

Buyer's guide:

CHOOSING THE RIGHT BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM

An eBook by



Note to reader:

This is a guide for those who already know a little about Business Intelligence and are looking to implement a BI system in the near future.

If you're not quite at that stage yet and are simply looking for a bit more information on what a BI system can do for you and your business, [click here](#).

So, you're in the market for a Business Intelligence solution? Good on you. But are you feeling a little flustered and overwhelmed? Drowning in buzzwords being thrown around? Dashboards. Reporting. Predictive analytics. SaaS. CRM. Yep, we feel your pain.

Well, this guide is here to clear a few things up, making your decision to introduce Business Intelligence (we'll call it BI from now on) a simple and logical one.

Before you even take your first step into the world of BI, you need to ask yourself some serious questions to decide if a BI tool is precisely what you need to solve your challenges.

Far too many BI providers claim they can solve all of your business' problems, end poverty and find the solution to world peace. In reality, BI does exactly what it says on the tin: it provides timely and telling intelligence about your business.

When implemented properly, BI can change your business for the better. It can improve processes, increase performance, boost productivity and streamline manual tasks. But introducing it is not a decision to be taken lightly. For BI to work, it needs to be right for you, your team and your business.

In this buyer's guide, we'll walk you through a couple of key questions you should be asking yourself and of the BI providers you have in mind.



1.

WHY DO I NEED BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE?

BI can address a wide scope of problems that may be slowing your business down, such as data being trapped in separate systems or the difficulty you face managing hundreds of customer accounts.

But that's not all, BI will also aid you in the decision making process across your business.

“ *Top performing businesses using Big Data, cloud and mobility strategies grow 53% faster than their peers.* ”

- Forbes

Do you want more transparency across your business? And do you want to save time and increase productivity? These are also some of the top reasons why a company might choose to introduce BI.

You have data but can't act upon it

Many businesses don't realize that data is not the same as information. Having heaps of data is little use to any business, but converting this data into information that's meaningful and relevant to every decision maker in the business is a real game changer.

The best way to think of BI is as your own personal golf caddy. All the stats, figures and weather reports about you and the course you're about to play don't mean anything until they're read, turned into actionable information and fed directly to you.

So the only thing you have to do is actually get out there and hit the ball.

A BI system works the same way: it analyzes your company's data and gives you vital information about your business in plain English. Whether it's an alert to a cross-sell opportunity, a customer's dropping spend or even if someone has stopped spending altogether, BI gives you the information you need to act fast before it's too late.

You've got dozens of different systems

Like many businesses, you're probably using at least a few different software programs and systems to get your job done. Whether it's email tracking software, tools that help you to manage your sales pipeline or even target management software, you'll be no stranger to the fact that it's incredibly laborious to have to switch from program to program just to complete one simple task.

BI gets rid of this awkwardness. Uniting all of your data sources in one place means you can wave goodbye to numerous annoying systems. Everything is neatly packaged in one simple, easy to use piece of software. More time, more productivity, less stress.

Getting reports from IT is a lengthy process

Creating any kind of report manually is tedious, but creating the kind of reports your management team need can be a huge struggle. But with BI, you don't need to know your macros from your pivot tables.

Business Intelligence programs streamline processes for all of your reporting and business performance analysis. It does all of the legwork for you, creating telling, information-rich reports in seconds. What's more, if your teams aren't spending hours compiling reports, they'll have much more time to do what you're paying them to do.

We're making decisions on gut and not on fact

The on-demand, real-time nature of BI is a huge incentive for most managers, wanting a single view of company or team performance from any location. The immediacy of BI allows even the smallest of businesses to start making fast, data-driven decisions. Our [very own research](#) (yep, we're fancy) indicates that almost **6%** of salespeople make sales decisions based on their gut alone. It may not sound a lot, but how many deals of substantial value are being done on a wing and a prayer? That's when it starts getting worrying.

This list is by no means comprehensive; some may apply to your business, some may not. But more often than not, businesses looking into BI are largely hoping for a couple of things. Either they want to collate and analyze a whole load of historical data or they simply want to be able to glance at their performance on a day to day basis without having to perform some kind of analysis. Or they want to do both.

But - and this is a big **but** - we can't stress enough how important it is to set some attainable objectives. These are pretty paramount to your BI's success. Address the reasons why you need BI, ensure that BI can help and *STICK TO THEM*.

Top tips

- + Lay out the current challenges that are being faced in your business
 - + Identify the pain points a BI solution could solve within your business
 - + Establish (and stick to!) some clear objectives of what you hope to achieve by way of introducing a BI solution
-

Exercise

When you're trying to hash out exactly what you need BI to do for you, endless email chains are not your friend. So get a whiteboard or flipchart, turn off your smartphones, power down your emails for half an hour and sit down with your stakeholders, team members and executives to address what you really need BI to do. And be reasonable. Which are critical 'must haves' and which are just pipedreams?

2.

WHO NEEDS IT?

Who in your business needs this bit of kit? BI should, for the most part, be a companywide tool. Every department in your business needs some kind of insight into company performance, customer interactions and historical transactions to do its job effectively.

Each stakeholder in your business will have different needs and requirements when it comes to BI. While your sales team may want access to historical sales and customer information, your marketing team may need an understanding of recent sales trends in order to craft targeted marketing campaigns.

Here are a few examples of how some key departments in your business could use BI. These might help you to clarify, in your own mind, how BI could truly help your business.

Sales

- + Track sales history with their accounts
- + Monitor trends in spend
- + Identify any sales opportunities that may have previously gone unnoticed
- + Highlight any areas of competitor activity
- + Automate the process of reporting

Management

- + Keep an eye on your business' overall performance
- + Monitor top performers and find out which products are your best sellers, which customers are most loyal to you and who is your best performing salesperson
- + Spot any problem areas with ease and work quickly to rectify them

Marketing

- + Create targeted, personalized marketing campaigns that really resound with your audience
- + Feed your sales team with easy wins and warm leads
- + Get notified of any changes in customer behavior and run targeted campaigns to shift any excess stock

Customer Service

- + View all recent sales interactions with customers
- + Calls can be truly personal with a complete record of all customer information and helpful insight
- + More proactive in their interactions with customers



It is estimated that businesses using BI can make critical decisions six times faster than businesses not using a BI platform for their reporting and analytics.

- Domo

3.

WHAT KIND OF BI DO YOU NEED?

With a variety of BI solutions available, many are often scalable and configurable based on your business' needs and requirements. You don't need to be the hot shot IT whizz-kid to get your head around the types of BI available. However, the type of BI solution you choose can largely dictate how you and your team access and use it.

Each type of BI solution has its perks and its drawbacks, as we'll discuss below:

Enterprise suite

Often designed for larger enterprise level business, these BI suites integrate many of your current software solutions into one. Think a union of your warehouse management, ERP systems, stock levels, customer service software and so on into one single home.

Advantages

- + Unifies your technology and software efforts in one single location
- + No need to use multiple applications
- + Proven integration capabilities and customization

Disadvantages

- + This level of integration often comes at a cost, both of time and money
- + Often managed by the IT department rather than senior management
- + If you're not quite at international powerhouse level, you probably don't need this kind of integration and intelligence

Designed for industry

These kind of BI solutions are designed exclusively for your specific industry and can often deliver a high level of customization based on your business' needs.

Advantages

- + You'll work with companies that know your industry's quirks and challenges like the back of their hand
- + Often less providers to choose from, making your decision a bit easier
- + Some BI tools can come highly recommended for your industry

58%

Percentage of BI leaders who say that reporting continues to be the strongest driver of innovation for their firm.

- Forrester

Disadvantages

- + What if you want to diversify? Will your BI provider be able to keep up with your changing business?
- + Fewer customers to service means less development on the platform

BI for SMEs

Some BI vendors pride themselves on offering a solution that is designed for the SME, no matter their industry. These tools empower the small and medium sized company to manage their business with ease, without the need for mind-boggling integrations or enterprise level solutions.

Advantages

- + More affordable than traditional BI vendor offerings
- + Flexible enough to cope with changing business' requirements

Disadvantages

- + Implementation can sometimes take a bit of time, something that not many SMEs have going spare
- + Need to consider the level of IT intervention required before implementation



4.

WHAT DO THEY NEED?

Depending on who will be using BI, each department will have different uses for it. From reporting and forecasting to planning marketing campaigns, you need to choose a solution that meets all of their needs. Once again, taking the time to speak to every department of your business will only do you good.

Think about the kind of information you want your team to have access to. Even though your shiny new toy might allow you to drill down 15 levels into your data or slice and dice it 100 different ways, that level of analysis might be unnecessary for your business. Do you want your users to see the performance of the entire business or just their territory alone? These kind of decisions should factor into your thought process and should be discussed with department heads as to what people do and don't need.

Also, think about the data that you want displaying in your BI system. Many solution providers will offer an array of dashboard styles and methods of presenting your data. A well designed and well used dashboard can be a truly remarkable tool for your team and can often empower your business to get more value out of your data.

Check and verify your data and where it is coming from. Where will the data that feeds a BI system come from? There is absolutely zero point in feeding a fancy new BI tool with incorrect or outdated data.

We're particularly talking customer and account data here. It's so important that everything is present and correct. Even if it means getting an intern for a few weeks ahead of your implementation to check and profile your accounts to verify key details, it'll be worth it in the long run.

But what if you're already using software that you don't really want to give up? Sometimes, BI may be a straightforward value add rather than a method of replacing your current tools. But be wary as it can often prove tricky to integrate your existing tools with BI tools, particularly if the technology doesn't exist to do the job.

Some of the best BI vendors on the market will offer their support to connect APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) to their software. An API simply allows two applications to talk to each other, share data and push information between the two systems.

Questions to ask yourself

- + What does each team need from a BI tool?
 - + What information do you want your teams to access?
 - + Do your teams need mobile or offline functionality?
 - + Is your current data up-to-date to feed a BI tool?
 - + Do you need to sync other systems like CRM?
-

5.

WHEN DO THEY NEED IT?

Timing is of course paramount when you're introducing any new bit of software. Your timeframe for introducing BI often hinges heavily on the kind of BI you choose to implement. Cloud solutions are often quick and relatively painless, where an Enterprise level can often take many months to integrate into your business. From the get go, you should be talking timescales with your BI provider. Make sure you're both always on the same page at every stage of your implementation so there are no unexpected delays along the way.

Something to bear in mind however is the need for training; pushing a new tool from the top down onto your line managers and executives will result in it failing - and fast. Take the time to explain the benefits of BI to everyone in the team, give a concrete definition of what it is, how it will make their professional lives easier and give adequate time for training courses. Even better, get them involved in your decision making process, let them sit in on demonstrations and give them a sense of ownership. Like any piece of new software, it won't be an overnight success and your team will have to get accustomed to a new way of working.

How to ensure success

- + Consider the timeframe of implementing a BI solution
 - + Don't forget to think about training
 - + Don't force change as you'll encounter resistance
-



6.

HOW WILL IT BE HOSTED?

BI solutions come with two main methods of access: on premise or SaaS. And you don't need to be an IT superstar to get your head around the types of hosting available for BI users. However, where your BI solution is hosted can largely dictate how you and your team gain access to it.

On premise

On premise software solutions are often hosted directly on your local network of servers. Now, we don't mean to put you off because they are right for some businesses but, frankly, they're clunky, expensive and require a fair bit of upkeep to ensure they stay updated.

However, on premise systems are often customizable to your business' precise needs and as your BI will be hosted on your servers, you will be entirely responsible for and in control of your system. If you've got a particularly large organization, on premise solutions can be cumbersome for your IT department, purely in the maintenance and management of the system.

Advantages

- + You retain complete control over all systems and data
- + Dedicated internal IT staff for maintenance
- + Initial investment is high, but can pay off over time, particularly if your company grows

Disadvantages

- + Hefty upfront implementation and set up costs
- + Often little subsequent product support or development as there's no ongoing costs
- + Requires at least some technical ability to maintain and update solution

Cloud/SaaS

"The future of the SMB is almost totally Cloud and SaaS-based." Gartner puts it so well! Integrating Cloud based BI into your business is almost as easy as flicking a switch. Unlike the traditional on premise solutions, there are no lengthy installation procedures to endure.

Further, the Cloud or SaaS-based software is accessible on any internet enabled device. So smartphones, laptops, PCs, tablets – you can gain access to the same BI tool no matter where you are or which device you're using.

The Cloud simply connects everything – from computing infrastructure, applications, business processes and personal collaboration – over a secure Internet connection and is delivered to you wherever and whenever you need it on any compatible device.

Usually delivered as Software-as-a-Service (SaaS), Cloud BI merges two of today's most prominent business technologies: ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) software and Cloud Computing. Businesses today are deploying Cloud BI as a means of empowering an increasingly agile workforce.

Cloud solutions often see higher adoption rates and a less invasive learning curve. This is largely down to the fact that most Cloud BI solutions are often browser-based so you can login just like you log into Amazon, eBay or Netflix; through a website, with a username and password, from any device.

What's more, SaaS-based solutions will scale with your business as you grow, reducing the need to invest in increased server capacities or IT staff to manage your growth.

Advantages

- + Cloud solutions are often low-cost and based on a monthly subscription
- + Providers are still heavily invested in post-sale service and support due to this monthly, subscription model
- + The portability of Cloud based applications is a huge plus for mobile workers

Disadvantages

- + Heavily reliant on a working internet connection to gain access to BI
- + Cloud is quite a new technology that can be perceived as risky by some
- + It can sometimes be difficult to customize Cloud based BI tools as all users will utilize the same version of software

If you're still unsure about the differences between on premise and Cloud solutions, here is a blog article explaining it in more detail: <http://www.sales-i.com/saas-vs-on-premises-which-is-right-for-you>

Exercise

Get together with your stakeholders early on in the implementation process to discuss the ideal approach to rollout for your business. Think about whether you need to implement BI in manageable phased chunks or release it in its entirety in one fell swoop. Consider the manpower you have in house to project manage a phased rollout or whether you're able to prioritize particular phases over others.

Breaking down the rollout into manageable chunks is often preferred, making it a less daunting process and easier to stay on track instead of having one final deliverable, however this will undoubtedly take its toll on the workload of whomever is overseeing your BI implementation.

Implementing Business Intelligence on any scale is not a job to be sniffed at. Since it will include and impact every department, it's a process that needs to be meticulously executed. Involve key people from the get go to avoid any surprises, keep your teams well apprised of progress and gather feedback at every step of the way. Follow our simple process for implementing BI and you won't go far wrong:

Key steps to follow

- + Run an internal session to dictate needs
 - + Thrash out your very minimum requirements and at what phase any additional features will be added
 - + Make sure any integrations won't be negatively affected
 - + Consider pricing and timescales early on
 - + Pick a suitable deployment method, and stick to it
 - + Arrange post-live training courses and think about future successes
-

About

We are the leader in sales performance for distributors and wholesalers.

sales-i is sales performance software designed to make every sales call more personal and profitable.

sales-i enables sales professionals to clearly identify and target high quality sales opportunities within their current customer base. Equipped with customer buying behavior alerts, salespeople can make insightful, personalized, quick business decisions, realizing repeat sales, reduced customer attrition and maximized profit margins as a result.

sales-i will change the way you sell. [Get in touch](#) for a free, online demonstration and judge our software for yourself.

✉ tellmemore@sales-i.com

📍 www.sales-i.com

"It is a no brainer for distributors, and the personal service is outstanding."

- Scott Bennett, Bennett Auto Supply

"One call using sales-i yielded a \$5,000 order from an account that was leaving us for a competitor, he felt we did not care, sales-i showed him we did."

- Ron Dahlhaus, Prostock Automotive

"We've closed off the financial year 58% up on the previous year and attribute this directly to sales-i and their sales performance software."

- Larry Sexton, Office 360°