

Exciting Developments in Business Intelligence

During interviews with analysts and press people, I am often asked about exciting developments in the business intelligence (BI) marketplace. “What are you doing that’s exciting?” they always want to know. Many of our customers are creating useful applications that meet the business requirements. But what I find exciting is when people get ideas that they didn’t have before.

In many cases, innovative ideas spring from a new way of looking at the data. In that vein, I like to make a distinction between *elective* business intelligence systems and *operational* business intelligence systems. Elective business intelligence systems are designed to solve specific analytical problems, such as determining which region sold the most widgets, or why there is a high incidence of defects at a certain manufacturing plant. Operational business intelligence (OBI) systems, by contrast, are fundamental information systems that help run the business.

In the best-case scenario, an OBI system will anchor its elective counterpart. Guardian Group of Funds (GGOF), profiled in this issue, is a great example. GGOF created its Enterprise Intelligence application not only because sales managers needed an analytic dashboard. At the root of the BI project is a new infrastructure for managing information. GGOF is using integration technology from iWay Software to combine CRM data from Microsoft SQL Server, fund accounting data from Sybase, and record keeping information from DB2. Then, using WebFOCUS, managers can examine the aggregated information to more effectively sell funds to investment advisors throughout Canada.

The point is, GGOF probably would not have set up this application just for analytical purposes. The elective capabilities were an offshoot of the need for combining and organizing operational data.

Deutsche Telekom, also profiled here, is another good example. IT professionals at this

telecommunications firm created the Systematic Quality Monitoring System to manage the performance of their network infrastructure. First, they set up an OBI system to monitor a vast network of hardware, software, and networking gear. Over time, they realized that the quality data reports generated by SYMOSY could be analyzed to indicate the continually changing dynamics of the telecommunications market. The operational information can now be exploited by executive managers for corporate decision-making. That’s the kind of “light bulb” realization that I find exciting.

Of course, not all BI tools have the right architecture for creating operational information systems. As you will read in our feature article in this issue, to make the grade as a corporate standard,



an OBI environment must be able to integrate with everything that is standard in the company. That includes accessing data on the fly in native formats and combining dissimilar data types—just like GGOF is doing. OBI applications must also be extremely reliable, and they must fit into the IT infrastructure that the company has chosen.

BI involves more than just garnering clever ideas from your data. That’s important, but the most successful BI systems are not built just for elective purposes. They are built to help you run the business. 🌐

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