A black and white photograph of a conference room. In the foreground, a dark wooden conference table is visible with a white sheet of paper, a pen, and a glass of water on it. In the background, several office chairs are arranged around the table. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows.

Fitting Your Business Intelligence Solution to Your Enterprise

Four options, one right decision.

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Executive summary.

People throughout your organization are called upon daily, if not hourly, to make decisions that affect your business performance. Who could blame you for wanting them to make the right decision and make it quickly? But no matter how experienced and dedicated your employees are, they'll only consistently make the right decision if they consistently get easy access to clear, accurate, and actionable information. What can you do to help them—and your company? Identifying and implementing the right business intelligence (BI) solution is an essential step.

If you choose to upgrade your business intelligence solutions you'll have lots of company, according to research by Gartner, Inc. In a 2011 survey of 344 chief financial officers, Gartner found that business intelligence was considered the top technology investment for chief financial officers and more than half, 54%, planned to upgrade their BI solution during the next two years.¹

Since every company—large or small—depends on business intelligence to make the best decisions, the basic question is not, “Do I need a business intelligence solution? Instead, it’s “What business intelligence solution do I need?” In this white paper, we help you answer this question.

We explore the fundamental impediments to good decision-making that affect companies of all sizes, in all industries—things like information that is hard to get, and hard to understand and use once you have it. There are many possible ways you can overcome these impediments and we describe the types of business intelligence solutions and the situations where they work best. We take an in-depth look at one approach—implementing specialized business intelligence solutions designed to complement and extend the capabilities of an existing enterprise software infrastructure. We also provide a brief overview of Infor's strategy for helping its customers use business intelligence to make decisions that contribute to better business performance.

The impediments to good decision making.

A common set of impediments to good decision making drives the need for specific business intelligence capabilities. In the simplest terms, companies need business intelligence in order to understand their day-to-day and long-term performance, so they can take the proper actions to correct problems and take advantage of opportunities. Here are the common impediments and how they affect businesses:

I can't get timely access to accurate business information. There are a few dimensions to this problem. In some companies there is a massive amount of raw data, but no way to aggregate the data points into a meaningful snapshot of a key performance indicator (KPI). For example, you may be able to identify that a customer bought 400 units of one of your products, but have no way to easily aggregate how many of your customers bought that product and in what quantities. Or you may not be able to easily learn all of the products an individual customer purchased. There is certainly value in knowing that customer “X” bought 400 units of a product. But if you have thousands of customers and hundreds of thousands of products, aggregating data is the only way to get meaningful information on which to make decisions.

¹ Gartner, Inc., John E. Van Decker, “CFOs Cite BI and CPM as Top Priorities: 2011 Gartner FEI Technology Study,” May 2011, p. 1.

It can take too long and require too much staff time to collect the data. Everyone in business is under pressure to make decisions more quickly, but sometimes they are delayed because the data is stuck in disparate systems that don't communicate with each other well or in systems that lack adequate processing power to extract the data quickly.

If your business intelligence process requires that your IT staff collects, analyzes, and creates reports for line of business employees, it will invariably take longer to make decisions. Involving IT also can lead to flaws in the data because the IT staff member doesn't fully grasp the business issue at hand. This leads to another problem—a lack of confidence in the accuracy or completeness of the data. In his 2011 report, "The Analytical Masses," Michael Lock, an Aberdeen Group senior research analyst for business intelligence, reported that companies have found that because BI solutions originated in the IT department, data traditionally has been manipulated and analyzed from a technical mindset, not a business perspective. He also noted that business users can apply their experience and instincts to ask better questions of the data and generate more meaningful insight.²

Companies that depend on spreadsheets like Microsoft® Excel® for collecting and processing data also are at a disadvantage. Although spreadsheets are flexible and give individual users control, they can be inefficient when used as a business intelligence tool. For example, in response to a request for revenue numbers, an employee may pull the data from many locations and put it into a spreadsheet. When the same request is made a few months later, the employee must go through the same time-consuming process again because there is no common storage repository for data.

When I finally get information, it's not clear, concise and consistent. Struggling with the basic tasks of collecting information and getting it in front of people who need it is only part of the problem. Many companies also lack ways to make the information clear and concise once they get access. This impediment can take many forms. In some situations, there is no cohesive format or single view for presenting information pertaining to individual business metrics. The interface may be outmoded and difficult to use, or the data may be stored in many isolated reports that do not provide a good overview.

Data inconsistency also introduces uncertainty into the decision making process. There are a number of causes. For one, a company may use disparate systems that store the same type of data, but in a different format, so it's hard to aggregate and hard to compare. At companies that rely on spreadsheets for collecting and storing data, there is often conflict about which person and which spreadsheet or even which version contains the most accurate information. It can be a chaotic situation.

Or there can be multiple definitions for things like revenue or a sale. Different divisions or parts of the business may have their own criteria for the metric. In this situation, your decision maker is forced into an apples-to-oranges comparison—and sometimes the differences are not even obvious.

When I get information it's not actionable. Some business intelligence approaches produce lots of data but lack the ability to transform the data into meaningful information that facilitates decision-making. Your employees may be required to manually organize the data or use analytical tools that are rudimentary, slow, or both. Or your business intelligence approach may be too inflexible to adapt your data gathering and analysis processes fast enough to keep pace with changing business requirements.

² Aberdeen Group, Michael Lock, "The Analytical Masses," July 2011, p. 4.

How the right BI solution can overcome these impediments.

Implementing the right business intelligence solution will help your company eliminate the information access and analysis obstacles that impede good decision making at all levels of your company. When you eliminate these obstacles, you create numerous opportunities to streamline core processes in ways that reduce costs and improve the timeliness and business value of decisions. This assertion is backed up by an Aberdeen Group report, which found that companies they view as best-in-class users of business intelligence achieve an average 27% year-over-year organic growth.³

No single approach to BI fits every enterprise. But there are common attributes of what constitutes an ideal business intelligence solution for a company. As you evaluate what BI solution is best for your company, you may wish to use a checklist of BI attributes and benefits, like the one below, to guide you. For all but the smallest companies, the right solution to a business intelligence challenge will have the following attributes:

- **Fosters widespread user acceptance.** Provides an easy-to-use interface that minimizes training requirements and minimizes the involvement of your IT staff in ongoing BI activities. Research by Gartner, Inc. reinforces the importance of an easy-to-use BI solution. Research for its “Magic Quadrant for Business Intelligence Platforms” in late 2010 revealed that ease of use for end users overtook functionality as the most important selection criterion when choosing BI tools.⁴
- **Aggregates and consolidates data:** Makes high-level as well as detailed financial and non-financial data available in real-time.
- **Connects to any system:** Communicates and transfers data to and from your other software systems either directly or via interfaces.
- **Provides the information level that is required by users:** Provides all users with the level of detail and analytical capability they need to do their jobs. Capabilities will range from sophisticated analysis tools for a single power user to tailored reports and dashboards that fit the needs of other less demanding users.
- **Supports operational and strategic planning.** Provides tools to help you create and maintain business plans and forecasting capabilities for all levels of the organization.
- **Streamlines compliance and secures access to critical business information:** Supports your business by helping you efficiently meet regulatory requirements.
- **Adapts to business change.** Has the ability to easily evolve to meet new business requirements as they arise.

³ Aberdeen Group, p. 6.

⁴ Gartner, Inc., James Richardson, “The Consumerization of BI Drives Greater Adoption,” June 3, 2011, p. 3.

Your business intelligence options.

The best option for addressing your business intelligence requirements will be determined in large part by the complexity of your business and the role that information plays in it. Here is a simple, high-level synopsis of business intelligence solutions and the types of organizations where they fit the best:

Spreadsheet-based: For small companies with a limited product line, limited geographic reach, and modest number of customers, a spreadsheet-based process may suffice. In these companies, decision making is the responsibility of one person or a small number of people. Typically there is no enterprise-wide software system, like an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution.

Rudimentary BI capabilities in an ERP solution: For more complex companies that have implemented an enterprise software solution, the use of spreadsheets to facilitate decision making becomes prohibitive. There are simply too many variables and data points to efficiently aggregate and analyze data in what is essentially a manual process. If the business is still relatively simple, with a small number of products, customers, locations, and employees, companies may be able to get by with the basic information collection, management, and analysis capabilities of a broadly focused enterprise solution. Some companies try to maintain a monolithic IT environment where all information is maintained in a single software system, but even these companies find that the use of spreadsheets increases dramatically.

Standalone, purpose-built BI tools: For companies interested in short-term solutions, a standalone BI tool is one option. These solutions are usually purpose-built to fit a specific business need. The solution could be an analytical tool, a financial planning tool, or a scenario-analysis tool. Often single departments choose these tools, which are not created based on a single and unified system like an OLAP (online analytical processing) platform. In the end, however, the enterprise itself ends up with an assortment of isolated tools that do not integrate and that constantly require additional investments to meet additional requirements. A BI tool that is designed for analysis only will never be able to deal with a complex planning process.

Specialized BI solutions that complement general-purpose enterprise solutions: Companies that have a wide range of ERP, financial management, or other core enterprise systems, typically need specialized BI capabilities, as well, to meet the demands of the business. These organizations are too complex and fast-changing to depend on a generalized or manual approach to business intelligence. If your company has one or more of the following attributes, implementing a specialized business intelligence solution may be the best approach:

- **Rapid change:** Businesses that are constantly changing because of acquisitions, organizational changes, and marketplace dynamics.
- **Complex organizations:** Companies with multiple facilities in a single country or multi-national operations.
- **Multiple enterprise systems:** Companies with many different software solutions for financial management, ERP, supply chain management, and customer relationship management.

In these situations, BI capabilities that are deeply integrated into the heart of an ERP or other enterprise solution can't meet the internal demands for reporting, analysis, planning, budgeting, and compliance. The sources of information are simply too widespread. The employees who depend on the information are too numerous and have responsibilities that are too diverse.

The Infor business intelligence strategy.

The Infor™ strategy for business intelligence is focused on helping companies that require specialized business intelligence capabilities meet their need to easily access, collect, analyze, and publish information throughout their enterprise. The Infor10 ION Business Intelligence solution combines advanced technology and a modern approach to usability and flexibility, raising the level of business intelligence beyond what is possible from a standard, multi-purpose ERP or other enterprise solution. The solution is an ideal complement to an established software infrastructure, whether based on Infor products or those of another vendor.

What Infor10 ION BI does

Infor10 ION BI is used by more than 2,500 companies worldwide to get true business value from their data. The solution features capabilities to:

- **Collect:** Automatically gather data from across the enterprise and store it in one place.
- **Aggregate:** Calculate and aggregate data multi-dimensionally in real-time and in the way you want and need it
- **Publish:** Let business people see their data in the way they understand it—in dashboards, in reports, or on mobile devices.
- **Filter:** Automatically filter data so users only see relevant information.
- **Analyze:** Easily analyze the data, using standard analysis and reports that can change as a business changes.
- **Create:** Create new plans and budgets in a flexible way by entering new data directly or by copying existing patterns to future scenarios.
- **Model what-if scenarios:** Perform what-if comparisons and other scenario modeling tactics using multi-dimensional data and flexible capabilities.
- **Rapid prototyping:** Rapidly model the business case and create a prototype which provides business value immediately.
- **Consolidate:** Create a statutory consolidation that is flexible and user-friendly.

How it does it

Designed by experts with extensive experience solving business intelligence challenges, Infor10 ION BI is a well-developed and well-established solution that plays an integral role in the overall Infor product strategy. The Infor10 ION BI solution features:

- **Fast and easy implementation.** The Infor ION integration framework provides seamless, flexible integration between Infor10 ION BI and already implemented solutions.
- **Simple, intuitive usability.** Infor10 ION BI relies on Infor10 Workspace to deliver a unified experience using single sign-on, common navigation, and single-click access to relevant information. It can also be used in other environments or as a stand-alone solution.
- **Real-time, versatile access to data.** The Infor10 ION BI OLAP Server aggregates and collects data in real-time from multiple sources in your enterprise and presents it to users in multiple dimensions. The result is faster and more dynamic analysis.
- **Access to data from any source.** Infor10 ION is used to facilitate easy collection of data from any Infor or non-Infor source. Alternative integration frameworks also can be used to access data from SAP, Microsoft or any other database.
- **User access to relevant data.** The in-context business intelligence of Infor Workspace ensures that users see only relevant information.
- **An interface and access format that's familiar and comfortable.** Users can access data in a variety of familiar formats, including Microsoft Excel, a web browser, or PDF.
- **Ability to move data easily back and forth between Excel.** The solution can be used to easily move data to and from Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.
- **Ability to do complex financial calculations.** The system can be used to perform complex financial calculations and store the results centrally in the Infor10 ION BI database for easy access and data consistency.
- **Ability to use it without involving IT.** Self-service capabilities make it possible to use the solution without day-to-day involvement by IT professionals.
- **Support for multiple languages.** Infor10 ION BI was designed to work in multi-language environments.

Conclusion.

In deciding how to address your business intelligence requirements, you have many options. In all likelihood ignoring the challenge is not one of them.

In a June 2011 Gartner, Inc. report, “Market Trends: Business Intelligence, Worldwide, 2011-2014,” Dan Sommer and James Richardson wrote, “The 21st century will be the era of information. Today, information amounts double as rapidly as every 18 months. These huge amounts of data and information will need context. Optimal use of information assets will be critical to business success, and organizations that can derive the best understanding from it will have a major advantage in a globalized and competitive world.”⁵

Business intelligence solutions will clearly play a central role in helping companies manage the immense growth in business information. In this white paper, we’ve explained the specific reasons to closely scrutinize your business intelligence requirements and implement a strategy tailored to your unique organization, business model, and decision-making requirements. We’ve explained the basic BI options available to you and provided a more in-depth look at using specialized business intelligence capabilities as a distinct and integral component of a comprehensive enterprise strategy. Infor’s business intelligence experts have developed a solution, Infor10 ION BI, to meet this need because we believe it is the approach that best meets the needs of the vast majority of Infor customers.


⁵ Gartner, Inc., Dan Sommer and James Richardson, “Market Trends: Business Intelligence, Worldwide 2011-2014,” June 7, 2011, p.1.




About Infor.

Infor is a leading provider of business software and services, helping 70,000 customers in 125 countries improve operations and drive growth. To learn more about Infor, please visit www.infor.com.

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INFOTP1120083-en-US-1211-1