



Feeding the Enterprise Appetite for Mobile Business Intelligence

A Business Imperative

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Introduction

Across businesses, the appetite for mobile BI has become unstoppable. Until recently, the technology and culture to support mobile BI didn't exist. That has changed dramatically.

A Cisco study shows that by the end of 2013, the number of mobile-connected devices will exceed the number of people on earth. By 2017 there will be almost 1.4 mobile devices per person. In addition, the report showed that in 2012, the number of mobile-connected tablets increased 2.5-fold to 36 million. Each tablet generated 2.4 times more traffic than the average smartphone. Evidence suggests that high performance tablet technology is going to be at the centre of the mobile BI wave. Business culture has also changed significantly to drive this global trend. Today, high-performance businesses empower their employees with alerts, data and intelligence on the go. With mobile workforces becoming the norm, this is not limited to C-suites. The trend is quickly filtering down to the lowest levels, across field staff and customer facing employees.

The trend is most visible in industries where employees are constantly on the move such as financial services, retail, logistics, media and

entertainment, manufacturing, healthcare and hospitality. In mid-2011 coffee chain Starbucks was showing the way with mobile BI, implementing a strategy that allowed its managers to access financial and operational data that was relevant to a specific location of its business. When managers visited a store, the GPS capabilities of the devices made it possible to deliver store-specific data. Today, dynamic mobile BI is growing beyond sporadic success stories, creating impact across industries and industry segments. According to TechNavio's forecast the global mobile BI market is set to grow at a CAGR of 27.47% over 2012-2016

There are several factors at play here. Demand from organizations has begun to shift from being able to view simple content and performance indicators to being able to navigate around data and ensure that dashboards respond to variables such as geography, provide filters and pivots, and are able to customize visualization based on the user and device. Fundamentally, organizations want to go from passive BI to active BI.

Moving from Desktop to Mobile

The good news is that organizations are already invested in systems that allow users to interact with data and customize visualization. The bad news is that these are desktop based (which cannot be intelligently location-aware). The challenge for organizations is to grow their BI strategy from desktops to include mobile devices.

How do you display complicated and content-rich desktop-based dashboards on mobile devices? How do you ensure that user experience across mobile devices is exceptional? User experience and user acceptance will ultimately determine how successfully a mobile BI and dashboard solution improves decision making, the ability to cross-sell, upsell or delight a customer.

The ideal solution is to step back and take a look at a variety of appropriate slices or packages of data on mobile devices. Mobile BI dashboards don't have to provide the panoramic view of organizational information that desktops have traditionally done. Instead, mobile dashboards must intelligently refine data for display based on a number of considerations such as user profile, location, schedules, device capabilities (such as gestures) and screen size, availability of sensors on the device, ability to store data in offline mode on the device and possibly even the network's characteristics. Put another way, before creating a mobile BI and dashboard strategy, organizations must look at user cases, user roles, business scenarios and end-user objectives.

What to 'Mobile-ify' - Start Building a Business Case

For most organizations, anytime-anywhere access to operational data may provide a guaranteed business edge. For many industries, such as manufacturing, retail and financial services, such data made available on mobile devices is easy to justify. This is because the data is time-bound and additional regulatory requirements which, if violated, could lead to expensive penal action or reputation loss.

But businesses need to go beyond operational data. They need to deliver information and data that is pre-digested (analysed) or can be manipulated by the user. This capability allows several users to demonstrate bottom line benefits. For example, an insurance policy can be sold based on the ability to "run the numbers" on a mobile device while discussing policy details with the customer. The ability to analyse data such as market trends, price and inventory can help manufacturing take better marketing decisions.

Our experience shows that not having a business case is amongst the top five barriers to adoption of mobile BI and dashboards. The top reason, of course, is the inability to justify the investments due to a lack of measurable ROI (and we will deal with this in just a moment). Between not having a business case and the lack of measurable ROI are the remaining three barriers: lack of strategy and roadmap, data security concerns and challenges in integration with legacy applications.

The Key Consideration

The big question before an organization adopting mobile BI and dashboards is: should the solution be custom built or out of the box? There are no hard and fast answers. However, the pros and cons are clear (Table 1).

Custom built mobile BI and dashboard solution		Out of the box mobile BI and dashboard solution	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
Will meet requirements of device OS	High effort required to customize apps	Faster time to market	May not fulfil all requirements of device OS (such as voice recognition)
Offline capabilities	App and browser may have different look and feel	Offline capabilities	Cannot match native look and feel of device/ OS
No additional cost for apps	User experience will be different on desktop and mobile device	User experience on desktop and mobile device almost the same	May need additional effort for integration with legacy applications and data sources

The next set of challenges for organizations adopting mobile BI and dashboards is the path to success in transformation. We believe that a clear mobile BI framework with checklists and frameworks is required. Over multiple engagements, we have developed such a framework that ensures successful implementation and migration to mobile BI and dashboards. Our framework is called moBI (Table 2).

moBI: Framework for Mobile BI and Dashboards		
Mobilize	Organize	Build & Implement
Assess overall mobile BI requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Reports and dashboards to be delivered to users ▶ Finalise mobile OS to be supported ▶ Finalise devices to be supported 	Define use cases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Track & Act: ability to monitor critical performance indicators and act on them ▶ Deal the Deal: Provide information to field teams 	Roll out mobile BI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Build mobile BI ▶ Implement mobile BI
Synchronize with overall security guidelines and connectivity standards of the organisation	Plan for a pilot. Proof of Concept	Define governance framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ User management ▶ Reports & Dashboards ▶ Updates and additions
Create blueprint for mobile BI rollout	Refactor reports, dashboards based on UI guidelines for different devices	End user training Support and sustenance for mobile BI

Mobile BI and dashboards have become unavoidable in an age of pervasive connectivity and mobile workforces, constantly changing business scenarios and global markets. Every organization, regardless of size, will soon find that mobile BI and dashboards are essential for business. However, measuring and capturing ROI will prove to be a puzzle that will leave them struggling to justify mobile investments. Analysts suggest that the new investments required by mobile BI cannot be justified by cost savings alone and that a business case must be built on top line benefits.

The implications of this argument are positive. Organisations that focus on delivering measurable ROI will see that their mobile BI and dashboard projects are implemented on time and are continuously upgraded.

When considering ROI, the following should be kept in mind:

Increase in use of existing enterprise applications: Employees are likely to use applications on the mobile device more frequently than a desktop (due to generational tendencies, change in consumer behaviour etc).

Bring new users to existing applications: Employees without formal requirement to use applications such as senior executives may volunteer to use these applications as they are accessible, easy to use and can be used on the road when required.

New use cases introduced by mobile applications: Device capabilities such as geo-location, camera, accelerometer, contacts etc. can increase and enhance use cases.

Increase in employee productivity: Use of mobile devices can shorten sales cycles and reduce operating costs (such as technical support etc).

Cost savings: The workplace can become paperless and environment friendly.

Increase in innovation: Employees can collaborate when spurred by new ideas on the road, generating revenue or reducing costs.

When calculating ROI, organisations must factor the complete cost of developing mobile BI and dashboards. This means including the cost of the devices as well as the infrastructure such as hardware, software, maintenance, support/ upgrades and training.

Conclusion

It is certainly not easy to capture and demonstrate ROI for mobile BI and dashboards. Despite this it is doubtful if organisations are going to delay embracing the trend. This is because intuitively executives understand the value of data on the go. Put another way, they have often been frustrated by the fact that data and information is stuck on inaccessible desktops, leading to poor decisions, loss of business or customer dissatisfaction.

Businesses today are moving beyond the boundaries of offices and cubicles, beyond meeting rooms and discussion tables. The value of data being made available outside traditional boundaries may not always translate directly into bottom lines, but it clearly provides the organisation with a leading edge.

About the author

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Subu has over 16 years of industry experience in Client relationships, Business Development, Strategy Consulting, Architecture, Design & Delivery, with over 12 years focused specifically in the Mobility space. He has successfully led several large & complex mobility initiatives for key customers across different industries. He specializes in Mobile Strategy, Cross Platform Solutions, Mobile Payments and Enterprise Mobility.

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