Focus Experts' Briefing:
BI Overview, Key Issues & Trends

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Introduction

BI applications gather and analyze a company's raw data to provide business process insights that can be leveraged for competitive advantage. Are such lofty goals realistic for an SMB that lacks the IT talent found in a large enterprise? What capabilities should you expect to find in any BI solution? What are the "gotchas" to avoid, and what best practices can you employ to raise your company's BIQ (or Business Intelligence Quotient)? Finally, what are some of the current trends in the BI market? This Research Briefing leverages the expertise and experience of Focus Experts and other Focus Community members. Their guidance will help you give you a solid overview of BI, and provide insight into key BI issues and trends.

We would like to recognize the contributions of the following Focus Experts to this Experts Briefing:

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1   What Does BI Mean for the SMB?

Introduction

There are lots of definitions of Business Intelligence. Perhaps my favorite is the one that says: "Business Intelligence is like Military Intelligence – an oxymoron." The reason I like this is that it makes two points: (1) Like Military Intelligence, Business Intelligence is about going beyond the routine ways of running the business in order to gain an advantage over competitors; and (2) Unless you are an intelligent user (a "data miner") and pick the right targets (insights that deliver value-add to the business), BI software gains you nothing. Experience has shown that those who use BI to quickly achieve a deeper understanding of their customers, their prospects, and their performance, and take actions accordingly, have a big ongoing advantage in follow-on revenues, spend efficiency and effectiveness, and flexibility over those who don't.

But the aim of the SMB should be more modest, because an SMB simply does not have access to the data mining experts and massive amounts of operational data that a large enterprise does. Analysis will be shallower, and use historical data less. To counteract this, the SMB must use more "agile" BI, and create a tighter link between the data analysis and the high-level decision-maker.

Analysis

The actual task of Business Intelligence (BI) is business data analysis. The typical operation is a query on a massive database of business data, usually fed from existing operational systems like order entry or sales, manufacturing or production, and distribution or delivery. For the SMB, this means that existing systems must add ETL (extract, transform, load) links to a central database that is strictly for data analysis. This deployment can take place pretty quickly, but typically, even in the SMB case, it will take a month or more to really start using BI.

The key question here is whether you anticipate growing into a large enterprise soon or not. If not, a SaaS solution or one that is pre-packaged and easy to query with is the best option. If you do anticipate being a large enterprise (say, more than 500 employees) in the next couple of years, take the extra time and do either open-source (if you have tech-savvy IT) or global BI.

Almost all businesses, SMB or not, have a wish list of things that they would like to find out about their customers, their operations, and their suppliers, beyond what their existing reports tell them. The SMB should take this wish list, prioritize it, and be ready to hit the ground running when the BI system has enough data in it to be useable. Again, the key is to be flexible: the initial answers you get may not be what you expect, and you will need to formulate follow-on questions quickly. Once beyond the initial shock, however, BI becomes quite routine.

One final point: as with other products, there must be high-level business buy-in. Unlike other products, that means not only that you deliver routine reports but also that you deliver periodic warnings and unexpected findings, and that the high-level business executive pays attention to these.

Conclusion

The key word today is flexibility: this economic environment is marked by more dangerous, more frequent, more profound changes than in the past, and BI software automates and institutionalizes more rapid corporate responses to these changes. As a result, BI can help not only large enterprises that appreciate the ability to respond better, but are necessarily slow to change, but also SMBs that are easy to change but are now more likely to be blindsided by a catastrophe.

Unfortunately, SMB BI is too immature to give the kind of you-can-count-on-it value-add that a vendor like Progress Software brought to databases. However, in a couple of years, I anticipate that SMB BI vendors will give you better simplicity and more options that will make acquiring BI a slam-dunk. Alas, if I were an SMB I would feel I couldn't wait. I would suggest hands-on use of any product before buying, and then do the best you can with SLAs and take the risk. All that you lose is the investment; what you may gain is differentiation.

— Wayne Kernochan, Focus expert and president of Infostructure Associates

2 13 Capabilities Every BI Platform Should Deliver

Introduction

CIOs are deluged with data. New streams of unstructured data are coming in from the cloud, social network sites, and mobile devices. Combine that with the structured data generated by enterprise applications, and the potential for insight into customers' preferences, changing markets, and internal processes is enormous. The trick is unlocking that knowledge.

Analysis

More CIOs than ever are turning to business intelligence (BI) to make sense of all this data, according to recent surveys by research firm Gartner and CIO magazine. With BI, CIOs can pinpoint the data that will drive better business decisions and get it in the hands of the employees who can take action with it. BI is evolving to become more predictive, giving CIOs greater insight into how the business is performing now and in the future. When done right, it can help organizations discover their strengths (and capitalize on them) and ferret out their weaknesses. It can even help organizations define new business opportunities.

"BI platforms enable users to build applications that help organizations learn, understand, and optimize their business," says Gartner in its 2010 Magic Quadrant for Business Intelligence Platforms report.

BI generally includes applications that gather, store, analyze, and provide access to a company's raw data. The related functions they perform include forecasting, data visualization, data mining and more. Armed with these tools, organizations can use their data to guide strategic decisions about products to sell, contracts to negotiate, customer service to improve, and markets to enter. BI can also help organizations identify internal business processes that can be made more efficient and less costly.

BI Capabilities

A BI platform should deliver 13 capabilities that support integration, information delivery, and analysis, according to Gartner. The research firm expects to see a greater demand for tools that go beyond information delivery to "enable easier and more intuitive analysis to discover new insights." These key features are:

- Shared BI infrastructure
- Metadata management
- Development tools
- Collaboration
- Reporting
- Dashboards
- Ad hoc query
- Microsoft Office integration
- Search-based BI
- Online analytical processing (OLAP)
- Interactive visualization
- Predictive modeling and data mining
- Scorecards

Deployment Options

BI platforms have traditionally been installed on-premises, but like with other enterprise applications, alternative deployments are emerging as the BI market matures. Software as a Service (SaaS) and open source BI may make sense especially for smaller organizations that need a lower-cost option.

According to research published in March by Aberdeen Group, open source BI gives organizations a chance to explore the software and see if their internal IT staff has the skills necessary to take on a BI project, without making a capital investment. Aberdeen's Open Source Business Intelligence report says that "open source also promotes a more iterative and incremental approach," noting that this lets IT departments work at a pace that best suits the company.

Conclusion

Despite the many acquisitions of the last couple of years, there are still many vendors in the BI market, including pure-play BI vendors and enterprise software "megavendors" that offer BI along with apps like CRM (customer relationship management). In January, Gartner identified IBM, Microsoft, MicroStrategy, Oracle, SAP, and SAS as the market leaders; the research firm's Magic Quadrant report also named pure-plays QlickTech International, Tableau Software, Targit, and Panorama Software as well as enterprise software vendor Tibco Software. Open source BI software is available from Pentaho and Actuate.

— Leslie O'Neill, Focus expert and professional tech journalist

Introduction

This research brief aims to introduce the notion of BIQ or Business Intelligence Quotient and how it can be used as a metric for accelerating the time-to-insight and keeping the customer/end-user in perspective. It enlists the five best practices companies can follow right now to graduate from being a *good company* to a *great company* and finally to an *intelligent company*.

Analysis

With a multitude of IQ's being used in trying to measure peoples' all-round success, namely, IQ, Emotional IQ, Social IQ, and the most mystic of all, the Spiritual IQ — it seems to make sense to do the same for business or companies — in order to quantify their performance 360-degree, not just from a ROI perspective, but from a customer/end-user experience perspective. As trivial as it may seem, this is by no means an easy task. Viewing a company as a conglomerate of people performing in various roles, and driven by a set of business processes, the accuracy of such an IQ extends beyond numbers. The words "win-win" create business value only when the business benefits of easier, faster, simpler, sharper decision-making capabilities by all users — from the corporate to the front desk — are realized when they are needed most. To this effect, here are a list of High-Fives that enables companies of any size and industry vertical to raise the bar on BIQ or Business Intelligence Quotient:

1. **Encore the fact that BI is everybody's business:** This is a key driver in BI adoption and empowerment by all users of a BI solution — from the corporate staff to the customer/end-user. Hence, educating that better BI means better decision-making that lead to efficient actionable analyses, across the company spectrum (i.e., about the why and what of a BI Solution) is a KPI in getting all of them eye-cued. A unified view of the contextual customer is the KPI for a higher BIQ.

2. **Data, Data Everywhere! But I Can't See It No Matter How I Do My Search?** Follow this as both the means and ends of adopting BI: Companies must be able to trace and track the silos of data that is present in various forms — from paper to prediction — across the length and breadth of the companies' resources. Then a robust BI Solution can help all of this data to be "refined" to derive the right information that is useful to the right user at the right time. So, the sooner your company gets going for the "gold data rush", the faster the time-to-insight which is the taken to analyze and arrive at "decision points" that when implemented can help in a better business/operational efficiency.

3. **Enumerate the potential of BI as an innovative invention of a superior customer experience:** BI helps in providing autonomy to the customer/end-user by way of self-service functionality combined with interactive and responsive controls that place the power to drive the business solution in those users' hands. And companies should focus on differentiating between customer and end-user in terms of Power Users and contextual business roles. This is the new dynamics of being "customer-centric." Proper enlisting of users vs. roles vs. business needs and maintaining the "independence and isolation of data/metadata access and presentation" is vital to a higher BIQ. And this is where managed-metadata comes into play by allowing some of the business context to be custom-defined by the end-users! By correlating customer/end-user centric aspects with their existing BI Solutions in place, companies can efficiently manage their metadata and streamline their business processes, companies.

4. **Right time information is the NEW BI imperative and it prevents the data burst:** From real-time to right time, time and data truly don't wait for any user today! This can be both real-time and point-in-time, or just-in-time-relevance and authenticity of information enables efficient use of the same and is essential to a better BIQ. And the ability to integrate/inter-operate with multiple existing solutions and data sources provides a value beyond revenue. Nothing is more critical to a business than the consistency, currency, and protection of all of its data-cum-information in a way that is secure, reliable, and available anytime, from anywhere, and by anyone authorized. To this effect, companies must layout security & GRC policies as per requirements, right from the early stages in their operational life cycle (A typical plan starting from concepts all through to customization). This ensures that the data/information life cycle goes in sync with the business process life cycle. Enforcing multi-factor authentication, distributed data replication, and/or data federation/syndication; rich search analytics, and industry standards-based architecture go a long way in getting the right data at the right time in the hands of the right user, or what I call the R-R-R rule.

5. **Consider BI as a strategic solution for your business:** BI is more than just a decision making tool. For any company, it is an evolving solution that re-invents itself based on customer/end-user experience, to adapt to the customer/users' changing needs from time-to-time. Thereby, it extends beyond intelligence to become a strategic decision-making enabler. Companies must keep this focus when deciding on a BI Solution — one that can adapt to current and future business requirements. By doing this the return-on-customer will be higher, which is an intelligent metric for quantifying Success-both in terms of business value and customer/end-user experience. This requires a self-adaptable BI solution that enables a greater degree of self-service BI. A "best-fit" IT solution based on gap-fit analysis, in terms of access optimization, embedded analytics, SaaS-enablement, and operational BI capabilities accelerates the operational efficiency. This again raises the BIQ — *better insights yield better results*.

Conclusion

The next generation of BI is driven by a new dynamics of customer-centric imperatives that include faster time-to-insight, right time information availability & accessibility, enhanced self-service by way of self-adaptability, business-process driven and business services-oriented, multi-tenancy enabled, and one that relies on active and passive security & compliance. Not just having the ability to analyze "big data", but the ability to enable "big decisions" that add strategic value, derived from any and every data source, however big or small, and across the enterprise BIQ is the new Business-IT KPI for a BI solution. A fine-grained analysis of business-centric requirements, followed by a robust plan for putting the above outlined principles into practice can help companies in raising the BIQ (Business Intelligence Quotient) — and an intelligent company, one that is tailored towards and geared by the customer/end-user.

— Lakshman Bulusu, Focus expert and program manager (database services)
at Compunnel Software Group Inc.

4   Q&A: Why Do BI Projects Fail?

What is the No. 1 reason why business intelligence projects fail?

What factors cause BI projects to fail? Is it usually on the business side or the IT side that such projects fail?

— Jeff Craig

Best Answers

I would suggest that BI projects which fail do so for the same reasons that other complex business/IT projects fail:

- Unclear project ownership
- Poorly defined business case
- Insufficient support from senior management to execute the project
- Poor resource allocation
- Interdepartmental politics
- Unclear communication (can happen at multiple levels)

The more complex the project, the more disciplined that each stakeholder needs to be in managing his or her part of the project in a way that benefits the whole, and not just that stakeholder's part.

— Andrew Baker, Focus expert and drector, service operations
at SWN Communications Inc.

Some additional success factors have to be considered as extremely critical - and make the difference and special challenge of BI projects versus other projects where IT and Business have to team up:

- data quality (as a common responsibility)
- the need to align and standardize definitions is vital - and not necessary for many other projects
- the fact that BI doesn't always seem to be that urgent and critical (if you can't send your goods or your invoice you will identify "failure" immediately, if some KPI's are delayed …)
- cross functional complexity (not only IT and biz have to be a team, but also functions which do not align otherwise have to agree and cross functional governance is not often foreseen)

And then there my most important learning: although you always need projects to set up BI capabilities, the real success of BI does not come from projects, but from running, living, and continuously improving BI. If you expect BI being "a success" after you have finished an implementation project, you will experience "failure". If you understand the responsibility you take with taking over BI capabilities from a project team into your operating responsibility, you will make the BI initiative a success over time.

— Andreas Reichel, Focus expert and senior advisor,
in information/change/transformation mgmt.

BI fails for several reasons, including:

- The criteria of useful data was not defined well enough;
- The systems gather what appears to be relevant but not detailed enough data
- Incorrect assumptions are made based on incomplete/faulty data
- Even if the data is somewhat useful, there is an inability to act upon it in a timely manner.
- Enough time passes during the data gathering phase that other "fires" pop up and get priority over the original problem.

— Joseph Zuccaro, Focus expert and president, CEO & founder of Allinio

Additional Answers

This is a great question. I have written literally about 900 blog posts considering issues such as this.

BI is challenging because it really sits between business and IT. Of course, the technical deployment belongs to IT, however, without business engagement the likelihood is low that the deployment will be successful. The basic problem tends to center on how the business and IT communicate and collaborate before, and during, the implementation.

Before even starting with software, IT and the business must be clear about their objectives, goals, and the definition of a successful project outcome. Without nailing this upfront, success is difficult. During the implementation, business and IT must be real partners. Business should define the goals and IT executes. However, both sides need input from the other in order to get the job done well. You've asked a deceptively simple question that reveals real complexity underneath. Thanks for raising this important issue.

— Michael Krigsman, Focus adviser and CEO of Asuret Inc.

Every answer above can be boiled down to a single statement: BI projects fail for the same reason most other IT projects fail, namely, the lack of a well-defined Business Analysis function.

A skilled Business Analyst is essential to identifying all key and non-key stakeholders; exploring the problem/opportunity from the perspective of each stakeholder individually and of all stakeholders as an integrated whole; accurately eliciting, analyzing and documenting the requirements for a successful solution; coordinating the business and technical domains for solution design and development; and participating with the QA/QC domain to ensure quality in development and implementation.

As a Business Analyst I see management consistently undervaluing this most valuable profession. Few Business Analysts are regarded as much more than "requirements gatherers," and most Business Analysts are relegated to a project functionary role, that is, merely another member of a project team. Few managers have yet grasped the enormous potential of building a robust Business Analyst practice that is business-dedicated rather than project-oriented, embedded in the business for the purpose of building depth of business knowledge that both resolves business problems and recognizes business opportunities, thereby contributing to building a strategic advantage to the enterprise and tactical advantages to the business domains within the enterprise.

Until this perspective deficit is overcome, BI and other IT projects will either fail outright or achieve only marginal success.

— David Medici, Focus expert and Sr. Business Analyst/Independent Consultant

This is not an easy answer since it is so multifaceted. I will lump reasons into one. The predominant reason for BI projects failing is a lack of defining what problem is to be solved by building a BI system and making decisions off the results. In other words what is to be accomplished. This problem definition sets in play the rest of the process including what data is to be integrated, the quality of the data, normalization of the data, the architecture of the system and the reporting or analytic structure. Too often the problem is not defined well because IT and the Business side are not working close enough together. IT understands technology but not necessarily data analytics and using data to drive the business. It is getting better but using data to drive an organization is relatively new in many industries thus many on the business side do not understand how to ask the right questions, which data elements to use to get at the right answer. There is also who is the owner of the BI process that also has a bearing on the problem definition. While this is multi-faceted the real issue starts at the beginning: What do I want to accomplish? Unfortunately there is no good standard "cookie cutter approach".

— John Wilson, Focus expert and CEO of Claim Insights, LLc

Read the full conversation:
http://www.focus.com/questions/information-technology/what-number-1-reason-why-business-intelligence-projects-fail/

5   2010's Top 5 Trends in Business Intelligence

Introduction

Business intelligence (BI) has been a top priority for CIOs for the last two years, according to recent surveys by research firm Gartner and CIO magazines. Both surveys show that BI will remain top of mind through 2010 and into the near future. In fact, CIO magazine's Technology Priorities Survey, published in January, showed that survey respondents were actively researching BI more than any other enterprise technology.

The interest in BI is no surprise. After all, it is a way for organizations to use real, raw data generated from within the company and externally by customers, suppliers, and partners to make better business decisions. Most recently, CIOs have focused on BI as a way to help weather -- and thrive in -- the economic downturn.

Analysis

According to the 2010 Magic Quadrant for Business Intelligent Platforms, Gartner expects the market for BI platforms to stay among the fastest growing software markets. "In tough economic times, when competitiveness depends on the optimization of strategy and execution, organizations continue to turn to BI as a vital tool for smarter, more agile and efficient business."

Experts, including Gartner, the Data Warehousing Institute, and Forrester Research, agree that BI is ripe for innovation -- and will evolve to deliver even greater business value. The top five trends for 2010 are:

1. **Business intelligence goes open source.** When open source software is sound and supported by a vibrant community, it can be an excellent low-cost option. Open source BI software has made that leap, becoming a deployment option that appeals to mid-size companies in a variety of industries as well as to public sector organizations. In fact, Gartner predicts that "open source BI tool production deployments will grow five-fold through 2012."

   According to Gartner, open source BI doesn't yet have the same level of functionality as commercial offerings and is more likely to be deployed as individual tools, rather than as an enterprise-wide BI standard. Open source BI isn't free -- support costs must always be factored in -- but it can allow an IT department to experiment with the technologies without making a multi-million dollar investment.

2. **Business intelligence moves to the cloud.** Not everyone has the development expertise to devote to open source software, yet many companies still want a lower-cost alternative to premises-based BI software. Research by the Data Warehousing Institute, HP, and Forrester show that organizations are increasingly interested in cloud computing for BI. With BI running in the cloud, organizations can pay just for the capacity they need, when they need it. Also, it gives companies access to complex, sophisticated BI technologies without having to pay for in-house BI expertise.

   James G. Kobelius, senior analyst at Forrester Research, expects that data warehouses in particular to be deployed in cloud environments in 2010. In January, he told SearchBusinessAnalytics.com, "In 2010, we'll see vendors continue to introduce cloud, SaaS, and virtualized deployments of their core analytic databases. The industry is moving inevitably toward cloud-based services that supplement appliances, licensed software and other deployment options."

3. **User interfaces become more graphical and business-user friendly**. Traditionally, BI software has generated complex reports that can be difficult to read. Newer BI solutions now offer far more interactive and graphical user interfaces, which feel more like consumer-application UIs. These make BI much easier to use and helps keep the data analysis results accessible to a wide variety of business users.

4. **Advanced analytics are more widely deployed.** "Advanced analytics is the critical enabler in turning data into insight," reports HP's Top 10 trends in Business Intelligence for 2010 white paper. Forrester's Kobelius believes organizations will use advanced analytics to find ways to reach customers via social networks, saying this year will be "the year social network analysis truly emerges as the new frontier in advanced analytics, supporting mining of behavioral, attitudinal, and other affinities."

5. **Pure-play BI vendors get more traction in the market.** The enterprise software "megavendors" like Oracle, IBM, and HP aren't the only ones offering viable enterprise BI platforms anymore. Smaller vendors, such as that focus solely on BI are gaining ground in the BI market. According to Gartner, "There is significant, if not euphoric, satisfaction with, and accelerated interest in, pure-play BI platforms. This is particularly true for smaller, innovative vendors filling needs left unmet by the larger vendors."

Conclusion

These trends promise to make BI even more valuable for help making strategic decisions. Innovations like these five will make the technology easier for everyday business people to use as well as make the data more accessible to everyone who needs it across the organization.

— Leslie O'Neill, Focus expert and professional tech journalist

What are some BI trends that we have seen in 2010?

Business Intelligence is constantly changing. It is something that takes advantage of what new and upcoming technology can achieve. The Great Recession has forced some organizations to not only update, but consolidate their software to cut costs. What other trends have we seen this year in terms of BI? Do you have any predictions of new trends for next year?

— Chris Longo

Best Answers

Based on the things vendors are pitching to us, I would say that we will see BI in the cloud (i.e. running at Amazon or hosted by SAP) and the use of grid computing to improve BI performance.

— Andrew Mosson, Focus expert and CTO of Focus.com

Some trends I see from reading press releases posted at DSSResources.com and checking with vendors include:

- Mobile BI, BI dashboards and query tools on smart phones.
- More visualization for data sets.
- Improved open source BI.
- More operational BI implementations.

— Danel Power, Focus expert and editor at DSSResources

SaaS and Cloud Computing seem to the most popular among my readers. The movement toward SaaS based business intelligence has the attention of CIO's. The lure of faster implementation and smaller initial capital expenses can't be ignored. SaaS is also doing a good job delivering BI to a wider user population within the enterprise.

— Shawn Rogers, Focus expert and
VP of research at BI/DW, Enterprise Management Associates

Additional Answers

Here are a few things that we're seeing, as a BI vendor ourselves:

1. **Greater embrace of a portfolio BI strategy.** There was a rush to consolidate, with the assumption that having one "throat to choke" was the best option. However, not all BI tools fit all needs, and some traditional BI implementations are difficult to scale or adapt. So there's a greater embrace of a portfolio of solutions. You might keep your on-premise BI solution for its current usage, but use the cheaper, faster SaaS BI solution for new projects.

2. **Mobile BI.** This one took us a bit by surprise, since we keep seeing stories that Mobile BI is hype. However, we had to expand to a mobile solution by customer demand. We're a SaaS company, so this was easier for us to do - we simply run our application through your mobile browser.

3. **BI for more departments and closer to the front lines.** As BI becomes more affordable and flexible, you can deploy it to groups who need it, but couldn't get it before. This is typically sales, marketing, HR, and operations.

4. **Greater collaboration.** People expect greater interaction with their colleagues, not to simply quietly receive information. So the ability to recut reports a different way and comment on the reporting is increasingly demanded.

In the interest of full and fair disclosure, I work for Birst (www.birst.com).

— Barbara Lewis, director of Birst

One of the trends is "Agile BI". On it's own, this is nothing new, but there is a new angle on that: software to facilitate the agile approach. There is a lot of attention for Data Warehouse Automation Tools (or Data Warehouse Life Cycle management software). Time and costs savings are basic pros, but the real business value is the incremental approach, that allows prototyping, flexibility, better time to market and standardization.

— Gertjan Vlug, Focus expert and CEO of BIReady

Read the full conversation:
http://www.focus.com/questions/information-technology/what-are-some-bi-trends-we-have-seen-2010/

7 Business Intelligence: 5 Things to Watch for in 2010

Introduction

BI (business intelligence) solutions will continue to multiply in 2010. Smaller, newer vendors will merge with or be acquired by larger software companies. And users will continue to try to figure out how best to leverage BI to turn their organization into truly intelligent, agile and more effective businesses. Below are some specific areas of focus and recommendations intended to help those users to achieve their goals.

Analysis

1. **BI will become more pervasive and more visible – and more invisible.** CRM, SFA and other applications focused on sales, service and support will increasingly act as "feeders" into core BI applications and functions. This increasing integration offers the prospect more complete and comprehensive views of business operations, in part by hiding BI functions behind other applications and interfaces familiar to users.

   Ensure that all of your current and potential solutions for CRM, SFA, help-desk management, contact-center management and other business-critical functions can "talk" to your BI solutions and processes. Also, work to drive adoption of those "feeder" applications to as close to 100 percent as possible. This will help to ensure that, to paraphrase a recent U.S. president, no BI information is left behind.

2. **BI functions will increasingly "live in the cloud(s)."** As more collaboration, CRM and sales/marketing automation functionality is delivered as cloud-based services, BI functions will follow suit. This should give you more options for expanding the reach and adoption of BI and related applications, in many cases more affordably and with lower management overhead than possible with previous alternatives.

   If you're already using cloud-based solutions for CRM, SFA or related functions, work with your vendor(s) and/or reseller(s) to make sure those solutions interoperate with incumbent or planned BI solutions. If your organization is not yet in the cloud, educate yourself and your colleagues about what's available; what works with what; and what makes the most sense given your organization's specific needs, goals and resources.

3. **BI and business collaboration will grow closer.** During 2010, numerous innovative collaboration-centric solutions will likely appear, built upon platforms such as Google's Wave, Salesforce.com's Chatter and SAP's 12 Sprints/"Constellation" project, now in beta testing. SAP's alternative is particularly interesting, given the company's long leadership in ERP and BI. Also, early reports indicate that SAP plans at least some integration with Google Wave, and to support real-time collaboration with information aggregated from multiple sources, presumably including those within and outside of an organization. Given SAP's legacy, the company will likely enable users to employ a hybrid approach combining cloud- and premises-based resources. All of these emerging platforms offer the promise of enhancing real-time collaboration with real-time and near-real-time BI and business analytics.

   Keep an eye on developments related to these and other such platforms. Pay specific attention to how and whether the providers of your most business-critical applications adopt and/or respond to those developments. And make sure those responsible for those business-critical applications at your organization sign up for access to the emerging platforms, so your organization has as much practical information as possible about potential specific BI-collaboration integrations.

4. **BI will gain a larger "voice."** The growing use of IP telephony creates new opportunities to gather and leverage information about who calls whom and what happens before, during and after each call. This information can be a very valuable addition to BI and analytics efforts – but only if a company's phone system and that system's vendor, reseller and/or integrator are sufficiently strategically focused on the company's business needs and goals.

Take a strategic approach to VoIP, and make sure that your chosen and candidate solutions – and their vendors – understand your business needs and goals. You want to make absolutely sure that all relevant information about voice traffic at your organization is as accessible to your BI- and analytics-related solutions and efforts as is information about e-mail and other data.

5. **BI will continue to challenge business decision makers to take full advantage of its benefits.** While growing numbers of companies will achieve success with BI in 2010, many will find their efforts stymied. Impediments will include disjoint solutions, inconsistent integrations with other key applications and information sources, lack of complete solution adoption, lack of managerial support or some combination of these factors.

Stay the course and remain focused on your business goals. Evangelize the business value of effective, comprehensive, enterprise-wide BI and analytics to all key constituencies at your organization, from senior management to sales and support teams. Strive to focus on solutions and vendors that support and encourage interoperability, ease of use and management, and effective integration. And keep at least one eye on technological and business developments among BI solution providers.

Conclusion

Business intelligence efforts can only result in a truly intelligent, agile business if they are driven by business goals; comprehensively deployed and adopted; and managed in ways that produce meaningful, measurable and credible results. The trends and recommendations above can provide a foundation upon which you can build an effective approach to BI tailored to your organization's unique needs and goals. In addition, resources such as Focus can help you to get and keep informed and up to date on relevant industry developments, the experiences of other users and advice from experts.

*— Michael Dortch, Focus adviser and
director of research at Focus.com*

About Focus Research

Each year U.S. businesses spend more than $75 trillion* on goods and services. And yet there has not been a definitive source of trustworthy and easily accessible information to support business buyers and decisions makers — especially those in small and midsize businesses. Filling this gap is the mission of Focus Research.

Through its Research Guides, Focus Research empowers buyers to make considered purchases and decisions. Focus does this by providing freely available, actionable advice based on the expertise of other buyers, recognized experts and Focus analysts.

Guiding Principles

Our goal is not only to provide independent and high-quality research but also to deliver a new research model that serves all businesses.

Open

We believe information must be set free. The data, advice and research on Focus are widely distributed and available to everyone.

Peer-powered

We believe in the power of many. Thousands of buyers and experts contribute their expertise to Focus every day. Our job is to take their insights and integrate them into our research.

Practical

We believe in addressing everyday issues facing businesses. Focus Research does not pontificate on high-level trends or promote broad-based research agendas. Rather, Focus Research endeavors to provide specific, actionable recommendations that help businesses make the right decision every time.

Relevant

We believe there is no "one-size-fits-all" answer to a business purchasing decision. Focus Research is, therefore, designed to address specific concerns of multiple Buyer Types across multiple industries. As such, users are encouraged to combine our different research deliverables into tailor-made packages that effectively address their unique needs and goals.

* Source: Visa, Inc. Commercial Consumption Expenditure Index fact sheet.