

February, 2012

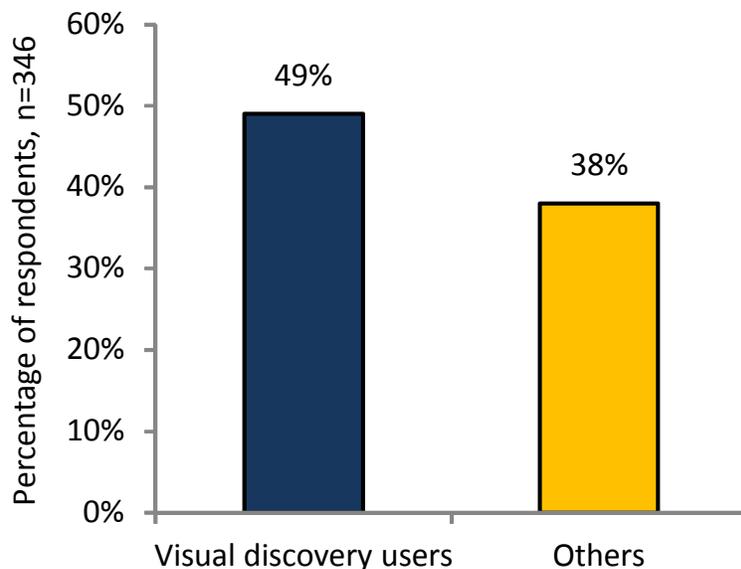
Picture This: Self-Service BI through Data Discovery and Visualization

Prior research by the Aberdeen group into Business Intelligence (BI) found that organizations are finding it increasingly difficult to get the right information to the right people at the right time. For example, Aberdeen's February 2012 research into operational BI (*Operational Intelligence - Part I: Driving Performance with Tactical Visibility*) found that 65% of business managers face a shrinking "decision-window" - the timeframe they have to respond after business events occur is getting shorter. With many companies also dealing with increasing volumes of data, this gives rise to an opportunity for innovation in analytics. This Analyst Insight leverages Aberdeen's March 2011 agile BI survey to examine the performance of organizations that provide business users with visual tools that let them freely and easily explore data to discover new insights.

Quick-Fire Business Drives Need for Visual Discovery

Increasing, or changing, demand for management information is the number one pressure driving analytics projects at organizations that are employing visual discovery tools (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Increasing / Changing Demand is Top Pressure



Source: Aberdeen Group, March 2011

Analyst Insight

Aberdeen's Insights provide the analyst's perspective on the research as drawn from an aggregated view of research surveys, interviews, and data analysis

Definition

This Analyst Insight discusses two different styles of BI:

- ✓ Traditional BI - Also referred to as managed reporting. Although business managers are often involved, this style of BI is predominantly controlled, driven and delivered by corporate IT. In many cases, only static views of data are available and any changes or enhancements must be made by the IT organization.
- ✓ Visual discovery - A rich, highly interactive, visual tool is provided to business users to allow them to manipulate and explore information directly. Although corporate IT is still involved, a large part of the responsibility for creating and accessing different views of the data falls on the business community.

Almost half (49%) of companies employing these tools cite this as a pressure. Notably, this same pressure is only the third priority of organizations that shun the use of this type of BI tool. Traditional business intelligence solutions - often referred to as managed reporting - can be very efficient at providing updates on standardized metrics and key performance indicators. For example, weekly figures on the number of patients admitted to a hospital, updates on the volume and timing of parts delivery to a factory, and monthly sales figures can all be efficiently distributed to the people that need them by traditional BI. Managed reporting can be very adept at providing routine information quickly and efficiently.

However, managed reporting is less adept at responding to unanticipated - and often time critical - information needs. Fast-paced, fast changing business environments drive the adoption of tools that put rapid analysis in the hands of business users.

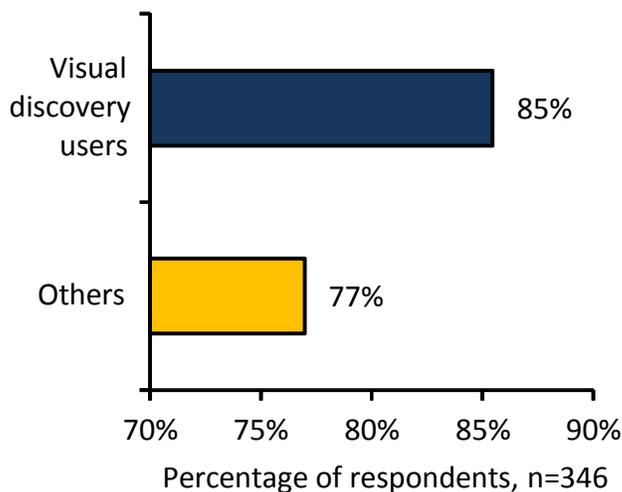
Use Case Scenario

What would happen if some components destined for a factory are delayed or short-shipped? Unless an alternative source of components can be found quickly, production output could be threatened. Visual discovery can help in situations like this, where managers would need to rapidly scour and analyze different potential sources in order to try and make up the shortfall.

Visualization Provides Rapid Access to Data

Organizations using visual discovery are slightly more likely (23% vs. 20%) to need access to information in near real-time (within minutes of events occurring). What is more critical, however, is that business users can actually find the information they need in a timely way. As Figure 2 shows, managers that make use of visual discovery tools are 10% more likely than their peers to be able to access the information they need in the time required to impact decision-making.

Figure 2: Visual Discovery Provides Timely Access to Information



Source: Aberdeen Group, March 2011

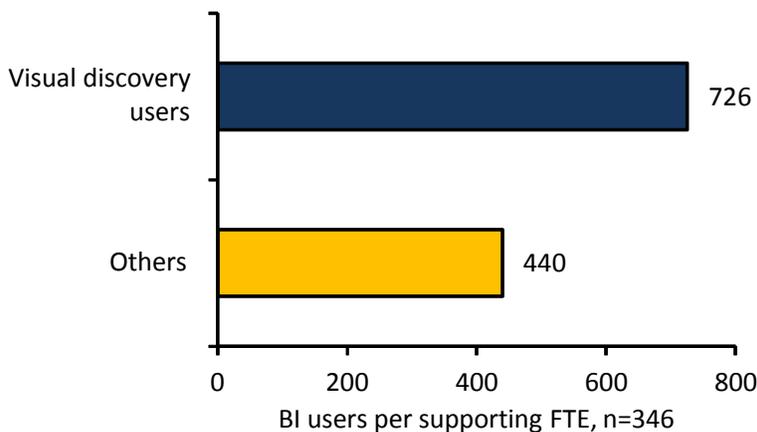
This is the key measure in determining the effectiveness of a BI project. Any investment in business intelligence - big or small - is worthless unless it enables the intended beneficiaries to access the information they need. Not only that, but they need to find that information in time to impact the

decisions that they have to make. Finding vital information too late is really no better than not finding it at all.

Optimal Use of Corporate IT Resources

While the visual discovery approach is beneficial to business managers, the benefits for corporate IT are very tangible too. Not only are users with visual discovery tools more likely to find the information they need in the time required, but they dramatically improve the leverage of scarce IT resources too (Figure 3).

Figure 3: 65% Better Leverage of Scarce IT Resources



"Like a lot of large corporations, there's still a lot of data back-end work that needs to happen to enable self-sufficiency, so part of our strategic review is to figure how we can do that better and faster without cutting corners."

~ Jim Keene,
IT Manager,
Harley Davidson

Source: Aberdeen Group, March 2011

On average, organizations using visual discovery tools are able to support 65% more BI users for every Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) employee involved in the implementation and development of BI projects (726 users per FTE vs. 440 users per FTE). With traditional BI implementations, it's not uncommon for IT staff or business analysts to spend significant time continually tailoring reports, modifying dashboards and responding to ad hoc requests for information. That's because traditional BI typically provides largely static views of data. And, when business users need different information to that provided by static reports, they cannot find the information themselves because they do not have the tools at their disposal. As a result, they have two choices. Either they can raise a request for help with the IT support team, or they can make do without the data. Providing business users with a self-service solution via visual discovery tools frees IT staff from the steady stream of support requests for BI changes or enhancements.

However, frequent collaboration between business users and corporate IT is still required for success. Eighty percent (80%) of companies using visual discovery indicated that such frequent collaboration occurred. In contrast, that is true for only 49% of companies without visual discovery tools. Fundamentally, the success of any BI project is underpinned by the data that

is available. The most powerful and intuitive self-service discovery tools are useless unless they are connected to the right, high-quality data.

Key Takeaways

Visual discovery can provide an effective way for organizations to cope with increasingly volatile and demanding management information needs. Companies considering the adoption of this type of software should consider:

- **Visual discovery is very effective at providing access to the right information at the right time.** Managers with visual data discovery tools are 10% more likely than those without to be able to access the information they need in the time required to impact decision-making. Unlike traditional static reports that provide no (or very limited) ability to interact, visual discovery tools facilitate free exploration of information, providing managers with a higher chance of finding the answers to unanticipated questions without assistance.
- **Visual discovery enables self-service BI.** Business users win because they can more frequently address unanticipated information needs in a timely way. Corporate IT wins because it no longer has to get directly involved to help business managers meet these unanticipated needs. As a result, significantly less IT staff may be needed to support the community of business intelligence users. Organizations deploying visual discover tools can manage 65% more BI users with every supporting member of the IT staff.
- **Close collaboration between business and IT is still required.** For visual discovery to be successful, IT leaders and business leaders should meet frequently to make sure that the BI information needs of the business are being anticipated and addressed. Education is required too. Thanks in part to the PC, the internet, and smartphones, millions of people without technical backgrounds are increasingly comfortable with computing technologies. That familiarity though doesn't necessarily translate into comfort or skill with analytics. In fact, organizations using visual discovery are three times more likely to formally develop the analytical skills of the staff than other organizations. This education and training paves the way for successful use of visual discovery.
- **Visual discovery can facilitate a strategic shift in corporate IT.** Technical staff responsible for BI implementations are often bogged down with requests to continuously modify and refine reports because the business users are unable to do this for themselves. The self-service capabilities made possible by visual data discovery tools can greatly alleviate this burden. As a result, the corporate IT function can adopt a more strategic role focused more narrowly on providing rich, high quality source data for business managers to use. Many organizations refer to this as data stewardship. In this guise, the role of corporate IT is to provide a

"Making things more visual and interactive for managers means then that when they have that 'a-ha' moment they can actually do something about it instead of just setting up a meeting with IT. There's been a noticeable change in meetings because the data isn't static and it's something that people can interact with and get answers in close to real-time while the key decision makers and thought leaders are in the room."

~ IT Manager,
Large Consumer Packaged
Goods Manufacturer

broad range of clean data for the business users to explore, provide the right tools (with appropriate education), and then set business users free. While ultimately some support may still be required, corporate IT would no longer be in the business of report modification.

For more information on this or other research topics, please visit www.aberdeen.com.

Related Research

[2012 Strategies: Putting the Intelligence in Mobile BI to Work](#); January 2012
[The Analytical SMB: More Data, More Users, Less Time](#); November 2011
[Agile BI: Complementing Traditional BI to Address the Shrinking Decision-Window](#); November 2011
[SaaS Business Intelligence: Driving Agility through Self-Service](#); September 2011

[Migrating from Reports to Dashboards: Upgrading your Business Intelligence](#); August 2011
[Agile BI: Three Steps to Analytic Heaven](#); April 2011
[Operational Dashboards Drive Profits and Customer Retention](#); November 2010

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