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Putting Analytics to the Test

By Pam Baker
CIO Today
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"A prime indicator of good performance is lots of user adoption -- meaning employees see it as a useful tool," says Siebel's Paul Rodwick. "In the end, all these systems are good only if people use them."

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Analytics are crucial in taming the business beast, but not all software programs are successful in corralling opportunities or herding problems toward solutions. Antiquated legacy programs are part of the problem; so are obsolete software packages and unpurged, dirty internal data.

But by far the biggest problem, Chris Eldredge, director, solution strategy, [SAP](#)  told NewsFactor, is a disconnect between upper management and line management. "Many CIOs have lofty goals that are not translated well to line management, resulting in employee behavior and activities that don't align with upper management's strategy," he said.

"If metrics are out of date, or employees don't understand the reasons behind the analytics , then this opens the door for exceptions and excuses that lead to a disjointed corporate effort and even legal action under Sarbox rules."

In the Trenches

The quickest way to get a read on how well analytics are performing is to take a long, hard look at usage. "A prime indicator of good performance is lots of user adoption -- meaning employees see it as a useful tool," Paul Rodwick, vice president of marketing, [Siebel](#)  Analytics, told NewsFactor. "In the end, all these systems are good only if people use them."



The advertisement features a circular image of four business professionals in an office setting. Below the image is the Intel Inside logo and the Centrino Mobile Technology logo. The main headline reads: "Unwire your workforce at home, on the road, and from anywhere in the office." At the bottom, there is a blue banner with the text: "Learn more about Intel® Centrino™ mobile technology" and the Intel logo.

Measuring worker usage is sometimes a matter of asking questions; sometimes it is a matter of answering them. "If CIOs see a sudden increase in tactical data requests, then they know newer and better data is required to respond to strategic initiatives identified by analytics," Mark Beyer, senior program director of [Meta Group](#) told NewsFactor.

"At first a jump in requests seems like a curse, when in fact it is a testimony to the success of the programs."

But there is more to the trench test than asking and answering questions of employees. Analytic programs vary widely from the packaged to the proprietary. Knowing the limitations of each is critical to controlling problems at the core of the programming. So is resisting temptations for an easy fix.

Bottom-Line Punch

"Architecture convenience and hygiene are top considerations in choosing a vendor," says Beyer. Impact on adoption and accuracy are only part of the equation, he says, but efficiency is also measured by the affect on I.T. budgets. He cited licensing and technology constraints as two hidden drains of I.T. dollars.

"Vendor licensing needs to be more creative than a seat basis. Named-user or concurrent licensing needs to give way to server-based licensing to better control costs and invasiveness," says Beyer. "And CIOs need to consider whether the architecture is going to limit accessibility and re-use of data to availability only through the analytic engine."


But, vendors say packaged analytics save money over the long haul in reduced maintenance and upgrade costs and in other, less-tangible areas.

Build or Buy?

"Data quality becomes less of an issue with fewer custom built interfaces," says Eldredge. "A key advantage to SAP out-of-the-box programs is complete integration and tried-and-true programming. You are not subject to errors from a custom coder."

According to Meta Group's report, "State of the Portal 2004: Budgeting, Funding, and Frameworks", "Products that enable unification of user activities will become more prevalent, less risky, and less expensive during the next 18 months, reducing the cost and




implementation time for customer relationship management, supply chain  management, and employee knowledge management strategies."

Taking Out The Garbage

In the build-versus-buy argument, there is one consistent problem. "The output is no better than the input, in either case," Lou Agosta, principal analyst at [Forrester](#) told NewsFactor. "The challenge is in transforming data of unknown, and sometimes even bad quality, into usable, reliable knowledge. You have to turn garbage-in into ideal-out."








Vendors say that's true, but new products help carry out the garbage. "Siebel products enable customers to see data they couldn't see before. Employees will discover dirty data in the process and correct it at the source," says Rodwick.

As critical as analytics are to modern business, they cannot replace the need for masters to wield them. "A good tool is not enough; there must also be strategic vision and tactical finesse," says Agosta. 







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