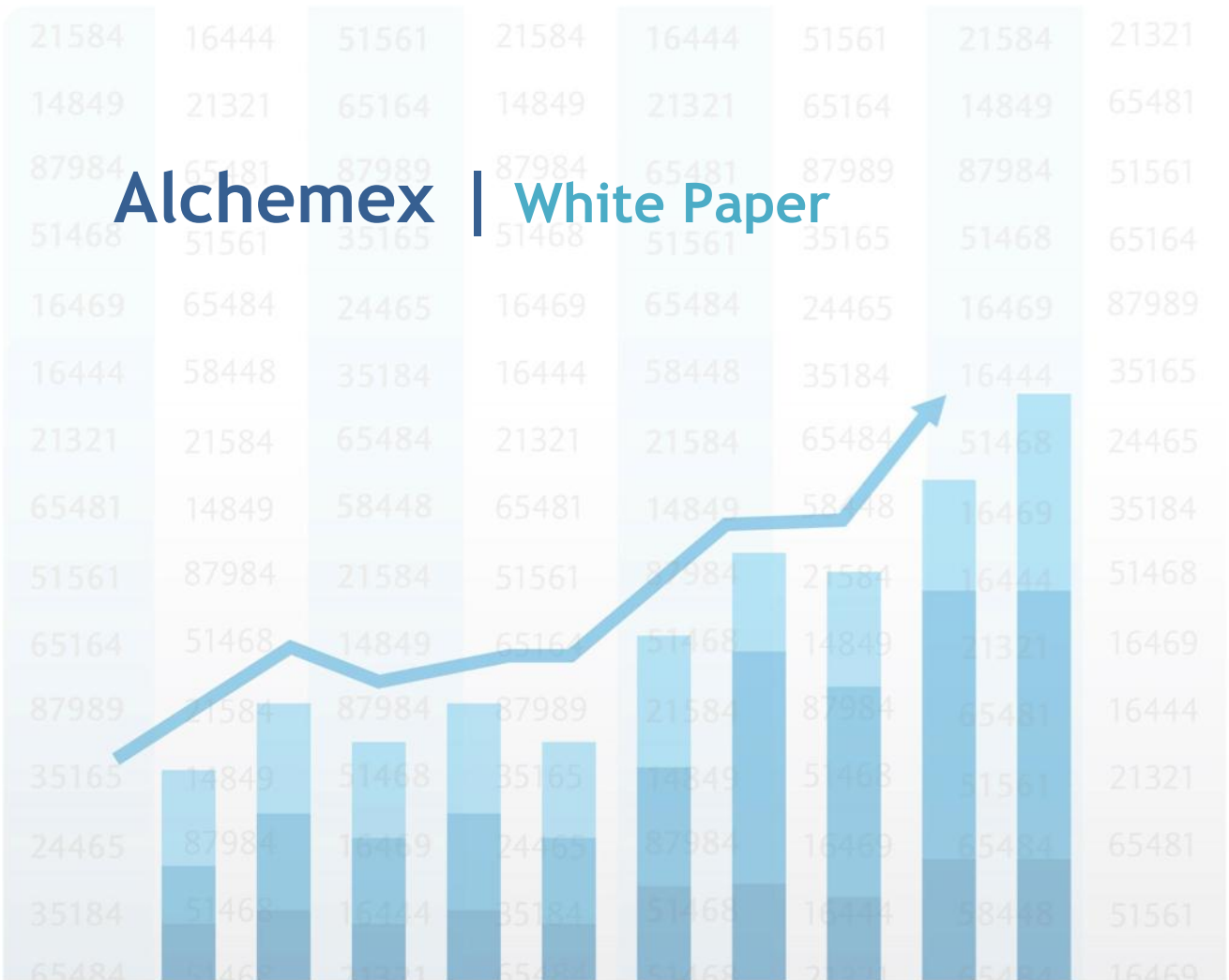


Alchemex | White Paper



Business Intelligence | Driver of Success



Driver of Success

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Executive Summary



Gary Boddington, Managing Director

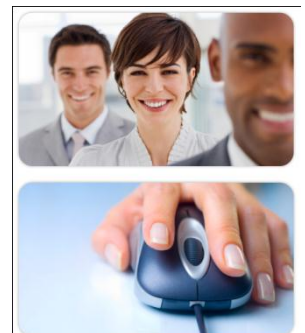
Audience: This paper is intended for small to mid-market business leaders who need to get better information to make more informed decisions in order to drive business success.

Although Gartner statistics and recommendations most often appear to be relevant for high end corporate companies that fit into the Fortune 500 or similar listed company benchmarks, it is clear that all of Gartner's Top 10 Business Priorities for 2010 are very pertinent to any organization regardless of size, region or industry.

If these priorities are to be adopted in a business then, how does a business give effect to them - and I don't just mean write them down somewhere - how are they adopted? It's easy to document them as part of a company's annual strategic planning but what I mean is, how do you actually measure them, how do you get regular and reliable visibility of whether the adoption of these priorities has created real benefits and competitive advantage for your business?

Enter Business Intelligence (BI), a very hot topic in any board room nowadays and no longer the prehistoric industry that sought to satisfy the needs of only the big and powerful corporate entities. BI has gone mainstream, and this document intends to give small to midsized businesses some insight into how BI technology can drive the fundamentals in their business and become a driver of success across an organization.

This paper doesn't offer a list of BI solutions, what they do, and how they stack up on the increasingly competitive BI landscape. It also doesn't argue that BI solutions should seamlessly pull relevant data from the database without the user needing to understand the underlying data structure, that access to BI shouldn't be restricted to the sole domain of the programmer, that data should effortlessly and without manual manipulation integrate with Microsoft Excel and that using the powerful analytics tools in Excel, such as PivotTables and Conditional formatting to slice and dice the data, is all that is needed to effectively analyse data in a business. Furthermore, it will not argue for built in dashboards that display specific metrics in a visual format that even a non accountant can understand - and importantly, that this output can reflect data from multiple companies, business segments, regions or projects. Why does this paper not expound on any of these issues? Because these arguments are so last decade and for this paper to have any context and meaning, it is assumed that BI vendors have overcome all these market needs and more, and the challenge now is how to implement and use BI effectively as a business tool in small to mid-market enterprises.



Instead, this paper seeks to outline the 10 top priorities for business in 2010 as espoused by Gartner and then map a scenario and visual illustration of how BI can play a role to achieve these priorities. Obviously each business is different and not each scenario will resonate across every business and industry, however, the starting point is to identify what needs to be measured, identify how it will be measured, whether against industry, regional or internal benchmarks, and then measure it and be accountable for it. So as we move into a new decade with new and existing challenges, one of which is information over-load, this paper will take you through the reasons why a robust, easy-to-use BI tool is crucial in your business to assist you in achieving each of these 10 priorities for 2010.

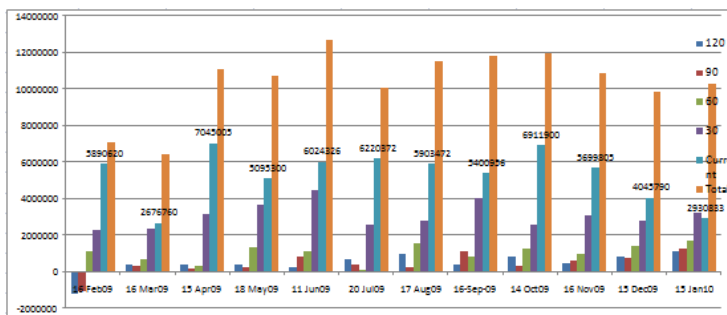
Gartner Priority #1: Business Process Improvement

How would you know what to improve in your business? If you have never measured your processes, if you have no transparent view of your functional teams and how they are performing against key functional metrics, how would you know where to start making business process improvements? Your starting point for 2010 is to measure your performance. As Stephen Covey says, “the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing”. Identify your ‘main thing’ for 2010 and what you can improve on to help you achieve your main thing. Then measure your success against recognised external or internal benchmarks, and use a Business Intelligence strategy to provide you with visibility of your progress. Once you have this visibility, and you retain focus on your main thing, you can make calls on performance against your benchmarks and make proactive and constructive interventions.

Need an example? Why not look at your debtor’s days? Cash is king and in these tough economic times debt collection processes need to be slick and debt collection targets need to be clear. Do you have a metric for debtor’s days? Do you know the impact of not achieving these targets on your cash flow report? Setting these key metrics up is the starting point but then accurately measuring and reporting on them is vital to the lifeblood of your business - cash.

Why not start by analysing what your debtor’s book looks like right now? The exercise of paying attention to your debtor’s book in itself should reap rewards by identifying easily collectable debt which is going to boost your cash flow immediately, but then why stop there? Why not set some targets for your business that will give you a very visible metric so you can measure how successful you are at collecting cash on a daily, weekly, monthly or quarterly basis? Clearly all businesses differ and some may be more cash driven and others less so, but if you start by using a simple table of key performance indicators or a graph as illustrated, you will start to get a much clearer picture of where you need to focus your efforts to collect your debt - and the better you perform, the better your cash position. For any business - Small, Medium or Humungous, the age old adage of ‘what isn’t measured isn’t managed’ applies, and losing control of your cash flow is a sure fire way to add sleepless nights when the creditors coming knocking on the door.

	Jan-10 Actual	Target
		KPI
120 days %	11%	0%
90 days %	13%	10%
60 days %	17%	15%
30 days %	31%	20%
Current %	28%	55%
	100%	100%

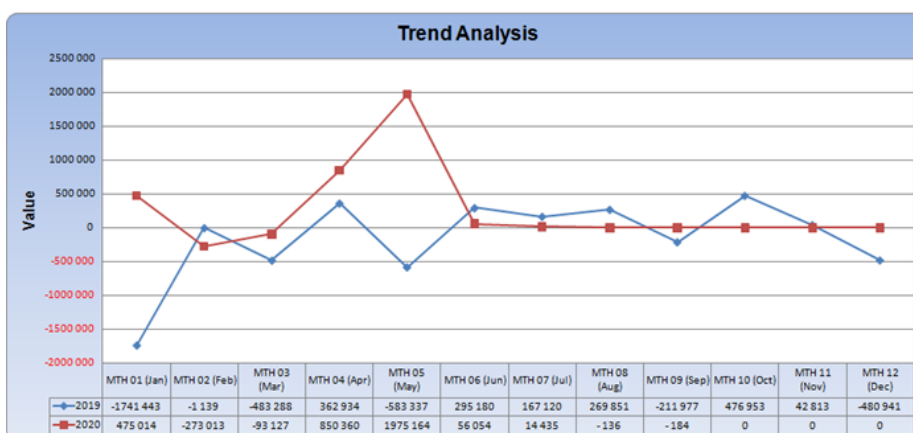


Gartner Priority #2: Reducing Enterprise Costs

Obesity is a major risk factor for people of all ages in modern day society. When people are overweight or obese, they have more serious health problems in addition to higher health care costs. So how is that different to your business? It's not - the higher the cost of your people, the greater the risk to your business and the more expensive it is to administer. People drive not only value creation within an organization, but also cost. So are you clear on what the drivers are of this cost to your business, what contributes the ever burgeoning salaries line which makes up probably more than 60% of your expense base?

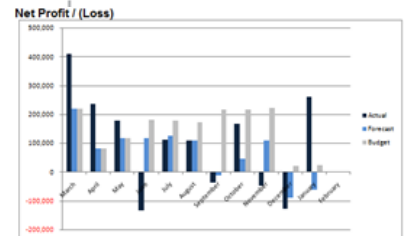
Like someone wanting to lose weight, why don't you set some targets and measure yourself against those in your business. Business Intelligence can help you measure your progress throughout the year and the result will be a leaner and fitter organisation. If you don't have a handle on it, then this is one place to prioritise your attention this year to reduce your costs in 2010. Do you know what your labour costs are for this year, and compared to the same period last year? Can you trend this year against last year quickly and easily and do you have the ability to see at a glance any anomalies that are causing expense creep, as the Trend Analysis report in the graphic illustrates?

Have you any measure, any early warning system or method of detecting a sudden bloating of expenses in this area to give you time to rectify the matter before unintended or unbudgeted expenses cripple your business. A trend analysis report can assist you to better manage all the expenses in your business and not just your labour costs by tracking them on a year to year basis. Conditional formatting (Yes, it is an Excel function and No, you don't have to be a programmer to use it) can be used smartly to red flag any issues. With the workforce comprising the lion's share of your expense budget, managing this effectively will assist you to reduce your enterprise costs in 2010 and moreover can give you a sustained competitive advantage against your competitors.



Gartner Priority #3: Improving Enterprise Workforce Effectiveness

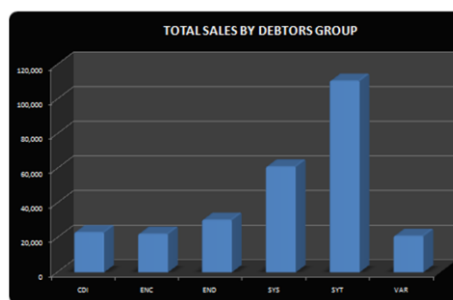
Everybody knows the philosophy “If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always got”, but have you really applied that thinking in a practical way in your business. For example, you may be struggling to generate the levels of profitability you are expecting for your business even though your sales people seem to be shooting the lights out every month. So how do you drive the net profit in your organization? A starting point is to have a very clear measure and visibility of your Net Profit against Budget and Forecast.



As this Net Profit graph indicates, the Net margins in this business have slowly been on the decline, if not very lumpy and inconsistent. So where do you start to set this straight?

As is usually the case, there is likely to be a permutation of different issues that may give rise to sagging profits but what about taking a closer look at your sales people for a start? What do they contribute to the organization, what do they cost the organization and what other overheads are associated with them? Do you have a handle on your daily sales or do you wait for a report (that is delivered inconsistently) and hold thumbs that you have ended the month or year in the black? Use Business Intelligence to gather the details that will reside in your ERP and/or CRM system that will reveal powerful information on how you can make your workforce more effective. Can you analyse sales by salesperson by customer? If not how will you establish your most profitable Salesperson, Product Line or Customer, one or a combination of which, can materially influence your Net Profit.

CustomerNameCode	DebtorsGroup	AreaCode	Data		
			TotalSales Excl.	Sales Tax	TotalSales Incl.
Audio IT Integrators - Audio IT Integrators	System Integrators - Software	JHD	61,125.56	0,564.57	63,740.13
Best Systems - Best Systems	Computer Distributors	PTA	23,222.84	3,251.20	26,474.04
Communication IT - Communication IT	System Integrators - Technical	JHD	87,486.05	12,248.05	33,734.10
Coastal Motor Spares - Coastal Motor Spares	End Users	BLM	26,201.51	3,821.65	30,023.16
East Stationers - East Stationers	End Users	BLM	4,205.33	588.76	4,794.15
End to End - End to End	Value Added Resellers	CPT	12,611.45	1,165.60	14,337.05
Flowers Galore - Flowers Galore	End Users - Corporate	BLM	22,283.53	3,120.53	25,410.06
One on One Solutions - One on One Solutions	System Integrators - Technical	JHD	25,763.18	3,606.85	23,370.03
Zero One Systems - Zero One Systems	Value Added Resellers	JHD	8,491.25	1,188.77	3,680.02
Grand Total			271,446.16	38,055.98	309,602.14



A closer inspection of this data may just reveal some startling facts which may have been going unnoticed because you haven’t had a closer look at the details that make up the aggregate numbers in your business. You may just discover that although one of your key sales people has indeed been shooting the sales lights out, it turns out that the costs of travelling and the lengthy sales cycle associated with each sale have contrived to create a messy sales situation, and you realise you aren’t actually making any profit on the sales that your best salesperson is doing. If you don’t have access to the detail which Business Intelligence provides, it is impossible to drive effectiveness around these issues. Since you’ve started, why not extend the exercise beyond just your sales people and measure the effectiveness of your manufacturing. Can you produce more for less in 2010? How would you know?

Gartner Priority #4: Attracting and Retaining New Customers

I am looking for a courier service; you provide a courier service. You are very aware that you operate in a competitive space centered on price and service. I am looking for a service that can give me easy access to information but you don't currently have systems in place to give customers visibility of their details, tracking processes and exact delivery dates. Your competitor does - so where do you think I am going to place my business? Make 2010 the year that you really start to use Business Intelligence to give all of your customers more visibility of what you do and how you do it.

A simple example is to use a Purchase Master Report to expose information you have to your customers. And we all need to get over not wanting to share information because it is sensitive and privileged - that is a thing of the past. Providing pertinent information can attract new customers and retain existing ones and give you the competitive edge.

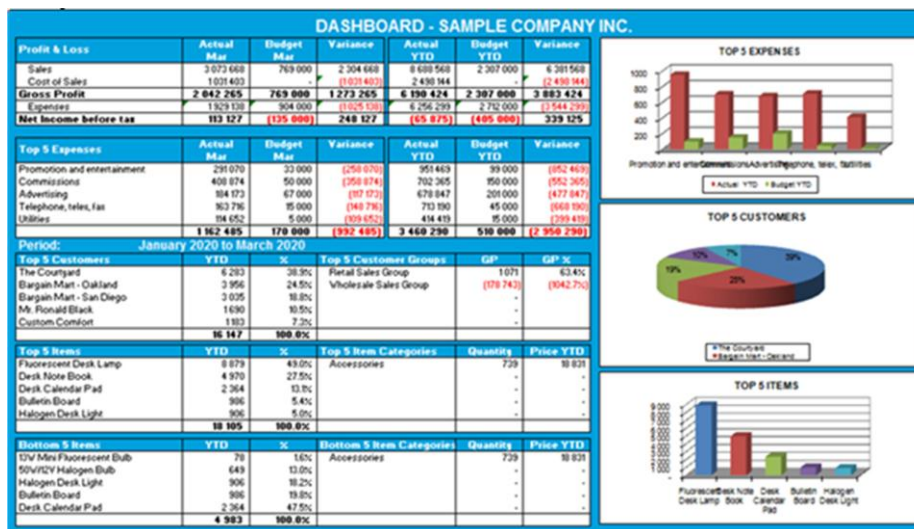
ItemGroup	(All)
ProjectCode	(All)
ServiceItem	(All)
WarehouseName	(All)

		Data				
SupplierNameCode	ProductCodeName	Qty	UnitCost Excl	Total Purchases Tax Excl	Tax Amount	Total Purchases Tax Incl
Communications (Pty) - Communications (Pty)		600.00	445.91	252,192.98	35,307.02	287,500.00
	COM - 001 - Internal Modem - Standard	150.00	263.16	39,473.68	5,526.32	45,000.00
	COM - 002 - Internal Modem - ISDN	100.00	438.60	43,859.65	6,140.35	50,000.00
	COM - 003 - External Modem - ISDN	100.00	526.32	52,631.58	7,368.42	60,000.00
	COM - 004 - External Modem - Standard	100.00	350.88	35,087.72	4,912.28	40,000.00
	COM - 005 - External Modem - ADSL	50.00	570.18	28,508.77	3,991.23	32,500.00
	COM - 006 - Internal Modem - ADSL	100.00	526.32	52,631.58	7,368.42	60,000.00
Memory Supplies Inc. - Memory Supplies Inc.		400.00	219.30	87,719.30	12,280.70	100,000.00
	MEM - 001 - 64 Meg Chip	100.00	87.72	8,771.93	1,228.07	10,000.00
	MEM - 002 - 128 Meg Chip	100.00	175.44	17,543.86	2,456.14	20,000.00
	MEM - 003 - 256 Meg Chip	100.00	263.16	26,315.79	3,684.21	30,000.00
	MEM - 004 - 512 Meg Chip	100.00	350.88	35,087.72	4,912.28	40,000.00
Monitor Suppliers (Pty) Ltd - Monitor Suppliers		605.00	2,246.59	1,397,807.02	195,692.98	1,593,500.00
	MON - 001 - 15" Cathode Monitor	100.00	701.75	70,175.44	9,824.56	80,000.00
	MON - 002 - 17" Cathode Monitor	103.00	833.33	90,087.72	12,612.28	102,700.00
	MON - 003 - 21" Cathode Monitor	100.00	1,754.39	175,438.60	24,561.40	200,000.00
	MON - 004 - 15" Plasma Monitor	100.00	1,754.39	175,438.60	24,561.40	200,000.00
	MON - 005 - 17" Plasma Monitor	100.00	3,508.77	350,877.19	49,122.81	400,000.00
	MON - 006 - 21" Plasma Monitor	102.00	5,000.00	535,789.47	75,010.53	610,800.00
Grand Total		1,605.00	1,251.15	1,737,719.30	243,280.70	1,981,000.00

Gartner Priority #5: Increasing the use of information/analytics

How many times have you heard “I had limited access to data so I had to make assumptions about what I thought happened, but there are potentially other explanations as well” - or something along those lines - in an attempt to explain away a poor business decision? One thing that won't change in 2010 is the fact that making good decisions is a crucial business skill at every level of an organisation, every day. Business Intelligence paves the way for more people to make better decisions, faster. BI is losing its stigma of being clunky, unfriendly and complicated and this new decade should become a period of properly understanding the transactional history in your organisation so you can professionally forecast and plan for the coming years based on a very clear picture of the financial footprint that you have left behind. The data has always been there, but make a resolution in 2010 to address this key priority - “I WILL USE INFORMATION MORE EFFECTIVELY TO MANAGE MY BUSINESS”. A Business Intelligence solution that draws real-time trusted data directly from your accounting package and delivers it automatically into pre-formatted Excel report templates allows you to easily customise, manipulate and distribute meaningful information.

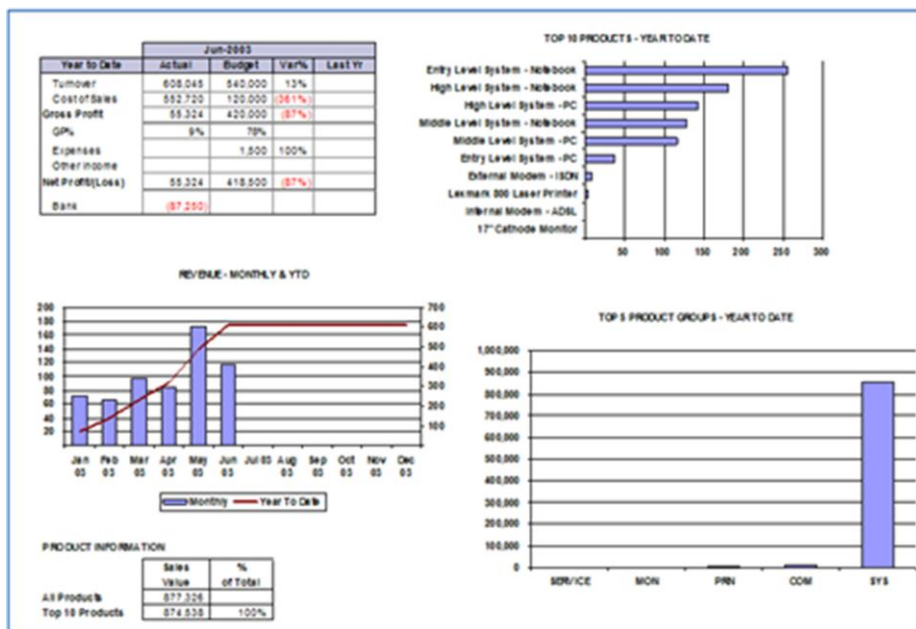
A Management Dashboard, for example, can provide executive team members with a real time, trusted report of key areas of the business including key P&L metrics, Top 5 Expenses tracking against year to date budget and forecast, Top 5 customers by Product sales and Top and Bottom five product sales by item.



This data at the very least must be available instantly and on demand for every member that has decision making responsibilities in your organisation.

Gartner Priority #6: Creating new products or services (innovation)

If you are planning for an exhilarating sales year in 2010 focusing on growing revenues of your exciting product lines of typewriters, fax machines and Sony Cassette Walkmans then you need Business Intelligence urgently. Sure it's a silly example because these are long discontinued products but sometimes the market forces that drive old products out and usher in the new are not so visible. We all know what new technology will be released but how does that apply to your revenue lines? Are you using Business Intelligence to very clearly track any slowdown in your product lines? Are the “bankers” in your business still the bankers they always were, and if you have noticed a year on year slowdown in sales, do you know why they have slowed? Are there economic reasons, do you have manufacturing problems or are your products heading for the same scrapheap (read museum) where you will find Typewriters and Fax Machines?

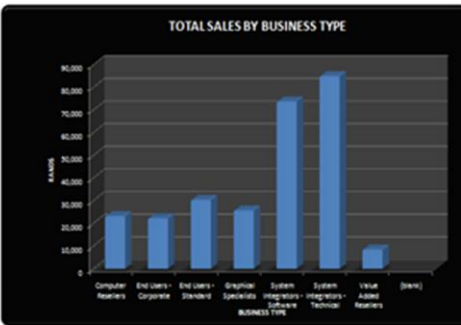


The point is: are you using Business Intelligence to understand your business in 2010? Do you know where you are at risk of losing some, a large chunk of, or all of your revenues and what do you plan to do about it? Do you create a new product line extension to boost the revenue, do you replace with a new product, or has the market shifted beyond your control, i.e. has someone ‘moved your cheese’? Without Business Intelligence, you won’t have a clue. Use a dashboard that provides sales information by product. Track your sales and analyse your top 10 products. Are your top 10 products the same as last year, are your top movers growing year on year or are they, and resultantly your sales lines and business, shrinking?

Gartner Priority #7: Targeting customers and markets more effectively

Management guru, Peter Drucker wrote that, “The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits him and sells itself”. How well do you know your customer - really? How well do you know your market - really? Is there information that you have captured in your ERP system or your CRM system, or any other bespoke transactional system for that matter, that might assist you to understand your customer better and get a better feel for your market?

CustomerNameCode	BusinessType	AreaCode	Qty	TotalSales Excl	Sales Tax	TotalSales Incl
Audio IT Integrators - Audio IT Integrators						
	Sytnm Integrators - Software	JHD		61,175.56	8,564.57	69,740.13
Best Systems - Best Systems						
	Computer Resellers	PTA		23,222.84	3,251.20	26,474.04
Communication IT - Communication IT						
	Sytnm Integrators - Technical	JHD		81,486.95	12,288.05	93,774.10
Coaxtra Motor Spaces - Coaxtra Motor Spaces						
	End Users - Standard	BLM		26,240.51	3,821.65	30,062.16
East Stations - East Stations						
	End Users - Standard	BLM		4,265.39	588.76	4,754.15
End to End - End to End						
	Sytnm Integrators - Software	CPT		12,618.45	1,765.60	14,377.85
Flowers Galore - Flowers Galore						
	End Users - Corporate	BLM		22,289.53	3,120.53	25,410.06
One on One Solutions - One on One Solutions						
	Graphical Specialists	JHD		25,743.18	3,606.85	29,350.03
Superior Services - Superior Services						
	Sytnm Integrators - Technical	JHD		(2,500.00)		(2,500.00)
Zero One Systems - Zero One Systems						
	Value Added Resellers	JHD		8,431.25	1,104.77	9,536.02



Have you applied any Business Intelligence strategy to get more information to guide your business in this regard? Do you know which customers are buying what products and if their purchasing patterns are changing? This might give you an early signal of changing customer habits and could spur you to have a conversation with them regarding their intentions of continuing to buy your products - or not!! Do you know which business unit is your best seller, your most profitable? Do you see growth in certain business segments or does it appear that the market which one of your segments addresses is changing? In 2010 identify the information you need to understand your customer and your market better and use a Business Intelligence strategy to get this information timeously and in a trusted format.

Gartner Priority #8: Managing Change Initiatives

How good is your organization at delegating authority or decision-making? A sensationalist Business Intelligence salesman could pitch the “democratization of information across the organization” as a key selling point. While the gratuitous use of this cheesy type of salesmanship might stick in the throat, if you think about it, it actually holds water. “Most discussions of decision-making assume that only senior executives make decisions or that only senior executives’ decisions matter. This is a dangerous mistake,” says Peter Drucker. What changes do you have planned in 2010, and how are these changes being planned and effected in the organization? To get buy-in across the organization you need all of those you are hoping to buy in to the change to have access to information. That’s where you need Business Intelligence to share information and delegate decision-making throughout your organization.

Location		AI				
Item Active		AI				
Data						
Segment Code	Qty On Hand	PO Qty	SO Qty	Qty Incl Orders	Total Actual Cost	
⊗ A1 - Accessories	10 385.00	510 079.00	124.00	520 340.00	388 612	
⊗ A2 - Accessories - Package	569.00	140.00	4.00	705.00	57 700	
⊗ C1 - Tilter Chairs	358.00	0.00	0.00	358.00	325 117	
C1220B - Krugg 220 Arm Tilter-Brown	74.00	0.00	0.00	74.00	293 013	
C1220T - Krugg 220 Arm Tilter-Tan	50.00	0.00	0.00	50.00	7 450	
C1250B - Krugg Arm Tilter-Brown	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0	
C1250R - Krugg 250 Arm Tilter-Rust	35.00	0.00	0.00	35.00	3 115	
C1500B - High Back Arm Tilter	199.00	0.00	0.00	199.00	21 539	
C1500T - High Back Tilter-Tweed	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0	
⊗ C2 - Steno Chairs	44.00	0.00	1.00	43.00	2 655	
⊗ D1 - Executive Desks	42.00	0.00	1.00	41.00	956 784	
⊗ D2 - Secretarial Desks	60.00	0.00	0.00	60.00	13 740	
⊗ F1 - Filing Cabinets	54.00	450.00	2.00	502.00	10 224	
⊗ F2 - Filing Cabinet Extras	0.00	6.00	0.00	6.00	0	
⊗ F3 - Filing Cabinet with Extras	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0	
⊗ S1 - Screen Dividers	231.00	4.00	0.00	235.00	227 252	
Grand Total	11 743.00	510 679.00	132.00	522 290.00	1982 084	

Let’s use a simple example of a need to change your product mix. Do you or the person responsible for changing the product mix have visibility of stock movements? Do you watch your stock levels closely enough, do you have reliable information that is trusted and up to date and does the person responsible for your stock levels have access to his or her information 24/7/365? Understanding and having reliable visibility of your stock on hand and associated stock movements can have two very profound effects on your organization: firstly, to discontinue the slow moving “dog” lines and replace them with more profitable product lines, and secondly an associated increase in your cash flow because of increased profitability on your new product lines as well as freed up cash in your bank account because you no longer hold onto old and unsellable stock. Sometimes these are tough decisions, but the numbers don’t lie and, possibly the kicker, it doesn’t need an executive to understand the problem!

Gartner Priority #9: Expanding Current Customer Relationships

Suppliers and manufacturers have market power because they have information about a product or service that the customer does not have and cannot normally access - but why do we not give them access? Is it because tools aren't available to do this, or is it because we are stuck in an erstwhile mind-set that says I can't share my information with anyone? In 2010 the tools are definitely available so how about resolving in 2010 to give your customers more information?

Data							
CustomerCodeName	ProductCodeName	Qty	Unit Price Excl	Total Cost	Total Sales Excl	Gross Profit	GP %
Best Systems - Best Systems							
	COM - 003 - External Modem - ISDN	3.00	536.26	1,578.96	1,608.77	29.81	1.85%
	COM - 004 - External Modem - Standard	1.00	385.96	350.88	385.96	35.08	9.09%
	SYS - 001 - Entry Level System - Notebook	4.00	10,614.06	19,298.28	21,228.11	1,929.83	9.09%
Communication IT - Communication IT							
	COM - 003 - External Modem - ISDN	3.00	536.26	1,578.96	1,608.77	29.81	1.85%
	SYS - 005 - High Level System - Notebook	10.00	8,587.73	78,070.30	85,877.28	7,806.98	9.09%
Country Motor Spares - Country Motor Spares							
	MON - 002 - 17" Cathode Monitor	1.00	2,788.00	873.98	672.96	(201.02)	(29.87%)
	PRN - 010 - Lexmark 800 Laser Printer	1.00	4,342.11	3,947.37	4,342.11	394.74	9.09%
	SYS - 001 - Entry Level System - Notebook	1.00	10,614.06	4,824.57	5,307.02	482.45	9.09%
	SYS - 004 - Middle Level System - Notebook	2.00	7,526.32	13,684.22	15,052.63	1,368.41	9.09%
East Stationers - East Stationers							
	COM - 001 - Internal Modem - Standard	1.00	202.63	263.16	202.63	(60.53)	(29.87%)
	NonInventory - Credit Note				(1,200.00)		
	NonInventory - Invoice				3,500.00		
	PRN - 001 - Epson LX 5000 Printer	1.00	693.99	701.75	693.99	(7.76)	(1.12%)
	PRN - 002 - Epson LX 8000 Printer	1.00	964.91	877.19	964.91	87.72	9.09%
	TRN - 001 - Transport	1.00	43.86		43.86	43.86	100.00%
End to End - End to End							
	COM - 004 - External Modem - Standard	1.00	347.37	350.88	347.37	(3.51)	(1.01%)
	COM - 006 - Internal Modem - ADSL	3.00	550.01	1,578.96	1,650.03	71.07	4.31%
	SYS - 001 - Entry Level System - Notebook	2.00	5,307.03	9,649.14	10,614.05	964.91	9.09%
Grand Total		36.00	54,040.53	137,628.60	152,900.45	12,971.85	8.48%

Why not, for example, tell the customer how much he/she bought, in what region, by product category and description, by season and price, and which products he/she has reordered most often. Show them how much they saved by buying early or using your early settlement discounts. Show them distribution efficiencies in busy seasons that were created because you worked as a partnership to get your stock out and on their shelves at the right time. Show him or her that you know that their spouse has just had a birthday and their 10 year old son won the MVP award in the recent Juniors Hockey play offs. Okay, so the last part needs good old fashioned personal relationship building, but the rest can be done using Business Intelligence to assist you. If you do just some of these things, your relationships and revenues, will grow in 2010.

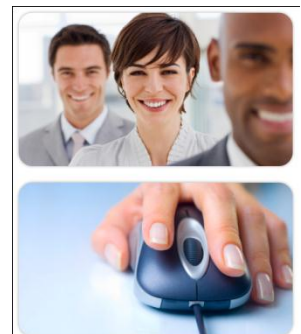
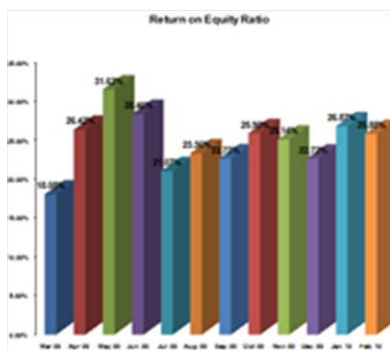
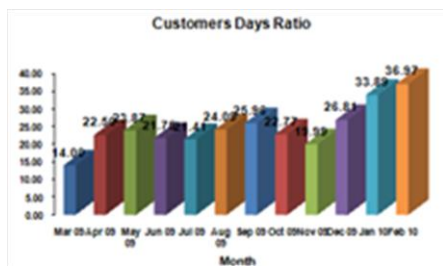
Gartner Priority #10: Expanding into new markets and geographies

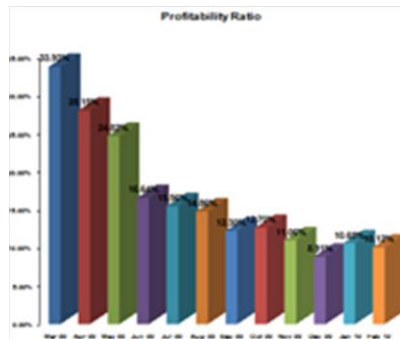
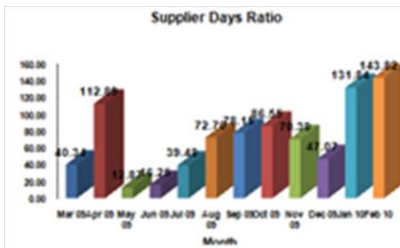
Why is it that mining service companies are sprouting all over Western Australia? Why is it that so many of the world's engineers are migrating to Western Australia? Why is it that Western Australia is one of the fastest growing territories in the world? On closer inspection it appears that the underlying issue stimulating these exceptional economic growth figures are directly related to a booming mining industry in Western Australia. So if you are in the mining industry then Western Australia is the place to be - and you can have that piece of anecdotal research for free without recourse!!

	Mar 09	Apr 09	May 09	Jun 09	Jul 09	Aug 09	Sep 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09	Jan 10	Feb 10
Acid Test Ratio	2.95	2.24	2.63	2.69	4.08	5.14	4.13	4.40	3.90	4.06	3.83	3.64
Asset Financing Ratio	0.79	0.73	0.81	0.84	0.87	0.91	0.87	0.87	0.86	0.87	0.86	0.85
Current Ratio	2.95	2.24	2.63	2.69	4.08	5.14	4.13	4.40	3.90	4.06	3.83	3.64
Customers Days Ratio	14.00	22.50	23.87	21.75	21.41	24.09	25.96	22.77	19.99	26.81	33.89	36.97
Inventory Days Ratio	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Inventory Turnover Ratio	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Profitability Ratio	33.83%	28.95%	24.82%	36.64%	35.56%	34.86%	32.30%	32.70%	31.06%	33.91%	30.68%	30.52%
Return on Equity Ratio	18.08%	26.42%	28.46%	28.46%	21.07%	23.36%	22.72%	25.98%	25.94%	22.72%	26.87%	25.88%
Solvency Ratio	4.60	4.60	5.29	6.13	7.43	10.80	7.76	7.43	7.21	7.95	6.31	6.43
Supplier Days Ratio	40.34	102.89	12.87	16.25	39.40	72.70	78.95	86.55	70.38	47.07	101.84	143.82

So what is my point? Sometimes we react in our businesses in the same way: you can see something unfolding, or can sense a change but have no substance to it and don't know the best course of action to act on your hunch. Obviously intuition is key in the decision making process in any business and there will be times where decisions are made on a wing and a prayer, but the tools are available for you to make more measured and circumspect decisions based on validated information. Do you use your financial ratios, for example, to manage your business, and is your business healthy enough to take on new markets? Are you sufficiently profitable, do you have sufficient cash; are you managing the core of your business to give you the stability to venture into new markets?

Any side bar info to go here and position on page accordingly, e.g. highlighted comments, quotes or summaries.





In this new decade, get to know the drivers of your business and get to know the key metrics which measure those drivers. Information provided by your Business Intelligence solution should clearly indicate to you where your opportunities lie. Do you know trends of your customers and suppliers days ratios? Do you measure your Return on Equity and can you rattle off the profitability ratios of your business if asked?

Conclusion

Not all the examples used or questions asked will be relevant for every reader but the purpose of this paper is to illustrate to small and mid-sized business owners and officers that BI is not only accessible to them today, but is a strategic imperative that needs to be a part of the makeup of any organisation.

The great news is that BI no longer needs programmers or technical specialists, and nor does the budget have to break the bank. It does however need an 'owner' who is accountable for the visibility of the data throughout the organisation and it needs to be effectively rolled out as an integrated solution in the business. If you are going to address these Gartner issues as a priority in 2010 you need information, and information is the output of Business Intelligence - it's that simple. Don't let the Business Intelligence Industry confuse you with fancy but meaningless acronyms. Business Intelligence is mainstream. It's available for everyone, it's affordable and its use, or lack thereof, can make or break your business in the next decade.

About the Author

Gary Boddington is a co-founder and Managing Director of Alchemex Pty Ltd, a BI software vendor focused on the small and mid-sized market specializing in Business Intelligence software. Alchemex derives its revenues from **Alchemex Reporting Solutions software through numerous OEM relationships with major market leading Accounting and ERP software applications.** Although this white paper is intended to be objective in its views it is recommended that readers form their own conclusions and that the observations contained herein are used together with (but not in place of) the readers own good judgment and research.

About Alchemex

ALCHEMEX is a leading developer, enabler and support provider of affordable Excel-based Business Intelligence software for small to mid-market enterprises.

For nearly 20000 registered users in Africa, Europe, Australasia and North America, ALCHEMEX's reporting software delivers automated financial, payroll and other decision-support reports in Microsoft Excel 'at the click of a button', directly from a company's accounting or payroll system.

ALCHEMEX integrates with leading accounting and payroll packages, pulling real-time data directly from the database, thereby eliminating manual report preparation and repetitive data extracts. ALCHEMEX provides complete automation of pre-formatted Excel reports for MYOB Exonet, Pastel Evolution (BIC), Pastel Partner (BIC), Pastel Payroll (BIC), Pastel Xpress (BIC), Sage50, Sage ACCPAC ERP (SAI), Sage MAS ERP 90/200 (SMI), Sage MAS ERP 200 (SMI), SAP Business One, Simply Accounting by Sage, Sybiz Vision (BIC), SYSPRO and VIP Payroll (BIM).

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