Windward Reports vs. SoftArtisans

SoftArtisans' WordWriter is part of the OfficeWriter package. The package also includes an ExcelWriter that I have not used, but the process for building the reports is very similar.

Developing reports with WindwardReports' AutoTag is much easier than developing reports with WordWriter. WordWriter is a basically just a prepackaged library of code that you can use in your own ASP/ASP.NET applications. If you want to use WordWriter to generate managed reports, then you must know

1. How to build web pages
2. Basics of scripting languages
3. Basics of server-side scripting
4. Basics of Microsoft Internet Information Services
5. SQL (Standard Query Language)

If you're not a developer, it's going to be extremely hard to learn these things and very unlikely that you will finish learning them in less than a couple of months. Therefore, if you aren't a developer, you can't use WordWriter to generate your reports.

Unlike WordWriter, AutoTag has no prerequisets for creating basic reports. Also, WindwardReports provides lots of tutorial videos and PDFs to minimize the learning curve, so either non-developers or developers may finish designing reports right away.

Non-developers can still at least build the templates for the WordWriter reports using Microsoft Word. To create a WordWriter template, you just insert form fields (a special Word feature) and give them names that match database fields. If you need special fields like calculations in your report that are not already in the database, the developer must create them for you in the code. Then you can designate repeating sections (repeat blocks) in the template by selecting a section of the form fields and marking them with a Word bookmark. WordWriter does not support nested repeat blocks. The bookmark can have any name as long as it matches up with the code for the report. Finally, you can format your report using Microsoft Word. After the report and the code for the report are finished, the developer can make the report accessible through a website. You cannot view the final report unless the developer makes it available on the website, which hinders the report development process.

Template design with AutoTag is much less costly because it can be done by a non-developer. AutoTag also uses the Microsoft Word interface, but it has more powerful design tools. AutoTag's Tag Builder lets you insert the tags similar to the form fields of WordWriter. Using the Tag Builder, you can easily insert database fields, repeating sections, and nested repeating sections. The Tag Builder also empowers you to create fields that don't exist in the database like calculations and special queries. AutoTag lets you preview your report at any time, which lets you can rapidly design the report knowing exactly how the final report will appear. The main benefit of using AutoTag over WordWriter is that the designer doesn't need any developer assistance!