

Getting More from Business Intelligence





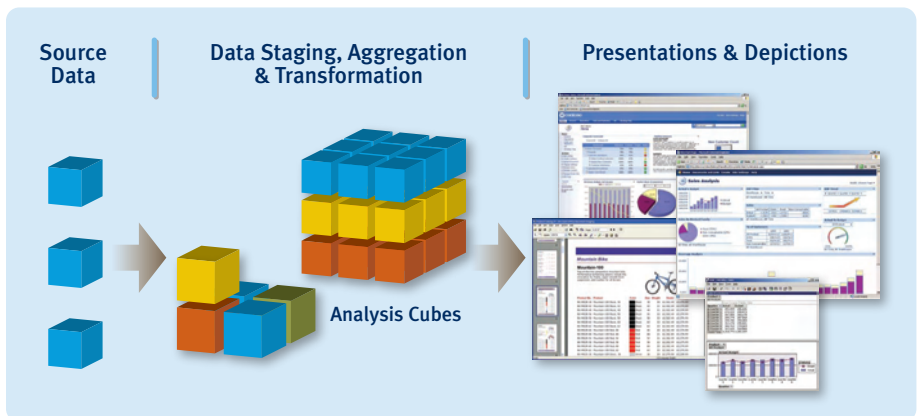
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WHAT IS BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE?

Ask a room full of people their definition of “Business Intelligence” and there will probably be as many answers as there are people. While some may believe this is a problem, consider that this is okay because to be successful in meeting Business Intelligence needs today, emerging and enterprise businesses have to accept that it covers a broad range of capabilities.

The typical approach to Business Intelligence centers on data integration and technology. Using this approach, various source databases are identified, the data is consolidated and aggregated into a data warehouse or data mart so it can be analyzed in the form of an OLAP cube, and then finally that data is put into some sort of presentation format. In essence, this is only a technical view of what it takes to solve the problem of converting data into information. While this approach worked in the past, at what cost? Only the largest of companies could afford to invest in this type of technology. To make Business Intelligence implementations more affordable to emerging and enterprise businesses, there needs to be a new approach that opens the door to the limitless possibilities that can be achieved with all the data that’s been gathered in the past and continues to be gathered today.

TYPICAL DATA INTEGRATION APPROACH



A NEW APPROACH TO BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

nexDimension Technology Solutions suggests looking at Business Intelligence from a different perspective. What would happen if companies looked at the data from the standpoint of the business processes that drive the data? What if we were to begin at the beginning of the process rather than when the data was already in the database?

What if companies were to analyze the nature of the data as various processes impact it to identify real opportunities to improve performance? How would the exceptions that would surface be handled? How much economic value could be realized if this data was presented as actionable information to appropriate personnel within an organization? By incorporating this new approach to Business Intelligence, emerging and enterprise businesses will rise to the next level and improve their organizations as a result.

THE BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE FUNNEL

What goes on within a business is what we describe as the Business Intelligence Funnel. The Funnel helps to identify key business processes within an organization and the various systems that support these operations. The Funnel also helps to identify a very important aspect of Business Intelligence that many organizations struggle with—what should be measured?



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For example, from a financial transaction point of view, the funnel starts at the top with customer-facing infrastructure such as a call center, internet web portal, point-of-sale system or a project timesheet. It then drives into operational components such as order processing, inventory management, purchasing and billing, then into financial components such as payables and receivables, and ends with the general ledger. This information is used to populate a Business Intelligence Data Matrix that identifies the various processes, the source systems involved and the dimensions that are impacted by the process.

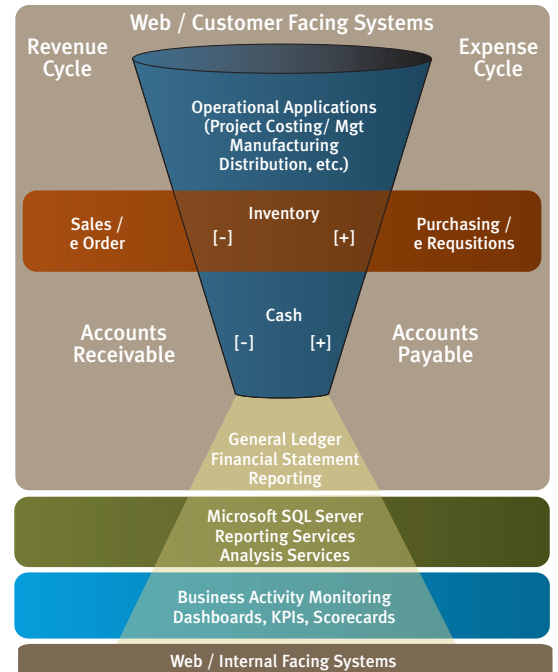
In discussions regarding these operational areas, it is possible to uncover critical business measures that beg to be monitored routinely as well as the interrelationships between systems that impact the underlying data. If an organization has been around for some time, there may be an inherent “gut” feel about what measures are important to the organization’s success. Regardless of whether the measures are based on “gut” or a written list of performance indicators, many are not monitoring themselves in a real-time, cohesive, systemic fashion. The problem with this is that anyone who’s participated in a meeting knows that it’s practically impossible to engage line-of-business and department managers constructively without empirical evidence. But history has proven that by monitoring measures to evaluate performance within an organization, performance in that area will improve over time. All we have to consider is the amazing success of General Electric under the leadership of Jack Welch as they adopted and embraced their own scorecard methodology to appreciate that we should be compelled to measure, monitor, manage and act.

What’s also important to acknowledge is that by using the Business Intelligence Funnel, it is possible to consider ANY enterprise, identify its processes and systems, and then define a universe of indicators that are the keys to its successful performance. If these indicators are constantly measured and evaluated, that organization will improve and become more efficient, agile, competitive and profitable.

But many emerging and enterprise businesses, even with experienced financial executives on hand, have trouble defining a universe of key performance indicators. These organizations may have lots of data, but they’ve not reached the level of “intelligent organizations”—those who convert data into meaningful information that is relevant and delivered within the right context to appropriate personnel so it can be acted upon in a timely manner. We are confident that organizations that strive to transform themselves into intelligent businesses now will be considerably more successful in the future.

This transformation process takes a forward-thinking enterprise to succeed. Fortunately, organizations that are still using existing systems from years ago don’t necessarily have to change their systems to transform. Instead, they have to be willing to apply some incremental technology to get more out of those systems. And if they do, they will do themselves a major service.

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE DATA FUNNEL





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BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE DATA WAREHOUSE MATRIX

BUSINESS PROCESSES	SOURCE SYSTEMS					DIMENSIONS				
	Web	CRM	Shipping	Accounting	Date	Customer	Location	Sales Rep	Product	Problem
Sales Orders	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Customer Service Calls	X	X			X	X		X		X
Sales Forecast		X			X	X	X	X	X	

MICROSOFT®—THE GREAT EQUALIZER

When someone says, “I need to change systems,” their statement could often just be rephrased, “I’m trying to get more information from my existing system, but since that system can’t do that, I think I have to replace the system I’ve got.” This approach could be misdirected. They may not actually have to change their source system, and shouldn’t want to, especially if it’s one that satisfies the demands of everyday operations and works. What they may need are tools that do more than just regurgitate data and instead generate information by aggregating and presenting relevant data in the right context.

Microsoft® has leveled the playing field for emerging and enterprise organizations with its SQL Server database engine. It has extensive features for integrating data from multiple external sources, analyzing that data and reporting on it, and numerous reporting tools that interface with it. We sometimes forget that it wasn’t long ago that this type of technology cost organizations literally millions of dollars and many months or years to deploy. But now with Microsoft’s technology, these capabilities are considerably more affordable for emerging and enterprise businesses than in the past. Companies that invest in this technology today are going to be way ahead of the game in the next few years.

nexDimension’s approach to Business Intelligence is Microsoft-centric at both the database and presentation levels. These technologies can be deployed alongside existing systems so that the implementation is less disruptive, takes less time in duration and is more cost-effective than replacing entire operational systems.

THE NEW BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE PROCESS

Now that the Business Intelligence Funnel has given us a better perspective that is more comprehensive and complete, and helped to identify a long-term plan for unfolding Business Intelligence in an organization, the next step is to focus on what needs to be measured.

But where to begin? Some organizations have such a problem defining where to start that they get “analysis paralysis.” They feel it necessary to define the whole picture before commencing in any direction. Because this takes time and businesses change routinely, the picture often changes significantly before it’s ever completed, causing a never-ending cycle. At the other extreme,



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some organizations are already so overwhelmed by numbers that they think it's necessary to measure them all. Faced with a daunting scope and limited technology resources, these organizations get stuck in infinite limbo without movement or a strategy.

The best thing an organization can do is pick one or a very small handful of key items to measure, making sure that measuring these items is achievable within a short period of time, within a reasonable budget, and can be accomplished using standard technology. So we suggest looking at the Business Intelligence Funnel, staking a flag and saying, "We're starting here." Otherwise, it will never begin.

THE BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE WHEEL

After we've spent some time understanding the Business Intelligence Funnel and how it relates to an organization, narrowed down a small handful of critical business measurement needs, and aggregated data within the SQL Server database to support what we need to measure, now what? We need to decide the best way to present or "see" the information we expect to derive from that data. The nice part about Microsoft SQL Server is that it interfaces with so many presentation tools, each manifesting itself in different ways, that there are plenty of choices. That leads us to the Business Intelligence Wheel.

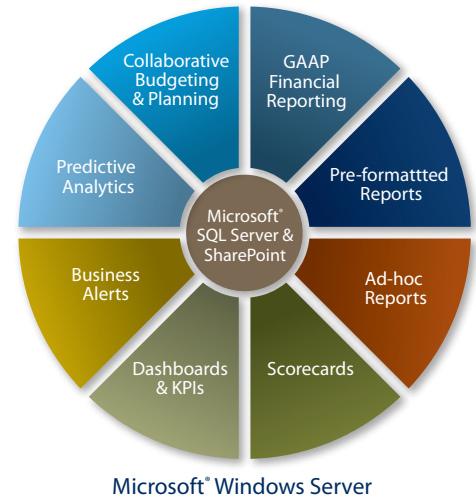
Whether, it's Financial Reporting and Budgeting, Dashboards and Scorecards, Business and Ad-hoc Reporting, or Business Process Management and Business Alerts, to name a few, there is a presentation solution that interfaces with SQL Server.

Although all of these presentation capabilities rely on Microsoft SQL Server, nexDimension takes a best-of-breed approach to the presentation applications because there is no single tool available in the marketplace that provides the capabilities to address every single type of presentation requirement a business might have. Even some of the largest vendors in the marketplace assemble multiple applications within their solutions. Interestingly, some of the more useful applications can be purchased to operate independently of the larger solution. Since the nature of what needs to be presented will dictate the style and technology of the presentation layer, we are fortunate that there are many choices available, and that they all interface with Microsoft SQL Server.

SUMMARY

At nexDimension, we're taking a different look at and approach to Business Intelligence. While the technology of integration and data warehouses is important, these technologies have evolved into a well-oiled machine for emerging and enterprise businesses using Microsoft SQL Server. Instead, we're concentrating our focus on data, and the nature of it before it ever gets into the data warehouse. Then, we're also focusing on how to use that data to the organization's maximum advantage. This allows us to make Business Intelligence a much more powerful tool.

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE SOLUTIONS





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As with all things new, management has to be absolutely committed and engaged at a business level to make this approach to Business Intelligence work. It has to be a priority for them. If not, companies can easily fall back into a technical view or get trapped in a never-ending analysis process before they ever solve the problem.

Our Business Intelligence Funnel and Wheel set us apart from the rest of the field. By incorporating these concepts, emerging and enterprise businesses are taking into consideration much more than just the raw data. They are opening themselves to viewing business in a new dimension—one that will enable them to become more efficient, agile, competitive and profitable.

ABOUT NEXDIMENSION TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

nexDimension has a single vision: We provide the most focused, comprehensive and cost-effective corporate performance management, business intelligence and ERP solutions available to emerging and enterprise businesses.

When you partner with nexDimension you are partnering with a trusted business advisor. We pride ourselves on knowing our clients and our extensive knowledge of the software we recommend and implement. Our staff includes financial, business and technology experts, including CPAs, former CFOs and controllers, computer specialists, software developers, and implementation consultants. Every member of the nexDimension team is dedicated to providing the depth and quality of service to meet your needs.

At nexDimension, we go beyond providing and implementing solutions. We understand that the investments you make today in business applications and technology will have an impact on your business tomorrow. We guide you to a future powered by a new perspective – one that makes you more efficient, agile, competitive and profitable.