MOLAP, ROLAP & HOLAP

In the OLAP (On-Line Analytical Processing) world, there are mainly two different types: Multidimensional OLAP (MOLAP) and Relational OLAP (ROLAP). Hybrid OLAP (HOLAP) refers to technologies that combine both MOLAP and ROLAP.

MOLAP
MOLAP stores the data in optimized multi-dimensional array storage, rather than in a relational database. It requires the pre-computation and storage of information in the cube – the operation known as processing.

Advantages:
- Excellent performance: MOLAP cubes are built for fast data retrieval, and are optimal for slicing and dicing operations.
- Can perform complex calculations: All calculations have been pre-generated when the cube is created. Hence, complex calculations are not only doable, but they return quickly.

Disadvantages:
- Limited in the amount of data it can handle: Because all calculations are performed when the cube is built, it is not possible to include a large amount of data in the cube itself. This is not to say that the data in the cube cannot be derived from a large amount of data. Indeed, this is possible. But in this case, only summary-level information will be included in the cube itself.
- Requires additional investment: Cube technology is often proprietary and does not already exist in the organization. Therefore, to adopt MOLAP technology, chances are additional investments in human and capital resources are needed.

ROLAP
This methodology relies on manipulating the data stored in the relational database to give the appearance of traditional OLAP's slicing and dicing functionality. In essence, each action of slicing and dicing is equivalent to adding a "WHERE" clause in the SQL statement.

Advantages:
- Can handle large amounts of data: The data size limitation of ROLAP technology is the limitation on data size of the underlying relational database. In other words, ROLAP itself places no limitation on data amount.
- Can leverage functionalities inherent in the relational database: Often, relational database already comes with a host of functionalities. ROLAP technologies, since they sit on top of the relational database, can therefore leverage these functionalities.

Disadvantages:
- Performance can be slow: Because each ROLAP report is essentially a SQL query (or multiple SQL queries) in the relational database, the query time can be long if the underlying data size is large.
- Limited by SQL functionalities: Because ROLAP technology mainly relies on generating SQL statements to query the relational database, and SQL statements do not fit all needs

(for example, it is difficult to perform complex calculations using SQL), ROLAP technologies are therefore traditionally limited by what SQL can do. ROLAP vendors have mitigated this risk by building into the tool out-of-the-box complex functions as well as the ability to allow users to define their own functions.

HOLAP

HOLAP technologies attempt to combine the advantages of MOLAP and ROLAP. For summary-type information, HOLAP leverages cube technology for faster performance. When detail information is needed, HOLAP can "drill through" from the cube into the underlying relational data.