Getting Started with Business Intelligence

Tips and Tools to Ensure Success
Identifying and selecting a Business Intelligence platform is not as onerous as it may appear at first. There is a straightforward process, but this does not mean you should take the process lightly.

A successful BI project will drive remarkable business value. For example, organizations have seen five times increases in inventory turns or 20% gains in incremental revenue after deploying BI platforms.

However, the failure rate of BI projects remains high; according to Gartner, 70 to 80% of all BI projects fail. So, how do you avoid failing? Here is your guide to ensuring your project is among the 20-30% of successful implementations.
Quick Tips

1 Establish a partnership, do not buy a product.
You are not buying a technology product, you are engaging in a business relationship with another company. You are about to make an investment of time and money to improve the competitive position of your business, so approach the project with that goal. Evaluate the company with whom you are doing business beyond their product offering. Understand that a multiple vendor solution means maintaining partnerships with multiple folks. Here are some key items to address during the buying cycle, beyond product functionality:

• Is this a business and person with whom you want to do business in future? Can they help you improve your business? Is the company willing to work within your constraints and needs?
• Does their enablement process and support policy match your business?
• Does the company have a reputation for helping customers achieve business benefits? This can be ascertained through industry analyst reviews and 3rd party metrics such as Net Promoter Score.
• Does your team’s skill set align with that provided by the platform? What incremental resources will you need to maintain and run the platform?

2 Solve business problems, not data problems.
Two primary reasons BI projects fail is that the initial requirements do not drive specific business value or the requirements change and the platform cannot adapt. A set of cool dashboards will not win you a promotion, but improving your business competitively will. To be successful, establish the technology requirements for your BI platform based on business requirements. Ask yourself what business metrics will this project improve? Plan for the reality that your business will change and grow and so, too, will your requirements.
Recommended BI Platform Selection Process

1. **Do your research.**
   The functionality of BI platforms varies widely. Understand the functionality, industry terms, deployment options (on-premise, Cloud), and different vendors' capabilities. There are lots of resources on the web or at industry events where you can start building your knowledge. Here are a few suggestions to get started:
   - **Vendor perspective:** View vendor demos online, attend live demos and webinars. Check out their resource centers and read their white papers.
   - **Expert perspective:** Find out what the experts have to say. Read books or articles from noted BI experts like Ralph Kimball to understand the basics and in-depth topics. Industry analysts, such as Gartner, also follow the BI space closely and publish extensively. They provide in-depth research on various BI topics, including assessments of vendors' capabilities. Their research can also be found on vendor sites for free.
   - **Join the Discussion:** There are many online BI discussions and more being added every day. You can find them on LinkedIn, and other technology sites, but beware the content can often be vendor biased.

2. **Create business and technology requirements.**
   Set a specific business goal and three to five use cases to drive the initial technology requirements. Then review and enhance requirements to ensure platform can support changes in those requirements. Sometimes, this is easier said than done. Download the Top 10 Business Questions that Drive your BI Technology Requirements guide, to better understand the key factors that determine your BI requirements.
3 Get executive buy-in.

Create a business case for the platform purchase, based on your business goal. Map out a total cost of ownership model and business benefit metric (cost reduction or revenue improvement) over at least a 3 year period. Get executive agreement on the business plan, purchase process, decision maker, budget, and timeline.

4 Build a short-list.

From your research and requirements, establish a short-list of vendors. Reach out to the vendors, get demos, ask questions about functionality and services. Ask for third party research that validates what they tell you and their capabilities and market position. If possible, ask if they will share Net Promoter Scores (NPS) with you. Be sure to give vendors specific use cases and requirements; and issue an RFP if desired. The goal: find out if this company (and platform) will enable you to achieve your specific business goal. Download 11 Key Questions to Ask of a BI Solution to get started building a short list of vendors that are best suited to meet your BI needs.
5 Make a selection.

Get to know the target vendors on your shortlist. Ask detailed questions and meet other employees besides the sales team. You may want to do a workshop where each company shows their platform performing one of your specific use case scenarios.

Do a Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) comparison. Pricing and packaging among vendors differs considerably and license costs are only a component of the overall costs required to run the software. Ensure you understand the full cost of deploying, maintaining, and running the platform, including people, software, hardware, and upgrades.

Evaluate vendors on several factors. While not necessarily product specific, there are numerous other factors that should be taken into account. These include company character, user experience, service and support, company viability, total cost of ownership, security, and flexibility. For a comprehensive approach to procuring Business Intelligence, download the BI Buyer’s Kit here.