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The Death of Traditional BI: What's Next?

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Executive Summary

Twenty years ago, IT pledged to put data in business users' hands to guide them in making faster, better decisions. Today, IT has all but given up on the original promise of Business Intelligence (BI), settling for collecting requirements and creating reports instead. But users refuse to settle for less than what they've become accustomed to outside the office—the simple, powerful, and easy-to-use consumer apps, social networks, and mobile technologies are busy reshaping the computing landscape.

How can organizations reconcile the two? Augmenting BI with Business Discovery offers a way forward—a way in which IT is no longer a bottleneck and users are empowered to solve problems for themselves. Business Discovery systems enable them to make better-informed decisions based on data using tools similar to the apps they're already familiar with. Business Discovery ultimately changes the economics of BI by driving down the costs of users asking and answering questions, transforming IT's mission from that of a bottleneck to an enabler. This white paper examines the challenges and benefits of Business Discovery systems for IT.

Apps, iPads, and Social Networks

Sometime between the invention of Facebook and the Apple iPad, people's expectations of software changed. Consuming, exploring, and sharing information has been redefined by the search bar, status box, and multitouch screen. Three key trends have led to a worldwide explosion in home computing over the last five years, and now companies are rapidly adopting them.

Consumer Apps. Apps such as Google's and Apple's invite users to open a window, start clicking, and become instantly productive. Business users increasingly demand the same experience at work and are frustrated when confronted with cumbersome and complex systems.

Social Networks. A growing majority of workers now use Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn at home to share news, crowdsource ideas, and trade files. Social networking is becoming more prevalent in organizations too, as it helps to flatten them by decentralizing decision-making and enabling collaboration among previously siloed people and groups.

Mobility. First smartphones and now tablets (led by the iPad) offer engaging, intuitive, and powerful capabilities that finally deliver on the promise of business-on-the-go.





Where is IT in all of this? Stuck tending to ERP, CRM, BI, and other monolithic systems. While users don't expect enterprise applications to be as easy to use as Google, they have been trained to think that asking a question is as simple as entering a couple of keywords and receiving an answer instantly—without having to know where or how the underlying data is stored. All that matters is that their questions are answered fast so that they can make decisions. End users have lost the innocence of their previously low expectations.

Consumer Technology Leads Us To Want More from IT Solutions

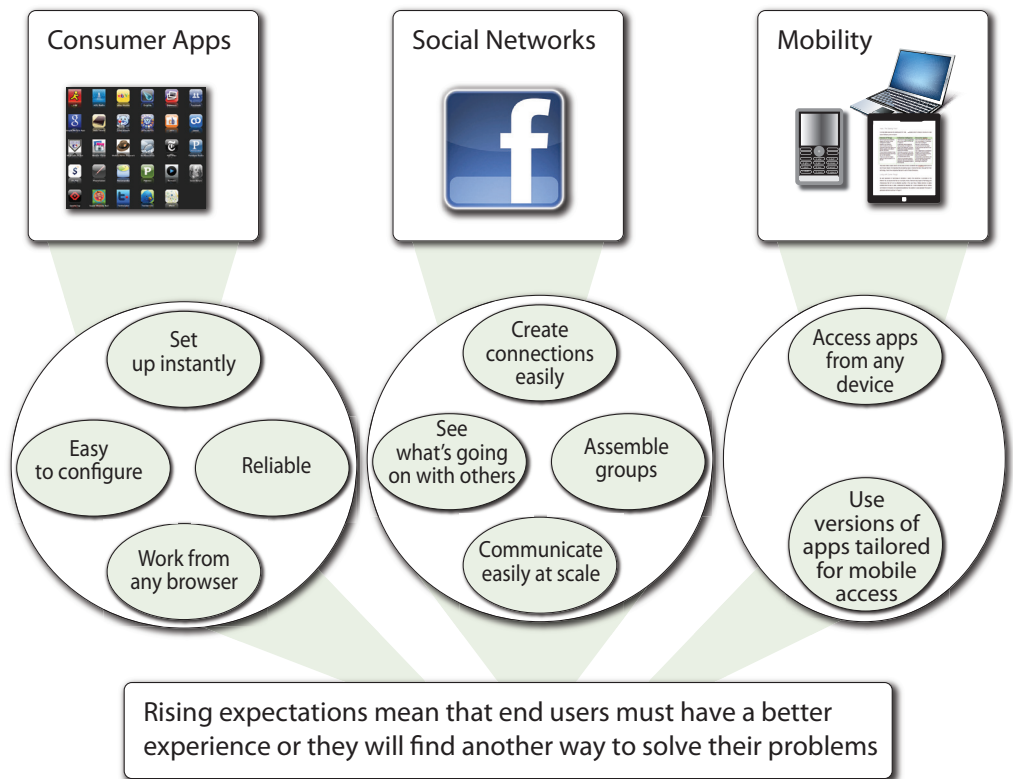


Figure 1. Consumer Technology Means Users Want More

The bar for enterprise software has been raised, and IT knows it. IT is increasingly being held accountable for why corporate data is so inaccessible and why it takes a week to deliver a report or re-spin an info cube or any other types of delays that deprive users of the answers they need when they need them. No one wants to call IT to add another dimension or ask for another report. They need data to make decisions and are frustrated that IT can't give it to them in time. BI is leaving users with unmet needs and as a result, frustration.





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But IT is frustrated, too. It's been challenged to explain itself and make a business case for all the complexity under the hood when there isn't one—it's simply a byproduct of the software architecture. There's no compelling reason why users should have to wait 18 months for BI to be installed, followed by months of building cubes and many more months waiting for IT to rebuild them. It's just that ERP is fundamentally incapable of being rendered as something as simple as a consumer app.

Which isn't to say that the lessons of Facebook and the iPad have been lost on vendors. Jive and Salesforce Chatter have already brought secure social networking to the enterprise, while Cisco and Research in Motion are readying tablets specifically designed for mobile collaboration. As a result, the bar is being raised again. Users expect these devices to be as portable and effortless as the ones they have at home, with all of the data and analysis tools that they need when they need them.

That doesn't mean loading an entire database onto a tablet. It means giving people the tools and information they need, exactly when and where they need it. It means sharing the apps as well as the data to drive collaboration. Most of all, it means bringing the data needed for making decisions closer to the customer or the task at hand. In practice, it means thousands of sales reps taking tablets with them on a visit, taking customer orders on the spot, and sending an instant electronic proposal rather than following up later. In the end, it's about business process transformation—eliminating unnecessary steps so that time, money, and opportunities aren't wasted.

IT can't deliver on this promise without changing the way it thinks and the tools it uses. Enterprise systems are too complex and inflexible to put in end-users' hands, never mind on tablets. And even if this were possible, IT has neither the time nor the resources to go at it alone. At the same time, enterprise systems are not going to go away; they just need to be leveraged in a fresh and flexible way. A new software paradigm is needed, one that replaces impenetrable interfaces and inaccessible data with new tools users can learn and support themselves, empowering them while taking the burden off IT. The name of this paradigm is Business Discovery.





Business Discovery

The emergence of Business Discovery is a response to users' mounting frustrations and unmet needs. It's a new kind of productivity software putting users in control of exploring and exploiting their own data, allowing IT to focus on core processes rather than attending to their every need. Business Discovery bridges the gap between traditional BI solutions and standalone applications like Excel. It enables users at every level of the organization to find tailored insights addressing their individual needs and deadlines. In essence, Business Discovery transforms everyone into a highly informed business analyst.

In many ways, Business Discovery aims to fulfill the original promise of BI, which proved to be impossible due to the limits of the architecture, forcing IT to shoulder the burden. But discovery improves upon traditional BI because there is no predefined path to follow and no questions to formulate ahead of time. Users ask what they need to ask, and they explore—aggregating up, down, and sideways—rather than simply drilling down.

Using lightweight tools that marry connectors to the underlying databases with fluid interfaces reminiscent of apps, Business Discovery systems drive down the cost and complexity of aggregating disparate data sources, which can then be combined and correlated in different ways to discover waste or opportunities.

For example, a question as simple and as random as whether there's a correlation between the size of a product shipment and the number of units placed on backorder (because, as it turns out, workers often wait too long for optimal packaging) may require data from three separate databases. And IT knows all too well that combining those three would take six months and cost upwards of \$250,000. So the answer to most questions is usually, "Forget it; it's not worth it."

But what if it cost \$5,000 and a day's worth of work? Users would have an answer the next day, with enough money in the budget left over to commission another dozen or more projects just like it. If only one results in significant savings, the scattershot approach will have been worth it. By driving down the opportunity costs for IT and users alike to ask questions and make better-informed decisions, the latter find themselves in a better position to capture market share, drive revenue growth, and cut costs because they no longer have to wait for IT to supply the data they need.





The evolution from a BI paradigm to Business Discovery has profound implications for IT, replacing its traditional delivery role with a support and enablement one. Rather than building applications day in and day out, they dispense tools and training to users while refocusing on larger issues such as data governance, security, and the underlying enterprise systems.

How Business Discovery Systems Create Value

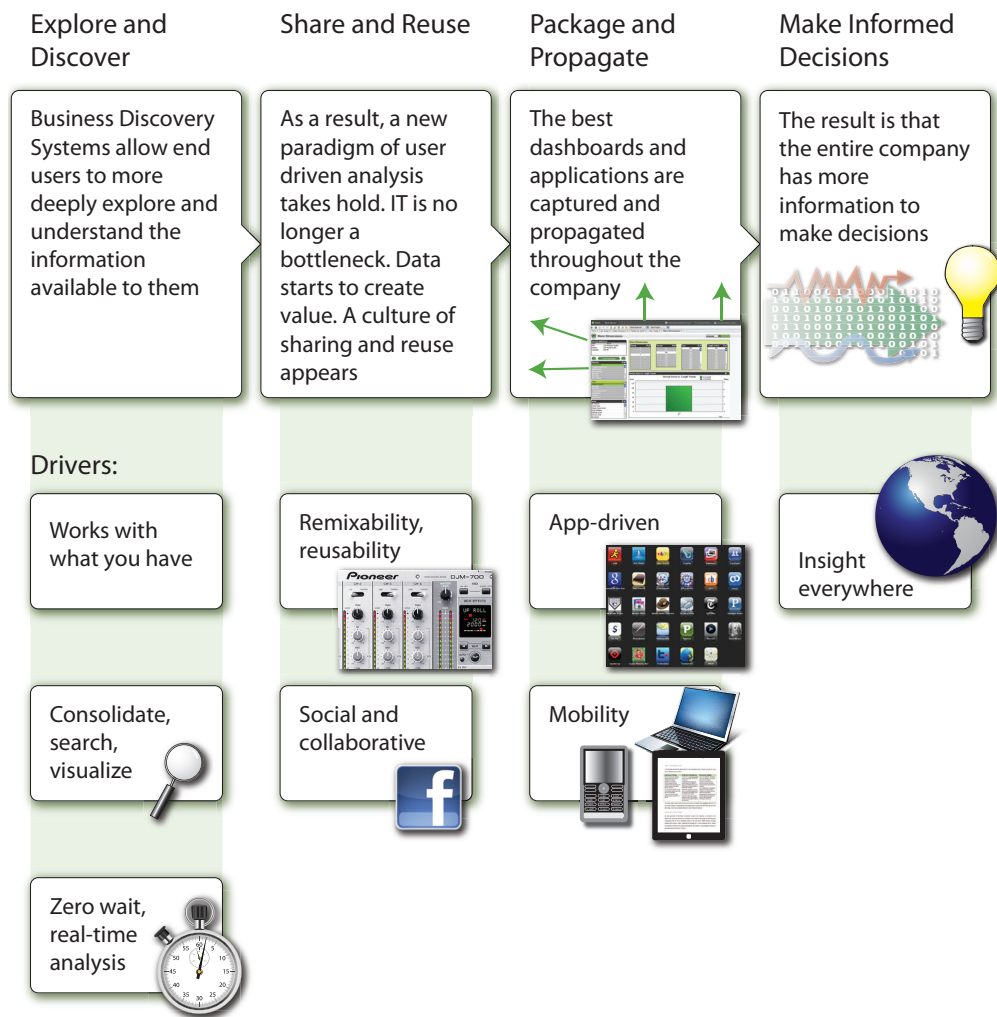


Figure 2. How Business Discovery Systems Create Value





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The key to Business Discovery is that it leverages the entirety of organizational capital. It takes a bottom-up, enlightened IT approach, allowing every employee to contribute and collaborate on insights that move the organization forward. It's an approach that reflects how businesses and workgroups make decisions in the real world.

How to Make Business Discovery Work for Your Business

Business Discovery takes its cues from consumer apps. Like Google, it encourages users to hunt for and explore data without worrying about or even noticing the underlying technology. Their entire experience is working within an intuitive interface to get real-time, self-service results with only minimal training.

It's based on delivering lightweight apps—much like Apple's App Store—that anyone can use to instantly deal with a specific business problem. Like Apple's, these apps are simple, single-purpose, and as intuitive as a spreadsheet. But they're also easy to create, modify, mash up, and share, enabling employees to create them on their own. This is where Business Discovery breaks with the centralized nature of traditional business systems that make software and users alike utterly dependent on IT.

Business Discovery systems embody the principle of *zero wait*, which has multiple meanings. There is zero wait to ask and answer questions, à la Google Instant; zero wait to navigate and data at different levels of detail and aggregation; and zero wait to change search parameters, add new data sources, and follow the train of analysis in any direction. Zero wait is what differentiates Business Discovery from traditional BI.

A Business Discovery platform allows you to remix and reassemble information to create new views and new ways of looking at information—and new ways of collaborating on decision making. It eliminates silos of information within its interface and lets users derive insights from their data in an intuitive, straightforward way.

Business Discovery also enables true mobility. Until now, mobile business software has been hamstrung by tiny displays, minimal access to real-time data, and handicapped interfaces. This was the unsatisfactory result of retrofitting applications for mobile use and shoehorning their functionality into devices for which they were never intended. Business Discovery tools, on the other hand, are native to the mobile era and tailored to their hardware limitations. They're portable and embeddable, offering





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users access to their relevant data, analysis, and visualization anywhere and any time they need it, whether it's on an iPad, iPhone, Android, or Blackberry.

Placing the tools for innovation in the hands of users extends of the power of IT to every corner of the enterprise. It's what BI was meant to be.

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