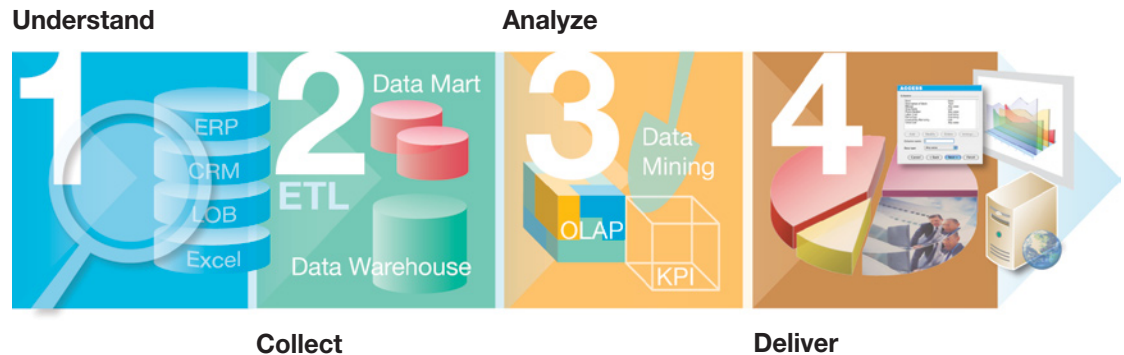


Prioritizing Business Intelligence Initiatives

by Craig McQueen

Business Intelligence (BI) is a key enabler for organizations to be responsive to their environments and turn masses of data into actionable insight. In order to reach the ultimate goal of monitoring all vital signs of their organization and understanding where they are heading there are many components that have to be in place. We have found that there are four key areas that an organization must assess to determine the correct focus for their BI initiatives.



1 Understand

To provide maximum value to an organization, BI initiatives must be undertaken with a strong knowledge of the business's goals and the user environment. Users and their sponsors need to buy in to BI initiatives. Your organization must have a commitment to fact based decision making and an environment of trust between departments. An overall understanding of the Critical Success Factors for the business is also vitally important. Senior Executives need to show support for BI by championing a global BI strategy and roadmap and providing training to all information workers. Senior Executives can best demonstrate their commitment by insisting that all business plans and proposals are backed up by information from corporate BI systems

2 Collect

Data Capture and Quality - The very beginning of the data life cycle is capturing the data that will eventually be analyzed and studied. Some data, such as sales orders, is typically already captured in transactional systems. More qualitative information, such as customer satisfaction, is often captured in a more manual, less rigorous fashion such as in

Word templates or emails. External information from suppliers and industry or demographic data is playing an increasingly important role in BI. Businesses need to ensure they have access to all necessary data in order to be successful in BI initiatives.

Once the data is captured, in order for business users to make informed, confident decisions the data needs to have high integrity. This is becoming increasingly important as some industries are becoming more regulated and data is being provided as part of regulatory compliance. Data quality needs to be considered at many aspects of the data life cycle. This includes an enterprise wide data dictionary and an ongoing strategy for data profiling, cleansing and auditing.

Data Integration and Storage - The backbone of a BI system are the datamarts and data warehouse that brings together information from various source systems. Once they are in place there are many applications that can be built on top of them. Analysis of the source system data and understanding the relationships between the source system data is key to making a successful datamart.

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3 Analyze

Data Analysis - Power business users often need to be able to analyze data in a more flexible, dynamic environment beyond reports. Data analysis tools permit them to begin with an understandable data model and slice-and-dice it enabling them to find the answers to the questions they are pursuing.

Data Mining - Data Mining provides an additional level of sophistication of working with the data. It enables business users to perform operations such as what-if scenarios and forecast into the future. Data mining is typically performed by dedicated business analysts who are trained in statistical methods, but newer tools are being introduced that bring this analytical power to every knowledge worker.

4 Deliver

Reporting - Reports are the baseline of applications used to support business intelligence. Reports often grow in an organic fashion within each business unit leading to inconsistent construction and duplicated effort. By having a centralized, standard reporting process, usability and quality of the reports increase. As well, the amount of effort required to deploy the reports decreases.

Performance Management - BI is the foundation on which Performance Management is built. BI provides the information with which an organization can be measured and compared against its critical success factors. This is the stage at which Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are tracked and displayed and performance management methodologies such as Balanced Scorecards are utilized.

Dashboard - A BI dashboard brings together all the BI components into one place and combines it with additional business context. It becomes the centralized workspace for the business user. Dashboards are usually deployed within a portal environment so that they are readily available to all knowledge workers.

In each of our BI engagements, we work with our customers to go through a comprehensive questionnaire to assess each of these areas. Although the list seems long and daunting, the good news is that most organizations already have many of the necessary pieces in place. Also, the introduction of more user friendly tools, many of which are integrated into software that organizations already own, means that putting the missing pieces in place can be achieved more easily than ever before.

For more information, please visit our website at www.agorainc.com/bi

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