

5 Essential Elements Every Business Intelligence Solution Should Include

Business intelligence is a confusing subject. Generally speaking, when a company realizes they need business intelligence (BI), they aren't clear on everything a BI solution should include. Why not? BI isn't the same across the board. As a result, comparing BI solutions is like comparing apples and oranges. Each solution contains different elements.

So, how do you know which elements to look for in a BI solution? Some elements are pretty standard, like simple ad-hoc reporting, the ability to use multiple databases, and exporting data to Excel and PDF. Besides these basic elements, here's a brief list of 5 essential elements that every good BI solution should include:

Tip: Click the images or blue text to view live demo applications



Ranking report: This report creates variable rankings, across multiple dimensions, while specifying various selection criteria at run-time. For example, pretend you want to see the top 25 best customers last year. Or, pretend you want to see the top 5 salespeople last month. Or, maybe you want to see the 10 worst selling products over the last 3 years. A ranking report is essential to business intelligence because it lets you quickly see the best and worst of any aspect of your business.



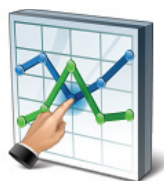
What-if analysis: This lets you assess potential business changes before you make them. Using past data, you can see how different changes would affect aspects of your business. For example, what if you raised prices by 10%? How would that affect overall sales? What if you lowered prices and increased quantity? A what-if analysis tool is essential to business intelligence as it lets you assess risks and rewards before making a decision.



Web-based pivot table/OLAP: Pivot tables are interactive tables that automatically extract, organize, and summarize data. They are often used to analyze data, make comparisons, and discover trends. For those unfamiliar with pivot tables, they are best understood with a hands-on demo (like this one). Drag and drop a few of the options into the horizontal or vertical headings and watch the table refresh automatically. Pivot tables are perhaps one of the most popular methods for analyzing data and business trends.



Executive dashboards: Dashboards provide executives with information critical to their everyday decision making and can alert a company to a problem before it gets big. A dashboard often contains a number of different easy-to-read graphs which provide a real-time view of the business in one place. Each dashboard can be customized to the executive's duties and areas interest. For example, a CEO might want to see a few different graphs displaying revenue over the past year, month, and week. The customer service manager might want to see graphs displaying average time needed to resolve issues. Dashboards are essential to business intelligence because they can alert a company to problems before they get out of hand.



Interactive reporting: Perhaps one of the most flexible reports in this list, an interactive report gives you instant access to a ton of business data in one place. It starts you out at a high level view and lets you drill down as far as you want. It's an incredibly useful tool because it lets you view your data in any way you can imagine. The interactive report is essential part of BI because of the ease of use and flexibility it brings in analyzing data.