

INTERVIEW

“LIGHTWEIGHT BI SOLUTIONS ARE SEEING UPTAKE”

MAIA Intelligence is a provider of BI and BA solutions that are customised to the needs of users. In a conversation with Shashwat DC, Sanjay Mehta, CEO, MAIA Intelligence, charts out the evolution of BI and maps how the change is affecting all the employees in an organisation.

BY SHASHWAT DC

How has the shift in BI been from a tool of revenue growth to that of productivity gain?

We have saved average daily time for our customers by over 20 minutes in productivity on reports for a normal user and over 90 minutes for a power user. Besides productivity gains, they got excellent insight on their own data and different perspectives to analyse the same with actionable information.

How do you view the evolution and efficacy of verticalised BI solutions?

There are two types of verticalizations that are happening in the BI space. One is in terms of function, like balance sheet consolidation, and the other by industry segments like healthcare and logistics.

We could sense the requirements for balance sheet consolidation from our customers for quick closure of books through an error-free analytics. So, financial consolidation is an area that is seeing a lot of knitted BI solutions. Due

to heavy M&A activity and a stricter regulatory environment, all branches, subsidiaries and sister concerns of these organisations have to have some common financial binding. And that is where BI is capturing the screen space.

The big question is which industry can be verticalised. Those industries that are regulated and follow some standard procedures are easier to verticalise. Going by that, BFSI, pharmaceuticals and telcos obviously look like hot segments. However, others like retail, manufacturing, broking are not being left out.

Economics is another key factor. Not all solutions can be viable from a cost perspective. There is a cost challenge attached to verticalisation. New fields, new reports, new laws, all need constant up-gradation and we have to understand how it can be technically deployed.

What are the steps that an IT manager needs to undertake before selecting a BI solution?



Keep in mind: the goal is not to find the “best tool” but to find the “best fit.” Every BI tool has its sweet spot. If you deploy the tool outside its sweet spot, you will see its weaknesses. A BI solution must integrate and align to deliver maximum business value.

Most BI projects and applications are motivated by a desire to derive more value from existing IT infrastructure and applications. The selection of data integration and BI tools should complement and leverage these investments as much as possible. It is therefore necessary to define a BI architecture and vision to complement the existing IT infrastructure. This means considering the issues of scalability, usability, security and metadata from an overall system perspective and not just from a stand-alone tool perspective.

Likewise, it's important to have an

overall BI applications roadmap that specifies the type of BI applications to be built and when. The architecture (both infrastructure and information) needs to be able to evolve over time to meet the new applications and changing business requirements. The tools need to be able to support and adapt to that evolution.

How big is the issue of integrating the BI solution with other apps?

We have seen customers asking for real-time reporting rather than waiting for big bang data warehouse modelling where this issue of data integration was a concern. As the business is changing very quickly, near-enough is good enough for business users. They expect quick reporting and analytics rather than wait for large data warehouse to get ready and then use the same.

Are the gains that accrue from BI match up to the costs and pain of implementation?

Budget cuts have been limiting long-range thinking, requiring that new projects provide extremely short-term value. Yet, organisations can't lose sight of driving value over time. Customers are opting for lightweight BI solutions that are easy to install, easy to use and which leverage existing IT investments and data sources. Also, they do not want to leave anybody out – ensuring everyone has the metrics they need to make competent, fact-based decisions.

What are the top three challenges in BI implementation and how they can be addressed?

Cross organizational collaboration: Data integration with multiple source systems is still one of the biggest challenges. BI has the potential to deliver enormous payback, but demands unprecedented collaboration. Where BI is concerned, collaboration is not limited to departments within the organisation; it requires integration of knowledge about customers, competition, market conditions, vendors, partners, products and employees at all levels.

Implementation time-lines: Customers no longer like to wait for a complete BI implementation to be rolled out and see its benefits after a year or so. They want instant access to the reporting analysis from their data within few days of the sign-up.

Foreseeing the real RoI: BI implementations fail because they are sold to IT departments and not to the business users.

What are biggest trends that you see in BI at the moment?

We see embedding of BI within application as one of the biggest growth areas. We are also looking forward to new technology wave of Rich Internet Applications (RIA) based BI. This kind of intuitive GUI was never experienced before by business users. **ITNEXT**