Better Business Intelligence Reporting

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You might be familiar with the ways that you would traditionally set up business intelligence (BI) reporting capability in an organisation. First you’d need to build a data warehouse, and then you’d have long conversations with your IT department about creating a cube and the right kind of queries to enable you to run your business intelligence reports. Eventually your reports would flow through the waterfall and out to you at the other end. If you found out, further down the track, that you wanted to build in data from some new sources, or required a few new reports, you’d have to go back to IT to repeat the process. Hopefully, the information was still relevant by the time you received it.

However, there have been some significant shifts in the way that business intelligence tools operate. Some of the newer business intelligence tools in the market use in-memory technology to speed up the process, associating data in-memory from multiple sources such as transactional systems, traditional disk-based data warehouses, databases and spreadsheets. The associative search capability allows the end users to drive the system, exploring the relationships between the data as they see connections to create charts, graphs and tables in real time.

Here is a summary of our top tips for getting the most out of business intelligence reporting.

1. Get people involved
Let everyone know about valuable data sources that you find so that they can be leveraged across your organisation. Nothing is more powerful for demonstrating the usefulness of business intelligence than involving the end users in building prototype reports. Once managers have the data and tools for analysis in their hands, they will wonder how they ever lived without them.

2. Look for the outliers in your data
Anomalies and exceptions in data can indicate where savings and opportunities lie, so you want to make sure that the set up of your queries isn’t making the anomalies invisible to the end report users. You need to be able to dig deep and find the reasons behind the data deviations. We recently heard a story about a company building their first business intelligence reports, who noticed that one of their company owned stores was being overpayed. The savings from this discovery were enough to fund the initial licensing of their business intelligence software.

3. Presentation is everything
There are a few basic rules for presenting data in meaningful ways. Firstly, pretend you’re in the real estate business and stick to the mantra ‘location, location, location’. The top right hand quadrant on any page is the prime real estate for your most important figures, so don’t use it for your corporate logo on internal presentations and make your readers search the page for key facts that will improve your organisation’s performance.

Make sure the colours and types of graphs that you use are telling the reader the right story. For example, re-using colours across different charts might lead readers to think that relationships are present between the data, when they don’t really exist. Use headings and colour to differentiate your graphs from each other, and also include tables of source data for the number crunchers amongst your readers. One final tip, make sure you use patterns, rather than colour, to create graphs that will be printed in black and white, as this will ensure that the differences in the data are clearly visible in the paper report.

Take a look
If you’re looking for a business intelligence tool delivering the sort of instant result, user-friendly consumer software experience that people are starting to expect in the workplace, take a look at wwwqlikview.com and experiment with their online demonstration sites. Not only is a tool like QlikView powerful and quick to implement, but it’s also very fast to learn, and you can access your BI reports on your mobile.

For further information, visit www.synateq.com.
New Study: Local M-Government

Technology Indicators have released the results of a study into the use of information technologies enabling mobile (field) and flexible (home-based) working in Local Government. The study highlighted cross state differences – for example, councils in Victoria report the highest level of the flexible workforce (approx 7% of the total council staff) when compared to their peers in other states, as well as the highest anticipated growth in flexible working.

The number of mobile (m-government) initiatives is expected to grow. This growth is facilitated by the ever growing diversity of mobile solutions for the services provided by local councils. For example, building inspections with an immediate delivery of inspection reports using mobile printers, mobile access to library information enabling book ordering in remote locations, air and water quality monitoring, fire hazards monitoring, graffiti management. Many such initiatives require low to moderate investment and have short (under 3 months) deployment timeframes.

However, feedback from local councils’ executives suggests that realisation of business benefits of mobile solutions is challenging - about 20% of the councils who have implemented mobile/ flexible working solutions in the last 24 months report little or no benefits to their business. Characteristically, these deployments had poorly defined organisational objectives and suffered from low user adoption. Inadequate network connectivity in some geographical locations also limits benefits realisation.

For a copy of the report, contact Technology Indicators at service@tech-indicators.com.au.