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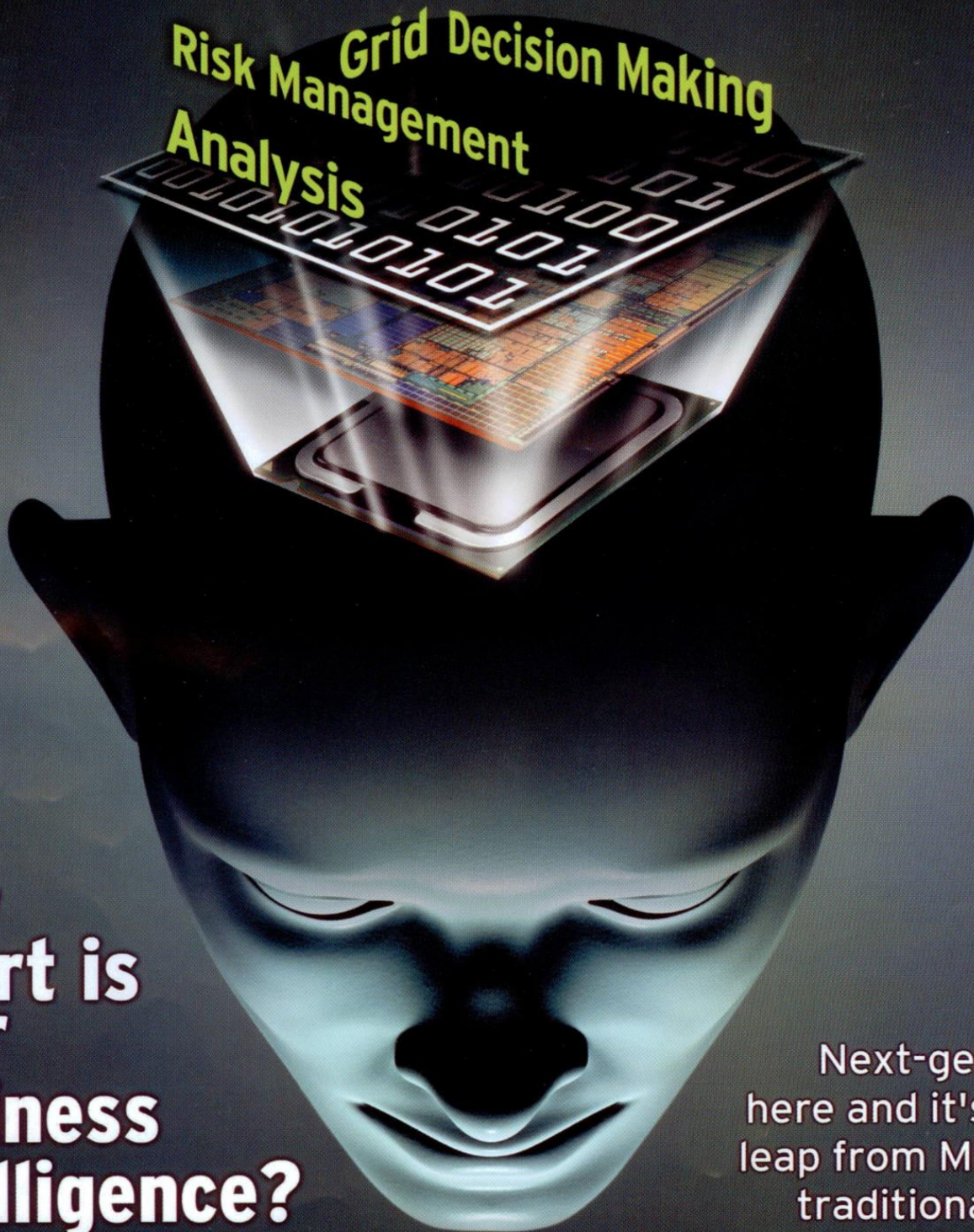
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Solutions for the Connected Enterprise



How smart is your Business Intelligence?

Next-gen BI is here and it's a big leap from MIS and traditional DSS

Small and medium business(es) intelligence

The need for improved visibility and efficiency is driving the deployment of BI tools in the SMB sector BY VARUN AGGARWAL

SMBs are no different when it comes to the need for BI or performance management. Their need to have an effective information delivery mechanism in place is more acute as most companies in this sector thrive on their agility to respond to market needs. SMBs actually face a greater risk in taking wrong decisions based on erroneous information.

What differentiates SMBs from large enterprises is their unique set of needs. These range from greater price sensitivity (hence a focus on more phased implementation, self-service, greater value and selective deployments) to greater focus on ease of ownership (in the buying process and scale-up, installation/deployment, training, use) and shorter time-to-value.

Such strategic considerations apart, there have been many drivers necessitating a proliferation of BI in the SMB space. Some reasons include regulatory requirements, an explosion in the volume and heterogeneity of data, rapidly decreasing response time, latitude et al.

SMBs have also been progressively learning from the experience of large enterprises about how a reliable performance management system can add value to the decision-making process in an organization. SMB market in itself is no monolith. From a BI maturity perspective, the market can be classified into three progressive stages:

1. Low (no BI or just spreadsheets)

These organizations have no data warehouse or IT information management in place. They perceive BI and performance management as being very complex and expensive. Such organizations are generally burdened with the complexity of person-dependent growing data.

2. Still low (spreadsheets, basic reporting tools)

These organizations have similar characteristics as the first stage. However, while IT recognizes the value of BI, business continues to resist this. The ever-growing heterogeneity results in spreadsheets proliferating; reporting tools are present without a performance management agenda.

3. Similar characteristics as the 'enterprise'

These organizations typically have a data warehouse in place that sits atop ERP or other core solutions. They are either in advanced stages of leveraging departmental BI, implementing enterprise-wide BI or progressing towards comprehensive performance management through co-ordinated decision-making. These organizations tend to invest in or leverage existing investments in enterprise BI solutions.

Most SMBs again look for a value proposition around three aspects – whether the solution is easy-to-buy, easy-to-use and easy-to-install and nurture. Consider the example of Wanbury, a Mumbai-based medium-sized Pharma company. The company was looking to adopt an efficient reporting tool so that it could have a clear view of the performance of its departments. In August 2008, the company deployed MAIA Intelligence's IKEY BI tool for its ease of use and efficient reporting. "We evaluated many other high-cost tools, which were complex. We didn't require most of the features they provided. IKEY BI tool helps us generate quick reports and is highly user-friendly," says Ghanshyam Naik, VP-IT at Wanbury.

The top management at Wanbury is able to make well-informed decisions since reports are now generated using the IKEY BI tool. "Previously the reporting process was not very efficient because collecting and compiling data were cumbersome tasks," explains Naik. Now, using IKEY BI, the company can take corrective actions in case a particular territory is not growing rapidly or if a product shows a decline in sales. Wanbury has deployed the BI tool on its sales, marketing and finance departments and the top management receives relevant reports on a regular basis with IKEY Scheduler.



"Be it the Pharma sector or any other, the top management needs to know how the sales figures are moving in the organization. BI helps them build such reports that compare trade in particular months to previous years, and all this analysis is available to the top management," Naik Opines. "In today's competitive market – whether SMB or enterprise – customers are demanding better quality of service at lower prices. Increased regulatory pressure creates the need for greater transparency and improved corporate governance. Thus, organizations across verticals are increasingly looking towards business analytics and performance management solutions that can help them measure, manage and monitor information to ensure that they leave no stone unturned in their search for a healthier bottom line. ■"

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