10 Questions to ask your Business Intelligence provider for maximum ROI

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So you've decided to invest in Business Intelligence (BI) software… great! No business of any size should be going without the insights its own data can offer. But how can you determine whether or not you're getting a decent return on investment (ROI) from your BI vendor?

In this whitepaper, we've put together 10 key questions to ask to ensure your BI is up to scratch and your investment is worthwhile for your business.

Question #1: Is the initiative going to be finance-led or technology-led?

This is important from two separate angles; primarily, it'll tell you why you're starting the project off and what outcomes to expect - ideally there'll be a combination of finance/business and technology benefits anticipated. Secondly, it'll help you ascertain who in the organization owns the implementation and who is accountable.

Question #2: Who are the users – the 'report consumers' – and, by extension, how are you proposing to train them?

Naturally all competent software designers will make their systems as easy to use as possible, but in terms of what data they want, it's a decision that will need to be made. Is it going to be calibrated for the sales team or the finance team? Will the executive team and board use it for a general overview?

Question #3: Does your BI partner have intimate knowledge of and experience of your market sector?

In the press:

- "Data Warehousing Market revenue from manufacturing application is likely to expand with a CAGR of more than **15%** through **2025**. The growth is attributable to advent of Industry 4.0 and intensifying trend of cyber-physical systems in manufacturing facilities to generate huge data."
(Source: Digital Journal)

- "The rise in the aviation sector is escalating the growth of the Data Warehouse as a Service Market."
(Source: Manomet Current)

Look at the two quotes from leading commentators in the box-out. Both refer to the use of data but one is specific to the manufacturing market and the other to aviation. This is not a one-size-fits-all, commodity product, but something that will need to be tailored to your business' exact requirements. Does your partner have what it takes?

Question #4: Where is your data coming from?

The good news is that a good data warehouse implementation with business intelligence sitting on top of it will extract all the information you need from all areas of your company and present it to you in a sensible, actionable manner. The bad news is that this

> 66 "Being able to demonstrate extra information, extra trends that the business had never looked at or viewed before - that was the primer to realising that we need to go with a proper system"
>
> **Rob Holgate,** Head of Finance, A. J Wells (Quoted in: A. J Wells & ZAP Case Study)

same information is currently likely to be scattered around older software systems, newer ones and, of course, in a LOT of spreadsheets. Ideally, you need to be able to access everything everywhere all the time, to give your BI the best chance of delivering.

Question #5: On-premise or cloud?

Early BI implementations were on-premise and therefore limited by the physical capacity (and location) of IT systems. Nowadays the recommendation is to go into the cloud at every opportunity and without exception, as long as it's the right sort of cloud, with all your security and data sovereignty questions answered in advance.

Question #6: Where is the BI system's data coming from?

This question can be interpreted in two ways. First it can refer to the means by which the BI speaks to your data; if it doesn't interact in near-real time then you're getting a delayed snapshot of your business when you ask it for something. It can also mean where the servers are physically located. Remember, your data will be subject to the laws in the country in which it is located.

Question #7: How flexible will the system be?

Looking at the quotes in the second box in this eBook, the first suggests that the client needed to check things that they hadn't considered previously. The second suggests that needs change as the company grows and evolves. Any BI system you implement will have to cope with that sort of change.

Question #8: Will it scale affordably?

This is related to question 7 and it's vital. Business doesn't stay still and — freak years like 2020 aside— it's likely that you'll be hoping to grow. Your BI system needs to be able to grow with you and take in more data feeds as you acquire other organizations with their own IT structures. It needs to be accessible and comprehensible to incoming management who have arrived as a result of these changes. Consider also the addition of occasional users as well as the full time staff — how flexible is this?

> 66 "As we are reporting, requirements shift and change over time. So we were able to make those minor incremental changes ourselves, too, if need be"
>
> **Dominic Green,** Business Technology Manager, Joval Wine Group (Quoted In: Joval Wine Group & ZAP Case Study)

Question #9: To what extent is your BI system's supplier going to be involved?

This is going to be something your organization will need to consider for itself. Many of ZAP's mid-market clients quoted on our website, were very keen to work with a BI partner that would be on the spot to help regularly in the form of training and consultancy hours. Enterprises with a large IT department are more likely to want a hands-off approach while they get their own team to offer support where needed.

Question #10: How long will it take to implement and how will systems function while that is a work-in-progress?

Even the fastest implementations of a decent BI system can take weeks rather than hours (the good news is that it's not months as it might be with full-blown ERP) and you're unlikely to be able to afford to have your business information walled off while that implementation is happening. Don't be afraid to ask any prospective partner what happens while you're changing to any new system — the good ones will have an answer.

Conclusion

Selecting the right BI tools is vital for your business' future. An underlying automated data warehouse will feed it the right information the whole time and keep a 360 degree view of the business available around the clock, and the questions above should offer a good starting point!

Ready to learn more? Watch our webinar on-demand:
5 Ways to bring your ERP data to life in Power BI
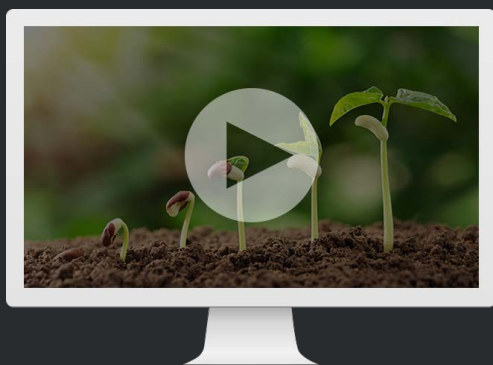
- A guide to dashboards, reports, statements and analytics for **Sales, Purchasing, GL** and all areas of reporting in Power BI
- Data collection and data connection options for your ERP data **(on-premise and cloud!)**
- How to add associated data to your Power BI financial reports and augment your ERP insight with info from **Excel, CRMs, and legacy systems**

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