

Five reasons why the right BI is like the right partner



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Matchmaker, matchmaker

You know you need business intelligence (BI), but you want it to be successful. As you consider your options, you are bound to run into companies that say you shouldn't choose a traditional BI solution because it's too boring and it takes too long to implement. You might hear that traditional BI is "processing intensive," "way too big to be nimble and agile," "a mountain of reports that no one understands." You might also hear that you should look into a lightweight solution. Or that you must have BI software that can provide gorgeous graphics

on your iPad. These solutions are alluring because they offer a quick fix to your information woes. You might even see demonstrations of how easily and quickly you can find the information you need if you toss out your dinosaur reporting application for one that provides slick animation for your next presentation.

If you think about it, searching for the right BI solution for your company and making sure it's a success is much like looking for the right partner. There are a lot of relationship "experts" who will tell you to ditch your traditional views in favor of new techniques: speed dating, online dating, compatibility profiles, million dollar matchmakers and more. They'll tell you the old ways of meeting people and dating are passé. All you need are their shortcut methods and you'll be happier faster.

This is happening with BI, too. Because the need for BI is great, suddenly a lot more BI solutions from a lot more companies have appeared on the scene. Like the experts who tell you to abandon the traditional approach to a relationship for what they assure you will be an easier path to true love, many of these companies offer BI solutions with flashy bells and whistles that can entrance and charm you.

But what happens when the bloom is off the rose? Most likely, companies that purchased the product that appeared to have it all in a few short demonstrations will discover that it falls far short of meeting their analytics needs. Others might find that they are quickly outgrowing their solution and now have isolated islands of data they can't access. BI solutions, like relationships, need to take a traditional path. Finding the right BI, then, is like finding the right partner. Here are five reasons why.



1. The right BI is more than a pretty face

It's hard to resist a pretty face. In a speed dating situation, for example, people are going to be drawn to the most attractive person in the room. And, often, that pretty face is the reason there will be a first date. However, if all that person has to offer is a pretty face, things can go sour quickly. The face might attract; however, there needs to be personality or substance or you're left with a one-dimensional companion. Yet, many people will commit to that pretty face anyway because, well, it's just so pretty.

In stories about why BI projects fail, there is usually a section on how organizations fall for gorgeous dashboards that are practically singing about high profits from an iPad and think that they're the cure for the reporting doldrums. However, many of these dashboards show inconsistent figures or don't flow easily into the rest of the organization's processes when they want them to. BI is more than dashboards; it is a robust analytics solution of which attractive dashboards can be a part—as long as what they're showing is real and usable.

In the search for the right BI, you can certainly be swayed by something that looks good on your office computer or tablet, but you need to make sure that it is three-dimensional. You need to be able to interact with it, just like you need to have

great conversations with your partner. The pretty face with a winning personality that is backed by a strong values system and a supportive community of trustworthy friends and family is likely to be just the right person for you. The right BI is similar; it is supported by integrated sister components and trusted information and data.

In a traditional courtship, you will soon learn whether there's more to the pretty face. When you choose traditional BI, you are definitely getting more than bells and whistles that look and sound good. You're getting fact-based insights from a unified workspace that can help you make the right decisions. You can interact with it and it will address your needs with substantive information that you can be confident in and that you can act on.



2. The right BI moves you to action

In the online dating scene, you are usually asked to create a profile that describes your likes and dislikes and encourages you to provide information about what you're looking for in a relationship. If someone is interested in you after reading your profile, they will usually communicate with you by email. Some of these emails will be long with a number of details about what the person can offer you and why you should meet or date him or her. The information might be enough to pique

your interest and so you might get in touch with that person and suggest you get to know each other better.

In some cases, when you meet that person, he or she will not have much more to offer. He or she might not be able to converse with you or he or she will spend what might seem like hours in a self-absorbed autobiographical discourse that lists personal preferences and, as a result, you will not be able to get many words in edgewise. You might not be inspired to date either type again.

Some BI solutions can be like that, too. They provide you with information but leave you wondering what to do with it. You have sales figures, but you have nothing that can help you figure out how to improve those figures. You might think that you've spotted a trend, but there's nothing there to tell you how you can capitalize on it. Some people think that's why they don't need traditional BI. They see traditional BI as just a long, endless dissertation of where their company has been. They think that traditional BI can't possibly be interesting, so they will look for a more modern solution or stop using BI altogether.

The right BI is not read-only. It motivates you to action. You can create "what-if" scenarios, analyze them and pick the right one. You can access financial models, contribute your plans and submit them to a larger model. You really do have what so many BI solutions promise: the ability to turn information into relevant insight and use it to act in ways that drive your business forward.



3. The right BI is not interchangeable

After a traditional courtship, if all goes well, you end up in a committed relationship. You'll marry or move in with the love of your life and begin a life together. You'll learn each other's habits, preferences, lifestyle and hobbies. In addition, you'll make some adjustments to how you used to live (as a single) to make your partner happy and your partner will do the same for you. You will figure out how to get along in a fair degree of harmony.

So, in that situation, it would be very difficult to replace that person with someone else and enjoy the companionship, fulfillment and contentment that you have with your partner. BI is the same. It is the heart of your organization's analytics system, not easily replaced without big risks. When you make an investment in something as critical as a BI solution, you are taking on a major initiative. You make adjustments to the solution to meet your needs, integrating it with other systems, such as ERP or CRM, and other applications that can enrich your BI, such as predictive analytics or scenario modeling. You can't suddenly decide to install an entirely new system or go to another vendor, order a new reporting solution, and expect it to work the same way with the rest of your solution.

With the right BI, you can not only choose your capabilities based on your immediate and future needs, but you can choose the right size that fits your company. If you need to work with your data in a spreadsheet and then export it to your analysis workspace, you can. If one of your sales representatives is at a customer's site and wants to show them the latest sales figures, they can get them on their mobile phone. And you don't have to look elsewhere for any of these features; they are part of your solution.



4. The right BI won't make you choose

You're probably familiar with this scenario. A couple you know is arguing. He doesn't like her friends. She doesn't like the fact that he spends all weekend watching sports. So, he'll say, "It's either your friends or me" and she'll say "It's either your sports or me."

Many times, this kind of "choose me or lose me" mandate happens between two people who have not spent much time getting to know each other. They think that "being exclusive" means that they can't have any other people or interests in their lives. The results of this approach are rarely satisfactory because each partner is missing out on something they need to have a fulfilled life. In a relationship that has been built over time, with each person truly understanding the other because they've taken the traditional path to commitment, there is no demand to choose friends or activities over the relationship.

The perception in the marketplace about BI is similar: you have to give something up when you choose your solution. You either have the freedom to work with BI on your desktop or from the BI environment IT provides. With the right BI, you give up nothing. You don't have to choose. Individuals have personal analytics solutions and IT has the centralized control it needs to make sure every corner of the organization has the data, information and insight they need to make decisions at the point of impact (all in a single solution).



5. The right BI is fueled with smarts

When asked to describe the qualities of the right partner, many people include "intelligent" or "smart." Most people need to be with someone who can demonstrate that they can make smart decisions and that can carry on a lively, interesting conversation about topics that matter (or even some that don't). If they're well-read or know a lot of facts because they are well-educated and they are willing to consult other sources to make sure what they are saying is true, all the better.

One of the reasons that BI is often perceived as boring is because many see it as just a bunch of reports, often used to chide line of business managers for declining pipeline or sales or as an impetus for doubling their profit goals. The "intelligence" just doesn't seem to be there.

The right BI is all about intelligence. Statistics, analytics algorithms, big data, social media and more are combined with traditional reporting and analysis capabilities so you get a holistic view of your business. You can generate the numbers and create the results you need to leave your competition in the dust. There are search options with intuitive navigation so you can find the right information fast to understand your business. Desktop and advanced capabilities help you analyze complex data and information to understand the underlying causes of an event or action with lightning-fast speed.

Most importantly, like the partner who knows where to go to get the right knowledge for a great conversation, the right BI is fueled by its interconnectedness with other sources of information. It can reach into data warehouses, enterprise content management systems, databases and information management environments to make sure that the data you access is the right data for whatever task you have at hand—every time.



IBM business intelligence is the right BI

The right BI is within your reach. IBM has optimized core BI capabilities such as reporting, analysis, scorecards and dashboards and then added real-time monitoring, mobile, collaboration, and predictive and advanced analytics capabilities. IBM has developed BI solutions for large

enterprises, small and midsize businesses, departments, workgroups and even individuals. And, because IBM believes in solutions that can all work together for the good of your business, IBM has added performance management and personal analytics. As a result, IBM business intelligence fits the criteria for the right BI.

IBM business intelligence offers the pretty face—and all the rest

IBM business intelligence solutions certainly offer rich dashboards and interactive graphical workspaces that you can access on your office workstation, notebook, tablet and smartphone to help you see how your business is doing. However, IBM business intelligence solutions are also robust, so that there is real value and substance behind those “pretty faces,” thanks to robust capabilities for reporting, scorecards, analysis and more.

To help organizations determine what they need to be doing to next, IBM has added capabilities for planning, budgeting, forecasting, trend and statistical analysis, what-if analysis and predictive analytics so that the solution is well-rounded. You have what you need to understand historical trends, monitor what’s happening in your organization as it’s happening and make decisions for the future that can result in better business outcomes.

IBM business intelligence gives you what you need to act

IBM business intelligence solutions were designed not only to provide you with the tools to assemble, analyze and share relevant information, but also to act on what you have found so that your business gets the results it needs to stay ahead of the competition.

IBM business intelligence includes assessment, modeling and workflow capabilities to make it easy to take action. Adaptable planning and forecasting capabilities enable consistent and cohesive decision-making. Workflow capabilities structure and automate analytic processes to drive greater speed, accuracy and accountability in performance planning and forecasting. Organizations and workgroups in your company can assign tasks and track progress to ensure that potential business problems are addressed promptly.

IBM business intelligence needs no substitutes

IBM business intelligence is designed to remove the hassle of trying to shoe-horn partial BI solutions into a greater BI environment. Instead, IBM has spent the last decade or so working on business intelligence software that is flexible, adaptable and can grow with your business. IBM business intelligence solutions are modular so that they can integrate with one another when the time comes.

You do not need to go looking for a separate solution and try to force it into your current system; everything you need is right there. And if you want to add predictive analytics or an OLAP in-memory processing engine, you can do that, too. IBM business intelligence is designed to work with IBM analytics, data warehousing, information management, enterprise content management and performance management solutions. You can even deploy them on the infrastructure of your choice, such as a mainframe or the cloud.

With IBM business intelligence, you can have it all

Since about 2005, businesses have had to choose either a centralized, traditional BI solution that helps ensure data integrity or a decentralized discovery tool that gives individuals the freedom to explore data in their own way. With IBM business intelligence, you don't have to make a choice. IBM business intelligence solutions are designed to provide both analytic freedom and management control. From the desktop, mobile and from the web, users in your organization can start almost anywhere and use BI capabilities the way they want to get their work done.

At the same time, IT is not hampered by excessive implementation, deployment, management and maintenance tasks. IT can validate content from multiple environments in a single interface, which can streamline upgrade processes and increase IT efficiency. IBM business intelligence solutions are designed to support multiple versions of software to help ease upgrade and roll out. IT can also effectively use and enhance existing security standards and restrict access to data according to business requirements, while at the same time reducing barriers to user adoption with the option to simplify the login process. It's a win-win for everyone.

IBM business intelligence is smart

The primary definition of intelligence is the ability to apply knowledge to manipulate one's environment or to think abstractly as measured by objective criteria. IBM business intelligence provides an extensive set of capabilities that can help you anticipate and shape outcomes, which is a form of manipulating the environment. You can also access the objective criteria that help you think abstractly—either from IBM business intelligence software or from other IBM software that integrates with IBM business intelligence, such as data warehousing, enterprise content management and information management.

You can uncover why something happened and use sophisticated algorithms, intuitive searches and automated analysis to decide what the next best action should be. You can create scenarios that help you anticipate risk and validate your assumptions and you can examine predictive results to better understand what might happen in the future. You can connect to other IBM systems, services and software to add dimensions to your knowledge. Just about everything you need for better business outcomes is waiting for you when you use a solution that is holistic and fueled by smart software and solutions.

Conclusion

Who knew that looking for the right BI could be the same as looking for the right partner? The similarity is striking. For the best results in both cases, you should not rush into anything. Instead, take time to appreciate the traditional ways of doing things. When searching for the BI solution that will create the most value for your business, the last thing you want to do is invest a great deal of capital in something simply because you had a great time on your BI “speed date.”

Consider the five criteria for the right BI and look for the solution that fits those criteria. In the end, you are likely to discover that IBM business intelligence is the right BI solution for your company. And that’s where the partner and BI solution analogy diverges because in life, we can’t all commit to the same person. However, everyone can commit to a business intelligence solution from IBM.

About IBM Business Analytics

IBM Business Analytics software delivers data-driven insights that help organizations work smarter and outperform their peers. This comprehensive portfolio includes solutions for business intelligence, predictive analytics and decision management, performance management and risk management.

Business Analytics solutions enable companies to identify and visualize trends and patterns in such areas as customer analytics that can have a profound effect on business performance. They can compare scenarios; anticipate potential threats and opportunities; better plan, budget and forecast resources; balance risks against expected returns and work to meet regulatory requirements. By making analytics widely available, organizations can align tactical and strategic decision making to achieve business goals. For more information, see ibm.com/business-analytics.

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