

REPORTS VERSUS BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE – WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

REPORTING BASICS AND CHALLENGES

In your organization, there are probably multiple applications that support different functions and departments. CRM serves your sales and marketing teams, while the finance team uses an ERP or accounting system and the operational teams use a line of business (LOB) application specific to your industry. Each one of those applications has canned reports and each department or the IT team may have built additional reports to meet a specific reporting need.

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Reports generally allow you to specify ranges of dates, products, document numbers, or some other parameter to generate a report in a standard format. Data to populate the report is pulled directly from the application tables which are defined when the report is designed. The format, including columns and rows, are predetermined based on the needs of the “average” user.

There are report writers — either included with the CRM/ERP/LOB application or standalone like Crystal Reports — that allow users to customize their reports. In most cases, extensive knowledge of the database and where to find the appropriate fields is needed to use these report writers, so the job usually falls to the IT department. The IT department faces several challenges creating and maintaining reports including:

- the volume of unique report requests,
- disparate data bases that can’t be consolidated for cross departmental reporting,
- users running multiple reports simultaneously (end of the month) slowing down the applications,
- static reports that don’t reflect real-time information.

The challenges of static reports from the user’s perspective include reports that are dated, show inconsistent data, are two dimensional, and don’t show the numbers behind the numbers – just to name a few issues. The basic problem is the inability for the user to compare data in ways that the canned report writer couldn’t anticipate. Every business is unique and the need to view complete and current information in various ways can make the difference between good and bad decisions.

THE BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE (BI) DIFFERENCE

BI gives the user both the opportunity and the responsibility to view, understand, analyze, and act on all the information available to them, regardless of source or format. While BI can still deliver “reports” to users, it also empowers the user to look deeper—past the high level information --- to find causes and solutions.

By consolidating data from across all the applications within the organization, BI enables the user to select the information that they want to see in the format that allows them to make better decisions. While dashboards commonly illustrate the ‘sexy’ display of a BI system, there should be much more insight available from the tool than just high-level gauges and charts.

In practical terms, BI allows the user to:

- access, build and save views of information in the format meaningful to the user,
- drill down from high level reports, dashboards or cubes to the transactional detail of the numbers,
- create and distribute charts and graphs that will provide information that team members and management can quickly comprehend,
- see only the information that is appropriate to his/her role,

The key to understanding the difference that BI can make in an organization is that the views display a combined data model, either warehoused or virtual, of the entire organization. Dashboards, charts and views can be manipulated to look at any combination of data points that can provide new insights into causes, effects and solutions. All in real-time, without delays, allowing immediate reactions and more informed decisions.

CLICKBASE BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

ClickBase is the ultimate business intelligence tool to provide ad hoc inquiry any time, from anywhere, in any desired format. And, unlike the big system tools that do similar things, it’s a very small fraction of their cost and a lot faster to implement and easier to use. ClickBase is the ideal tool to embed into a total system where incompatible information files need to be integrated.

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“Business Intelligence refers to skills, processes, technologies, applications and practices used to support decision making.”

*Definition from
Wikipedia*
