

“With BI, make intelligent decisions on-the-fly!”

Louis Pasteur—the famous French chemist and microbiologist once affirmed: “Chance favours only the prepared mind.” In business scenarios too, it is crucial to be ‘prepared’. To achieve this preparedness, business heads, team leaders or managers need to adopt tools that could enable them to mine relevant bits of information from the sea of organisational data and do a multi-dimensional comparative analysis to make informed decisions. And all this, instantaneously! A business intelligence (BI) tool addresses this very requirement of decision makers and empowers them with business insights, on-the-go, avers Sanjay Mehta, CEO, MAIA Intelligence.

Vandana Sharma of Benefit bureau caught up with him to understand the efficiencies that a BI tool can bring to a firm’s business processes.

MAIA Intelligence is a company that is emerging as a force to reckon with in developing powerful Business Intelligence reporting and analysis products.



Sanjay Mehta,
CEO, MAIA
Intelligence

>> Key Benefits

- Know why a BI tool is a MUST for your business
- Use BI to make prompt, intelligent, information-based decisions

Why should a firm deploy a BI solution? What functionalities does it offer?

We can chart our future clearly and wisely only when we are factually abreast with the latest information and are capable of deriving inferences from those facts. A BI tool empowers business heads to analyse organisational

data and make intelligent, information-based decisions. And that too, without the need of any special computing expertise.

The uniqueness and efficacy of a BI tool can be explained further by visualising a business scenario. Consider this—every firm prepares an outstanding report based on which it does an aging analysis. Using a BI tool,

one can analyse different parameters of this data to capture details like: the quarters when payments are not flowing in; the top ten customers whose outstanding is the highest; the top ten customers with whom payments are always stuck; the season or quarter when the payments usually get delayed, etc. One can also compare data across branches, products, employees, etc. The analysis is reflected in the form of graphs, cubes, pyramids, and dashboard feeds.

Based on the insights that the tool unravels, decision makers can formulate future strategies.

So, basically, BI serves as a compass that gives you a direction and enables prompt and wise decision making—on-the-fly!

How different is a BI solution/software from a conventional ERP (enterprise resource planning) system, which also generates MIS (management information system) reports, etc?

Standard ERP packages do come packed with standard reporting and analysis modules. But the kind of decision making that is facilitated using a BI tool is something that this kind of reporting module can never match.

Suppose a firm is using some ERP accounting module, the business head would still need some tool to generate comparative analytical reports, a functionality that the conventional ERP software doesn’t allow.

Comparative study, where one is able to analyse the results of one quarter against that of another; the same against the yearly data and against the data of the last five years; or that of the first quarter data of the last two years—product-wise, sales person wise, branch-wise, etc, can not be generated using a regular ERP software accounting module.

To do this kind of comparison, either someone needs to write a program or export all data on to an Excel sheet and then work on it. But

by using BI, you can do many kinds of analysis on diverse data fields, using heterogeneous data sources, in the flick of a second.

Are BI solutions customised to suit the requirements of different business verticals?

It is important to understand that a BI tool is basically a data visualisation tool that showcases reports or outputs, post data analysis. This is a platform that sits on top of the transaction system that captures organisational data. This transaction system could be a CRM (customer relationship management) solution, HR (human resource) tool, ERP or Tally software. It is the transactional system that needs to be modeled to suit a particular industry format and not the BI tool.

How different would the requirements of a small organisation be from that of a bigger one, when it comes to the application and use of BI?

Both small and large organisations face similar decision making challenges but in large organisations there are IT teams to support and facilitate data analysis programmes and functionalities. But in small and mid-sized organisations, usually such support is not there. So there's a lot of value offered to the user if such a tool comes bundled with an ERP solution.

In fact we are following the same model and have bundled our solution with the ERP software of many a firm, especially in Tier II and Tier III cities so as to enable customers to buy solutions off the shelf.

Is such a tool useful for only CEOs or to employees across the organisation?

A BI tool is useful for employees across the organisation. These days BI tools come sliced into many presentation modules to suit the requirements of different job functions.

For the bottom of the pyramid, the basic analysis modules in the

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form of spreadsheet analytic reports, are sufficient. For the managerial level, modules that generate cubes, graphs and pyramids to reflect different analysis can be deployed. For the CEO level, modules that offer functionalities such as key performance indicators, multi-field analyses modules, dashboards, etc can be deployed.

What are the pain points or glitches in the way of IT adoption that you may have observed of late, especially amongst small firms?

I feel that the key to any IT implementation lies in the digitisation of organisational data, across the board. We are still at a very nascent stage of IT adoption in the country and digitisation is not happening to the fullest in most organisations. In many firms, it is a very common practice to automate a few key processes while some functions, like timekeeping and attendance records, are still being maintained manually.

Most small businesses are meeting the statutory needs with IT. They are still not getting the competitive advantage of analytics to take fact-based decisions and conduct business.

Is cost a deterrent to the adoption of BI tools?

Yes cost plays a major role in any IT adoption, especially in the case of small firms. These firms usually have small capex (capital expenditure) budgets and consider investing in IT infrastructure as a one time activity. But IT software require regular upgrades and the business heads need to understand that budgets need to be

allocated each month/quarter for the same.

Besides, when it comes to BI adoption, so far, most of the standard products from multinationals are being offered at a per-user-seat pricing model, i.e., if you want to have the BI functionality on ten computers, you will have to pay for ten users. This is something that irks the small-time firms, and even the big players when they scale up and their user requirement goes up.

But we have tried to change this scenario in order to increase BI adoption. We offer a server-based deployment pricing model that allows unlimited users to access the functionality. This way, the total cost of ownership never goes up and there is more return on investment too. Also, businesses don't feel the pinch when they are scaling up and offering the BI functionality to more users. We are hopeful that this will result in increased proliferation of the BI adoption.

Do you see the situation improving in the coming years? If yes, how?

The SaaS (software as a service) model may give a lot of push to IT adoption as it doesn't need a lot of capex. Besides, there is no maintenance required at the users' end. Understanding the scope and potential in this domain, more and more solution providers are making a shift towards this model. IT adoption will surely get a boost once most of the management software becomes available under the SaaS model. ■