RESEARCH NOTE
BI HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

THE BOTTOM LINE

CIOs should consider using mobile BI offerings to broaden BI benefits and adoption while also improving operational efficiencies and productivity.

Mobile BI has been a long time coming, but it's finally here and people are using it. It has actually been around in the form of alerts and e-mails, but was fairly crude. Information flowed in one direction — to the mobile user — and there was little interactivity. The major BI vendors now offer more user-friendly mobile applications that are more content rich, provide real-time — rather than batch-driven — data, and allow users to drill down, across, change views, and interact with data.

Your sales force is already checking in on weather.com during downtime on the road. They should be able to get vital data for sales calls just as easily.

Smart CFOs and CIOs should consider making it available to employees as a way to improve productivity, extend BI adoption, and improve operational efficiencies.

MOBILITY IMPACTS ADOPTION AND DATA

Mobile BI has another advantage because it makes BI participation easier. Most BI deployments falter for two reasons: people don't adopt, which lowers the ROI, and people don't participate in data sharing, which lowers the quality of the data in the cubes. Making BI mobile means mobile employees who resist adoption — especially people who are data protective, like sales people — have one less reason to resist adoption and data sharing.

HOW IT HELPS

Mobile BI is more than just another great application to put on your Blackberry, iPhone, or Treo. It can bring value to an organization, because it helps:

- Mobile workers — who can now access more data, and depending on the vendor, more real-time data from their home, mobile office, or car.
- Salespeople — who can access BI from their car before a call, and instantly get a full picture of the customer relationship. They can also check in with sales data of different types. A sales manager who is on the road may want to view his regional sales when he is near quarter end. If numbers are good, he can tell his salespeople to be a little less aggressive on price as the quarter ends.
- Administrative workers — many is the administrative worker who is e-mailing reports to data-addicted senior managers who are always looking for the latest statistics on sales or operations. Senior managers who access this data from their PDA allow their support staff to spend time on more value-added tasks.

Here are some real-world applications that people are already achieving:

- Operational staff at a major gasoline retailer use mobile BI to more rapidly find out which stations have broken pumps. Fixing pumps faster means fewer frustrated customers drive to rival gas stations and revenue per pump goes up.

- Managers of field employees at sites such as oilrigs, airports, and retail outlets have richer and more real-time data with which deploy their staff. This increases staff utilization, reduces the need to pad staffing levels, and cuts payroll costs.

- Service agents in the field — who make sure your customers are happy with your products — can use mobile BI to get information about a customer's relationships, purchasing habits, preferences, and complaints in order to make the most of a site visit.

BI VENDORS THAT ARE MOBILE

Here are a few of the vendors offering mobile BI:

- Cognos 8 Go! Mobile accesses Cognos 8 BI, and reaches to your on-premise Cognos deployment. Since it is not a separate application or duplication of the on-premise environment, it does not require a separate deployment. Features, functionality, and data interactivity are identical to the on-premise reports, dashboards, and scorecards.

- Business Objects Mobile is a similar, SOA-based application that has a two-way interaction with your on-premise installation so that users can drill down, across, query, and change data.

- iDashboards is generally an on-premise, non-mobile solution, but it has a BAM module that has threshold and KPI-driven alerts that can be received via email or on a PDA. The beauty here is that iDashboard's application connects directly to the data source, and requires no middle layer for storing data, which means you can skip all the work on databases, data marts, and data warehouses.

- Information Builders WebFOCUS Active Reports are compatible with all mobile platforms and enable employees to filter, launch graph windows, manipulate reports in various sort orders, and filter data by different criteria.

CONCLUSION

In the end it's not just about being able to access BI in your car. It's about spending more time on higher-order tasks. With mobile BI, sales people spend less time driving back to the office to research their accounts, and less time on the phone with administrative tasks. Employees in the field can be deployed faster, more thoughtfully, and with less interaction with bosses over phone, fax, or e-mail. It's also about adoption and data. When BI is easier and more accessible, more people use it and provide data.