

Example Business Report: Butler Group

Key Findings

- The era of the isolated Business Intelligence (BI) tool is drawing to a close. Certainly, most of the latest product releases from the industry's leading players have been targeted towards the delivery of enterprise BI services, and much of the recent consolidation activity can be attributed to a movement towards an 'all-in-one' strategy for BI.
- All organisations need to become more efficient in the way that they exploit their data assets.
- In the BI arena data has no intrinsic value unless it can be used to support business decisions.
- It is Butler Group's opinion that business will only be able to improve its information services, and obtain real value from the ever-increasing data silos that it continues to generate, when it accepts that there are significant advantages to be gained from integrating and standardising its approach to the management of BI services.
- Visible cost savings that come from BI product consolidation will accrue from the simplification of systems management and systems support infrastructures. At the same time Butler Group believes that the real financial benefits to the organisations will come from the better, more consistent, and more competitive use that the business can make of integrated operational intelligence.
- BI has reached a crossroads, and its value to business will only be improved when products are delivered that are capable of being used as genuine enterprise-wide, intelligence-lead, data access, management, and information delivery solutions.
- Any organisation that cannot deal with data quality and consistency issues from within the confines of its BI platform does not have a credible product in place, nor does it have a plausible BI strategy.
- Ultimately there needs to be a high priority set on BI to take first-line responsibility for all the data that it services. Accepting poor and unproven data into enterprise decision-making systems is in Butler Group's opinion the ultimate recipe for disaster.
- Within an organisation's enterprise BI strategy, Butler Group recommends that each existing BI deployment should be carefully reviewed, to ascertain whether it should be replaced, integrated into another platform solution, or removed due to duplication or redundancy.

Introduction

Both public and private sector organisations have become highly proficient at capturing large volumes of data, with the capability to hold information about every customer that has ever transacted business with them, or every citizen that resides within their jurisdiction. Unfortunately, for many such organisations the good news ends there: although they have been working diligently at taking in information and building up terabytes of stored data across a variety of operational systems and databases, the one vital thing that they have failed to improve upon is the ability to make more effective use of that data.

Let us not mince words here: without exception, all organisations need to become more efficient in the way that they exploit their data assets. Furthermore, the data control and management issues that are being discussed here will not be resolved by simply attacking them with technology solutions that slice and dice the data into manageably segmented chunks before delivering it to sales and marketing functions as customer intelligence. The problems associated with the way that we utilise our corporate data are far more deep-seated than that, and the resolutions that need to be applied are far more fundamental than can be achieved by simply throwing in more intelligence-lead technology.

For Butler Group the easy way out would be to accept that the latest BI technology releases provide all the answers, and that we can all sleep safely in our beds at night knowing that when customer or operational performance metrics change we will be properly informed. After all, the BI solutions that we all use are in the main extremely mature, the results that can be achieved from deploying and using the technology are well understood, and the range of products and tools that are available are extensive. However, our view is that over the last two years BI usage has stagnated. The vendors have failed to address key user requirements, focusing instead on bringing new technology on stream, acquiring and integrating complementary products, and building end-to-end BI-based intelligence suites. But, whilst doing all of this, they have fundamentally failed to understand the way that business organisations are utilising their products, and it is this basic failure that is holding back organisations from working smarter with the data assets that they hold.

It is Butler Group's contention that BI has reached a crossroads. Without doubt there are a number of genuinely strong BI solutions available today, but while they continue to be deployed at a limited tactical level, the value proposition that the technology is capable of delivering will remain constrained. Three years ago the BI industry was attempting to play on the business need for Integrated Business Intelligence (IBI). In our opinion that approach failed, and nothing much has changed.

Today we have a situation where businesses are strongly inclined - perhaps we may even go as far as to say that they are desperate - to find a better, more efficient, and more cost-effective approach to utilising the competitive and commercial value of their data assets. The BI industry itself is eager to provide its services at a cross-organisation level through the deployment of strategic and enterprise-pervasive BI, but the business community seems somewhat reluctant to acquiesce. A stalemate appears to exist; on the one hand both business users and the industry itself need to improve the way that BI products and services are used, but if we are to move beyond departmentalised tactical deployments of BI, we must understand the critical steps that will be involved in optimising the technology for the benefit of the enterprise. Therefore, on