a reasonable format
- can be used to track down data issues (poorly-migrated data, sloppy input patterns, etc)
- requires a pre-configured catalog (which is what Impromptu Administrator is for)

A Cognos PowerPlay cube:

- starts out a bit like an Impromptu crosstab
- is not designed for detail at all, only aggregation (totals, averages, counts, etc)
- can have many layers of data -- for a geographic dimension, users could drill into "USA" to see data broken out by state, then into "Illinois" to see cities there, then into "Chicago" to see finer detail yet...
- lets the end user *analyze* his/her data by determining dimensions, measures, presentation and more at run-time
- might reveal quality issues in the data but it'd be hard to determine exactly which records need attention
- requires a data source (or several) which could be spreadsheets, CSV files, direct database connections or what have you... often people use a data warehouse as an intermediate layer between their enterprise database and a PowerPlay cube

There is *some* overlap between Impromptu and PowerPlay, especially when thinking about Impromptu crosstabs, except PowerPlay crosstabs are very fluid or dynamic. In a PowerPlay cube, for example, you could start out looking at degree-programs-by-academic-year, then drill down into GPA-by-department and further into grades-by-course. Try drilling-through from an Impromptu crosstab!

Impromptu reports give the **report-author** a great deal of flexibility in design decisions and in how to present the data, whether it's a transactional report (here's a list of students and their grades, here's a list of alumni addresses, etc) or a summary report (here are the donor-gifts by designation for the last three years...). But once it's designed, the report user has little to say about it other than to answer some prompts.

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PowerPlay cubes give the **end user** lots of flexibility -- pick another dimension for the columns, add a second layer in the rows, choose to display three different measures simultaneously... If your end-user wants to see head-count instead of average-gpa, or students-per-degree instead of faculty-per-department, no problem in PowerPlay!

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