

## Business intelligence solutions for SMEs

### Business Intelligence—your key differentiator

Today small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are facing stiff competition in the wake of globalization. Just-in-time delivery is fast becoming the norm in SME circles too. Every organization is being pressured into enhancing its performance in all the spheres of business — in accordance with the demands of stakeholders. Every organization is being forced to plug into the information

arising out of its business functions and converting it into insight that is immediately available to all key decision makers. Every organization is grappling with real time transactions, data ubiquity . . . cheaper, yet effective solutions pertaining to Business Intelligence (BI). And, we are talking about a Web-based business intelligence solution built on the Microsoft .NET platform.

### What is Business Intelligence?

Business intelligence is taking all the necessary corporate data about your business and turning it into meaningful understanding. This creates the right kind of information base in bring about reliability into the planning process. It fosters accountability, which places day-to-day

activities within the right performance context. Making way for effective metrics management, it takes risk out of any company's ability to execute plans. It paves the way for Business Performance Management (BPM).

### A Typical BI Solution Overview

A business intelligence solution should allow for a deeper understanding of customer and partner relationships, performance, and a consistent view of the organization from the executive level to the frontlines — all in real time and from a single data source.

Why?

In general, a decision-maker seeks three types of data:

- *Ongoing data* — information that is to be kept track of on a regular, on-going basis
- *Deep data* — information that gives an in-depth view of the business or business process and which can be utilized to make insightful business decisions
- *Time-critical data* — information that must be received quickly and on a need-to-know basis because it could have a critical impact on both foreseen and unforeseen risks and opportunities.

This data, once captured, should be made available to the decision-makers for analysis. Now, reporting information itself has three crucial elements to it — **level of detail**, **time-criticality**, and **delivery mechanism**. What, when, and how decision-makers receive information must be based on their individual requirements.

Essentially two type of reporting take place: *Pull* type and *push* type.

Pull type reporting involves standard reports and dashboards. On the other hand, push type reporting involves alerts that compress the time gap between the occurrence and the passing on of time-sensitive information to decision-makers. This dramatically increases the speed with which they can access information and plays a key role in building the real time business elements of the organization.

These alerts are event-driven and monitor key changes.

- The immediate *notification* of the availability of ongoing information in the form of crucial reports, say, updated OLAP cubes, changed or modified queries — known as **Notification Events**.
- The automatic detection of variances in business *performance* measures and metrics, or deep information — known as **Performance Events**
- The detection of *operational* business risks and opportunities, or time-critical information — known as **Operational Events**.

Having detected changes, event-driven alerts then notify decision-makers, keeping them informed *up-to-the-minute*. These alerts can also be personalized thus ensuring that the information reaches decision-makers — as they want and when they want.

Therefore, for seeking the essential types of data and reporting them effectively for enhancing any aspect of business there are some prerequisites that must be met.

### Prerequisites before the rollout of BI solutions

- Define business goals and corresponding Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- Create performance measures at the organization level
- Create performance measures at the project level in line with the organization’s KPIs
- Define across the organization projects small and big — spanning across all business functions and incorporating performance measures.

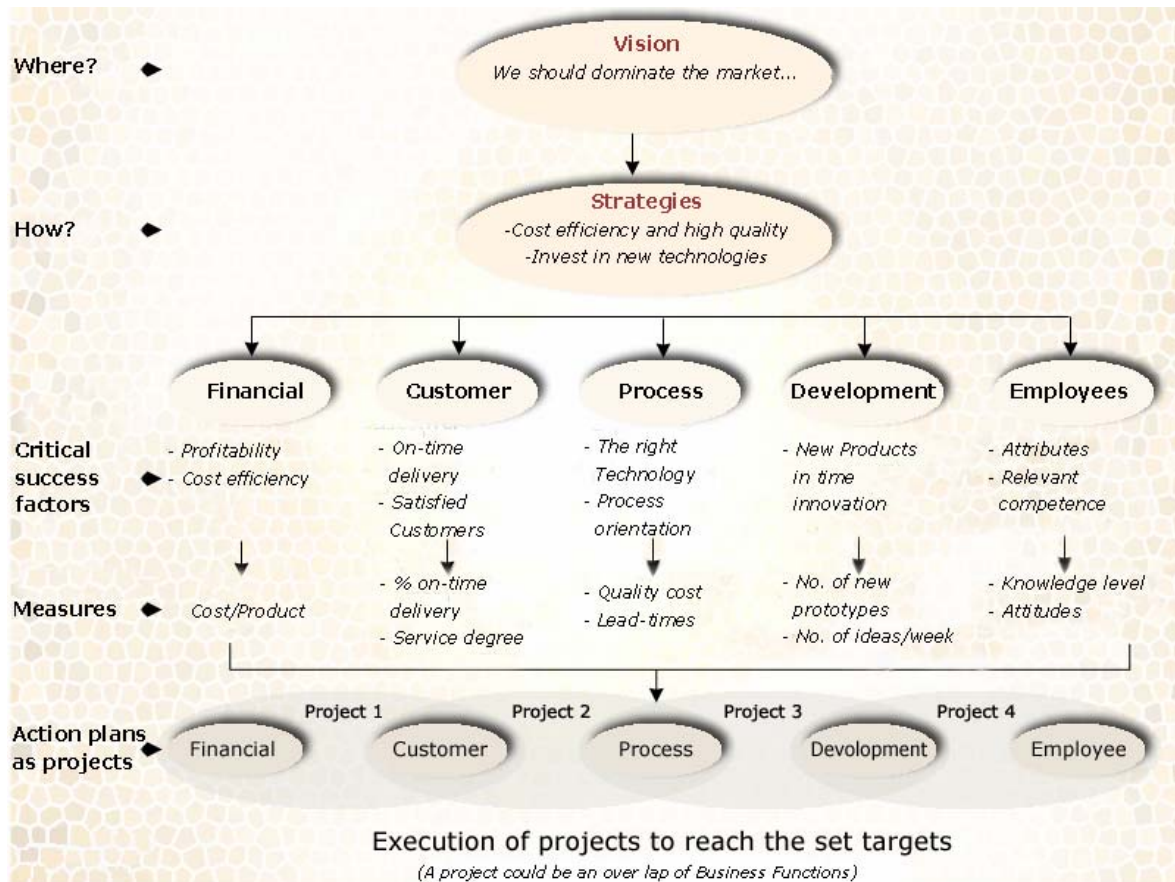


Fig. 1

Given the above, the grounds for effective business intelligence may be prepared. What remains is the deployment.

## Web-based BI solutions on .NET

By using the Internet to enable software applications to more easily work together, Microsoft® .NET offers businesses the opportunity to develop business intelligence solutions that decrease costs, and connect with customers and employees. NET-connected software is built on Web service standards, which enables new and existing applications to connect with software and services across platforms, applications, and programming languages. This obviates the need of writing new software to connect to the existing Microsoft applications or databases — as is the case with most business intelligence solutions. So, once a solution is developed on .NET platform it offers a massive head start to the businesses to get to their job as quickly as possible without worrying about integration issues.

The other major advantage of using .NET platform is the low cost associated in

maintenance or additional development required for the solution — as Microsoft Visual Studio® .NET and the Microsoft® .NET Framework empower developers to quickly and easily create new cutting-edge Web services and applications, building on their existing skill sets.

In addition to improving developer productivity, Visual Studio® .NET helps alleviate one of the greatest scarcities in the world: skilled programmers. Applying rapid application development techniques to Web applications and services increases developer productivity, saving both time and money. Finally, by supporting any programming language, these tools tap the broadest developer talent pool, take advantage of existing skills, and let people use the tool most appropriate for a specific task.

### *Softrack:*

## A true Web-based business intelligence solution on the .NET platform

Softrack is a one hundred percent Web-based business intelligence solution developed, deployed, and maintained on the .NET platform. Once installed on a Windows Server, anyone within its network can enter data and view reports. If the server is hosted on the Internet, the same power is available to all the privileged Internet users.

Incidentally, Softrack is ranked one of the top 10 .NET solutions in India. This speaks volumes about the technology depth and Softrack's adherence to .NET technology framework.

Softrack has all the features to launch an organization into the world of business intelligence. As with any true enterprise solution, these features are available to all users based on set access privileges.

Softrack uses a unique concept called **UOM** — unit of measurement. UOMs can be defined at all levels of the organization. So, once the key strategic goals and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are defined, the middle management layer can fix the corresponding measures using UOMs and

define necessary projects for the organization across all the business processes. If required, the project planning and defining measures can be delegated to the lower level, which Softrack allows for. Once the planning is done, Softrack allows users to report against these measures and track the progress of the project vis-à-vis the set measures. Most of the features in Softrack allow decision-makers to see a consolidated picture of these measures depending on the organization's information hierarchy. As all the data comes from a single database, it is one truth — all the time, any time.

With Softrack, the features lead users from ongoing data, and time-critical data leads to the deep data; that information should be on a need basis is the unspoken mantra reflected in all the features of Softrack. Once the enterprise users are up-to-date with the latest information snapshot, they can move on to the deep data and the relevant analysis. But if they are in a hurry, the **dashboard** offers a quick pizza delivery right on the homepage with all the important information!

The dashboard is a healthy mix of ongoing data and time-critical data. The user can customize both the breadth and the depth of the dashboard. The information snapshot provided by the dashboard can span across all the measures of the business functions. For instance, how many receipts in and how much expenditure out, how many customer complaints received and how many answered, project planned start time and project actual start time, and much more.

When users employ the **project plan** in conjunction with the dashboard they have the power to drill down to their chosen level of detail for all the data captured. This information is provided against the set timeline vis-à-vis the information hierarchy of the enterprise. Users can baseline against a previous view of the organization or that of a competitor, or that of an industry leader, or that of a desired future view of the organization. Once the baseline is set, monitoring and tracking becomes even more eventful for the enterprise. Once the data is entered or captured, the project plan provides **process centric information**. So,

all the mails and some of the key reports are provided to the users right beside the process. *So, real time collaborating is just a click away.*

Finally, a word about time-critical data and event-driven alerts. With Softrack, the entire presentation layer can be viewed on any mobile device that is a part of the network. So, when users are plugged into the network, pull type reporting as well as all the features in the presentation layer are at their behest — anywhere and anytime. But if they decide upon certain information to be 'pushed' to them, Softrack allows it through its event-driven alerts. These alerts can be customized ('when' and 'what') as can the degree of criticality. So, say, in a typical software industry scenario, if the deliverable for a premium client is not met, a notification alert can be sent to all the concerned, including the CEO of the organization on his/her mobile device. Moreover, the CEO can send a response in a flash. That, you would agree, is great business intelligence!

**[Gear up to be a real-time business intelligence organization. Gear up with Softrack.](#)**

*Softrack is the flagship product of Vortex Technologies.*

*Vortex is an innovative technology company headquartered in Hyderabad, India. Conventionally a product development company, Vortex is now fast expanding its services arm.*

*Vortex currently operates in the business space of business performance management with offerings in the fields of business intelligence and enterprise project management.*

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