

THE BI OF THE STORM

An Executive Briefing by Sapphire Systems

This paper looks at how Business Intelligence (BI) is helping organisations in the mid-market to harness, access and analyse data to empower greater decision making, and achieve differentiation in an increasingly competitive world.

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DECISIONS: THE CURRENCY OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

As the trend towards globalisation continues to gather momentum, and markets become increasingly saturated, having the right proposition is no longer a differentiator but a prerequisite of existence. Products are becoming increasingly pervasive, with more than half of consumers actively avoiding brands as they seek more targeted, personalised experiences. In the face of sluggish economic growth, companies are having to work harder than ever to engage with stakeholders and stay relevant to their market.

More often than not, this means leveraging existing data, channels and assets to be able to instantly respond to market trends, customer feedback, interactions or price changes and make better, more profitable decisions about all areas of the business.

**“9 OUT OF 10
CORPORATE EXECUTIVES
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Yet according to [the Economist Intelligence Unit \(EIU\)](#), nine out of ten corporate executives admit to making important decisions on the basis of inadequate information, with 46% claiming that wading through huge volumes of data impedes decision-making. Furthermore, global research carried out by [Forbes](#) amongst 3500 execs, found many admitted that they were effectively flying blind, with 55% saying they had trouble making sure that day-to-day decisions supported their company's strategy.

The good news is that decision-making is undergoing somewhat of a transformation. The explosion in data, combined with the availability of intelligent and intuitive techniques to utilise and extract value from this data, have resulted in a significant mind shift. In the face of these unprecedented market dynamics, organisations recognise that it's no longer feasible to consistently use intuition or past experience as a basis for making decisions.

RELIABLE & CONSISTENT DATA -THE FIRST STEP TO BETTER DECISION MAKING.





THE BI OF THE STORM

Business Intelligence (BI) is intrinsic to this shift as it represents a means of harnessing all structured information available to a business, with the sole aim of consolidating data and improving decision making. It combines market data with company data such as sales, financials, supply chain, customer relationship management or marketing, to facilitate comprehensive insight which cannot be derived from any singular set of data. By making this insight available at the right time to the right people in the right format, it can then be used to empower employees to make the best possible decisions, whether they pertain to financial budgets and forecasts, inventory management or customer loyalty.

But while the benefits of BI are well documented amongst the big players, adoption in the mid-market has, until recently, been much slower.



NEW TERRITORY

This disparity existed because BI has long been the privilege of large corporates. It was frequently written off by mid-sized organisations as expensive, overwhelming, and often overkill for their needs.

However mid-market companies face exactly the same challenges as their larger enterprise counterparts, and recognise that they need to understand their businesses better in order to progress. Testament to this recognition is that BI solutions are the number one mid-market priority in 2015 according to Gartner, as business leaders seek to level the playing field and compete with larger players.

The key difference is that the mid-market faces an additional challenge of having much smaller teams and tighter budgets. So against a backdrop of seemingly conflicting priorities, disparate systems and budgetary challenges, how can they achieve success?

**“2015 IS THE YEAR
OF BI SOLUTIONS
FOR THE
MID-MARKET.”**



MID-MARKET RULES

BI in 2015 is a world away from the expensive, complex systems associated with traditional BI projects, and uptake in the mid-market is high.

The new generation of BI systems offer lower price points, greater choice and more flexibility. Deployment methods span cloud and on-premise, and solutions offer extensive tool configurability, making it much easier for business leaders to embrace on their own terms. But ensuring the right approach from the outset is crucial.

More than meets the BI

The first principle in any BI project is to understand that BI is more than just a technology: true BI encompasses people, techniques and processes.

It requires deep understanding, buy-in and cultural change, and even the best BI systems in the world cannot guarantee success unless the organisation is fully committed to the project. In order for BI to work there has to be sufficient buy-in to encourage adoption across the entire department or organisation.

This in turn means working with a partner who understands your business and infrastructure – not just the BI piece.

**“TRUE BI
ENCOMPASSES
PEOPLE, TECHNIQUES
AND PROCESSES.”**

Keep it real

The second golden rule is to be realistic about what is achievable and recognise that not everything may be achieved immediately. Taking small, incremental steps which deliver value and tangible benefit along the way are key to securing buy-in from everyone involved, and maintaining momentum.

Even with the promise of ROI, most organisations cannot pause their business and invest all resources into a huge BI project. It is about prioritising. For example - is the focus consolidating financials in order to achieve greater visibility and support forecasting, or extending efforts to enhance procurement, supply chains, sales and customer service?

Make it easy

Business applications today should be as intuitive and easy to use as a tablet or smartphone.

Reports and dashboards should never be overcomplicated. It stands to reason that if business users are unable to access the insight created by BI within a few clicks, their motivation will quickly wain.

Building very complex reports is time consuming and costly, therefore opting for a BI system which incorporates pre-built reports is crucial to reduce costs and resources. Additional information can always be added at a later date, but having sufficient flexibility to allow all business users to slice, dice and drill down into data on a self-service basis is key. Dependency on IT skills and resources slows down the process, impedes agility and diminishes decision-making.

State the obvious

Mobile and social media are now an intrinsic part of the way we live our lives. For BI to be adopted extensively and successfully it must conform to these standards. The latest BI applications incorporate these capabilities, allow users to view dashboards on a smartphone and follow pieces of information such as landed costs or incoming orders via social media platforms.



GET GOING...



Power to the people

Another cause of BI project failure occurs when analytical skills are confined to a small number of users. BI is not an add-on to existing business processes. It must be incorporated into day-to-day processes and put in the hands of business users to maximise its potential.

Cull complexity

Making a decision based on limited information can be more detrimental than instinct alone, as it creates a misleading picture of a scenario. A good BI system will take data from disparate sources and integrate it into user-friendly dashboards, crunching complexity behind the scenes to analyse current scenarios and map them against assumptions and forecasts to predict future scenarios. However from a user's perspective it should appear in a simple, easy to navigate, format.

A higher plane

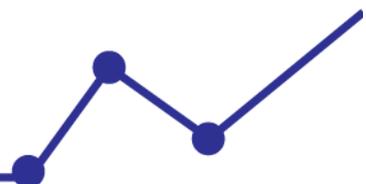
The emergence of cloud-based BI solutions opens the door to functionality which would previously have been restricted to all but the larger players. Offering reduced implementation, maintenance and support costs, cloud represents a major force in levelling the playing field.



A GOOD BI SYSTEM TAKES DATA FROM DISPARATE SOURCES & INTEGRATES IT IN USER-FRIENDLY DASHBOARDS.

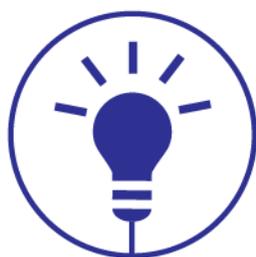


ACCELERATING SUCCESS



There's no doubt that BI is now successfully creating a storm in the mid-market. These companies have the ability to be more agile than larger enterprises and can act on new insights much faster. This capability is driving innovation and creativity, securing competitive advantage, and in many cases enabling mid-sized companies to leapfrog the efforts of their larger counterparts.

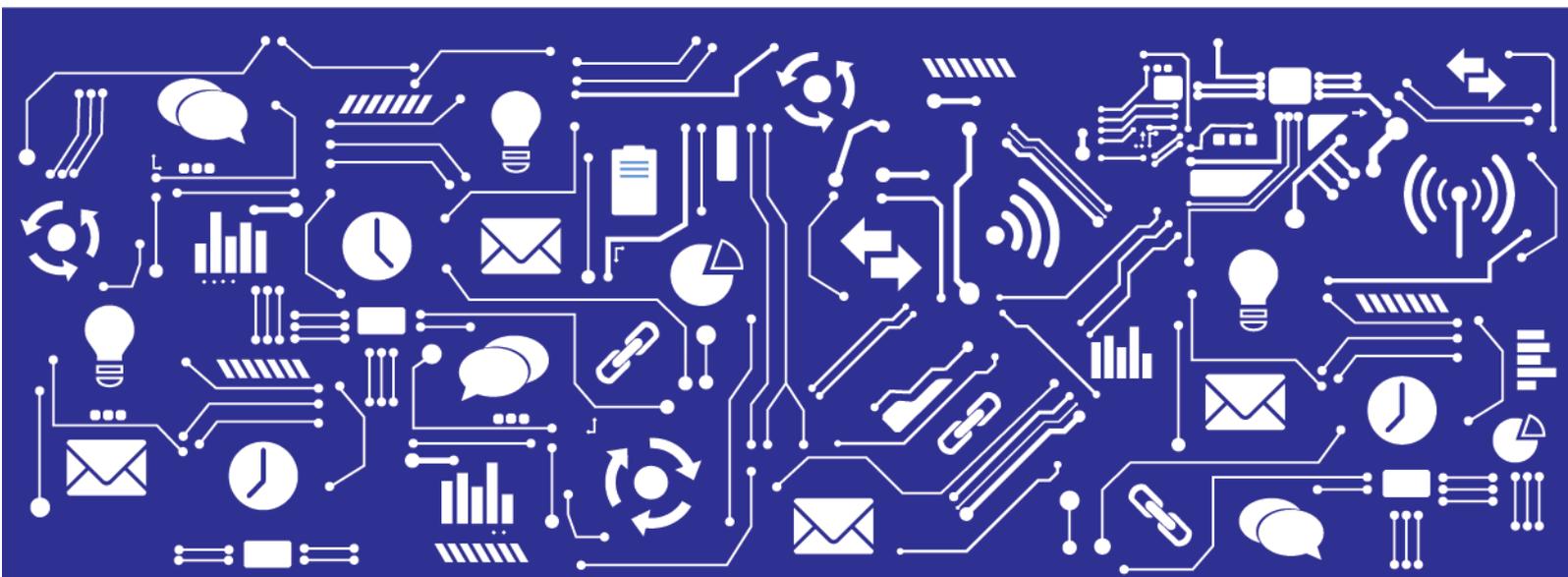
Effective BI minimises any margin for error or interpretation, reduces risk and informs the very best decisions. In the future this capability will represent the best opportunity for differentiation. In a market where products are increasingly pervasive and competition is on the increase, failing to capitalise on BI is akin to driving without your foot on the accelerator. You might be able to cruise for a while, but eventually you'll be overtaken.



**BI IS HERE
TO STAY...**

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