

BI AND ANALYTICS IN THE CLOUD

Best Practices for Getting Started

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THERE ARE SEVERAL key advantages to implementing business intelligence (BI) and analytics technologies within a cloud computing environment. Many companies who have implemented these systems previously will tell you about the potential for more accurate and timely forecasting and real-time data analysis, greater cost savings and increased mobility associated with the cloud. Before you decide to implement BI, analytics and cloud computing, first you must answer fundamental questions in order to ensure optimal success:

How will you access cloud technology – through architecture (on-premise) or procurement (SaaS-based approach)?

There are advantages to doing either on-premise and the SaaS based approaches; depending upon your specific requirements.

The SaaS approach is the most cost effective way to access cloud technology as it eliminates cost infrastructure and labor. However, this option may affect the ability to get all of your company data into the SaaS provider. This is one of the biggest reasons why doing BI and analytics using a SaaS provider can be challenging. When implementing a BI solution, the more data the better.

What are the specific data requirements for your industry and your organization?

How will you get your vast amounts of data into that SaaS provider? Here is where you need to do some real planning in order to build a data warehouse to get timely data loaded into your SaaS provider on an ongoing basis. Keep in mind that most SaaS approaches cannot support and deliver real-time data – and if they do, you will have to check

on the availability of opening up a connection. So, while the SaaS model offers several upfront savings, you may have bandwidth constraints, security and legal issues and the inability to access data in real-time. You may not get the full value from your BI implementation if you go this route.

What specific problems are you trying to solve?

Make sure you know if your organization – and the industry it is involved in – actually relies on real-time information. Ask yourself these questions: what is your company looking to get out of this BI implementation, and do you even need the real-time data in the first place? If your company is a manufacturer looking at Far East orders and forecasts, you probably don't need real-time data. But if your organization is a retailer that wants to see how merchandise is selling across different locations in



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an up-to-the-minute fashion, then the data coming in from a SaaS provider will be stale within hours.

Before you automatically assume that you must build your own cloud, do know that there will be higher costs and labor fees as well as considerable time spent up front. At the same time, you will be able to get all of your data into your cloud environment and access it in real-time on a 24/7 basis. And, you will have the flexibility to control just how real-time your data actually is.

Do you have a deep enough understanding of BI and what it can do for your organization?

In a nutshell, the cloud implementation path you decide to follow should be based on the timeliness of the data you need to analyze and if you must process that data in real-time. Here are some other good questions to

ponder that will help you select the best possible implementation approach:

Do you already have a cloud or virtualized infrastructure? If so, you should capitalize on this investment. You probably already have good in-house skills. If you do not, then you need to find that skillset before moving forward.

Do you understand how to build cloud architecture? If not, then see if you can secure it as a service.

Look into your data requirements – are they real-time or do you have to support a data warehousing analytics function that does not need to be real-time?

Do you understand metadata?

This is taking more complex

data, such as a relational database and putting it in an easy to use format to complete the analysis. If you currently do report writing, you may eventually move up to a more elaborate analysis and then escalate to real-time dashboards and real-time feeds as data comes in.

Do you understand BI and how it can help your organization? This knowledge will truly help you better solve the specific data challenges your organization faces.

Looking at all the questions and considering your own organizational structure and requirements, you can now begin to organize and access your plan for moving forward with the best solution for your company whether on premise, a SaaS-based approach, or even a combination of both.