The New School of Dashboards

5 Reasons to Reconsider Your Approach

We all know someone who's old school. That person who's still listening to vinyl albums, who's still tapping away on an electric typewriter, who's still watching the 6 o'clock news. But while a little old-school flavor may impress the hipster crowd in their retro sneakers, it won't get you very far in the business world.

For example, your business intelligence (BI) dashboards. If they're old school, they're holding you back. Are they giving you a static view of the business? Are they only good for fixed reporting? Are they rigid and inflexible? Are they used by just a small number of people in your organization? If so, it's time to update. The speed of business today requires high-performance BI dashboards that can constantly adapt to new data sources and provide the intelligence an organization needs – at anytime, anywhere, to anyone.

In the new world of business intelligence where data-driven insights are no longer only the domain of analysts and power users, tools like dashboards need to be easy to access and easy to use for all employees, from the cubicle to the corner suite. They should be powerful enough to give workers not just data but a competitive advantage. And they should be equipped with the features you need to drive your business to the front of the pack.

Here are five ways to tell if your company's approach to BI dashboards is old school:

1 Functionality

In the old school, self-service is an empty promise. Some solutions do come with self-service options that promise anyone can create insightful queries and reports on the fly, but if you're anything less than a computer science Ph.D., well, good luck with that.

In the new school, self-service is for real. Up-to-date BI dashboards don't require those gatekeepers who once guarded the keys to corporate data. After all, why should today's workers have to wait days or weeks to get access to a piece of information they need to do their jobs? In every other instance, they can just go to Google and get the information they want. They should be able to use your organization's BI dashboard to do the same.

Business intelligence is no longer the sole domain of techies and data analysts. A new generation of information workers has grown up with the Internet, social media and mobile apps. They know the answers they need are available and they expect to be able to access them without hassle.

Think about it: you can research any esoteric topic on your smartphone, yet you can't see what your sales were on a given day. So if you're not using a fully self-service BI dashboard, your access to information about your own business is just not adequate.

Effective dashboards these days feature a wide range of self-service options, including interactive visualizations and drill-down/drill-across capabilities that enable information workers to analyze data and build reports on their own. Today's workers – the VP of sales, the marketing manager – are not prepared to ask and wait. They know the information they need is available and they expect that there are dashboards on the market that will deliver it.

2 Accessibility

In the old school, dashboards are accessible to select departments only. In this world, executives think BI technology should be available to just those people who have the greatest need for data. And even as the tools become more user-friendly and effective, they still ration them to a small number of users within their organization. In fact, Forrester Research's 2010 global BI maturity survey found that only 35 percent of organizations are currently employing pervasive BI.

In the new school, dashboards are accessible to people in every corner of the business, because that's

how you derive game-changing insights. Have you ever watched the show *Air Emergency* on the National Geographic Channel? Each episode examines a plane crash and explains why it happened. And in almost every case, the accident occurred not because one thing went wrong but because six things went wrong at the same time. The co-pilot was doing a crossword when the pilot fell asleep when the aileron failed when the...you get the picture.

The same applies in the business world. A product isn't selling. Why? Because a lot of things are going wrong. But your people can't know what's going wrong without the right tool. They can't see what customer support is doing or what's happening in product marketing. The necessary data needs to be correlated and made available to all departments. When everyone is armed with the right information, crashes are avoided, people make good decisions and your business takes off.

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One Fortune 500 consumer electronics manufacturer, for example, has now deployed BI dashboards to 75,000 users around the world to provide timely tracking of sales across product lines, financial data and call center metrics. As a result, the company is better able to correlate disparate data, which has boosted sales, improved executive insight and eliminated hundreds of hours of manual reporting effort.

3 Flexibility

In the old school, the same dashboard metrics that worked five years ago are still working today. Or, rather, not working. Because as quickly as markets change now, no business can afford to rely on the same tired metrics it used a half-decade ago. The old metrics don't dispense accurate, informative, useful data on demand.

In the new school, BI dashboards embrace all available data sources. Social networks, cloud computing and countless other emerging technologies have dramatically changed the way companies measure operating costs, marketing effectiveness and regulatory compliance – to name just a few – and, as a result, the metrics that organizations use to monitor their performance must also change.

For instance, if you're a customer-service manager, you can't rely on static customer-satisfaction surveys to assess your results. You now need a way to gauge social media sentiment. You need to hear what people are saying on Twitter, on Facebook, and in the blogosphere to understand how your company is viewed by customers.

But to get that data, you need a BI dashboard that's flexible and easily updated. That's why a top 5 multinational automaker created a dashboard that combines social media sentiment with more traditional marketing metrics to optimize its advertising spend. Even in an economic downturn, it was able to grow revenue while cutting its ad budget by 10 percent.

What will be the next Facebook or Twitter? No one knows. But we do know that everything can change at a moment's notice and that there will be more and more data points coming at you faster and faster in the future. Staying agile and adapting to new data sources will be a major competitive advantage.

4 Usability

In the old school, dashboards are limited to a small group of decision-makers. Why? Because nobody else wants to suffer through eye-straining reports filled with hard-to-read tables, charts and graphs if they don't have to.

In the new school, business intelligence is easy to use for all members of an organization. The runaway success of smartphones and tablets has reshaped the BI market. The popularity of these devices has brought accessible graphics and easy visualization to the forefront. People want to see things presented in a quickly comprehensible way and dashboards are starting to deliver. As a result, relevant information is more accessible and pertinent to everyone.

Of course, new-school dashboards aren't all about bling. No effective BI dashboard can afford to emphasize eye-candy at the expense of information. There has to be real utility to the data. A pie chart that jumps off the screen is not enough if it doesn't contain the needed data. That's why those dashboards that deliver both style and substance are coveted by everyone within an organization.

Indeed, today's top dashboards are starting to go viral. When people see one in action at work, they want it for themselves. After all, why would someone be happy with a flip phone when the guy in the next chair has an iPhone? The same is true of the new BI dashboards.

5 Honesty

In the old school, workers need to validate dashboard data before it's shared with the executive team. And since we're on the topic of honesty, let's be honest: that's just a diplomatic way of saying workers need to massage and manipulate data to make it look good before they show it to the leadership team. (Who cares about accuracy, as long as the boss is happy?)

In the new school, everyone is open and honest with the data. It's so easily accessible that they have to be. Nearly 50 percent of executives say they've made a bad business decision due to inaccurate or outdated data* and they won't stand for that anymore. If a department has a habit of spinning data before it's uploaded to the executive ranks, that department will soon be in trouble.

Recently, a $2 billion manufacturing company used a dashboard to eliminate manual reporting processes used to track machine uptime. With a real-time dashboard in place, executives found the "real story" was sometimes different than what the manual reports were saying – not because of malicious intent but rather because of a difference in the metrics being used. Now the executive team has direct access to a single version of truth, which has helped the organization boost productivity more than 5 percent companywide.

*The Business Impact of Big Data, Kelton Research, November 2010

With today's array of technologies and mobile devices, the transfer of corporate information is constant and instant – and the demand for dashboards that can deliver an up-to-the-minute data flow is huge. Savvy execs don't want to be the last to know and they don't want to be fooled. And, with an effective dashboard solution, they won't be.

Meet Domo

If you've come to the unhappy conclusion that your company needs a new-school attitude adjustment when it comes to BI dashboards, you may want to consider Domo. More than simple dashboards, Domo provides an executive management platform delivered as a service that helps managers and executives transform the way they run their business.

By bringing all of your data – finance, sales, HR, compliance and more – together in one intuitive, visual interface, Domo gives you real-time, self-service access to all the information you need in one place. No more searching. No more waiting. No more doubt. To see what Domo can do for your, visit www.domo.com or call 1-800-899-1000.