

TRENDS ARTICLE**SHIFT IN POWER TO VENDORS FOCUSING ON HOME-GROWN, SELF-SERVICE BI SOLUTIONS IN SA**

The growth currently seen within the local business intelligence space in South Africa is mainly due to the self-service trend, says Matthew Cook, Gauteng EIM (enterprise information management) business unit manager at Datacentrix, a high performing and secure ICT solution provider.

Cook explains that, although today's budget constraints in most businesses have reduced the scope for grand scale machine learning, big data and predictive analytics, the self-service business needs to build its own reports (as opposed to an "off the shelf" IT solution) exploring data and proactively acting on it. This has opened up the self-service BI solution space to vendors in South Africa, especially those that can supply a sophisticated, proven homegrown solution that is more cost-effective.

Independent analyst, Mike Lamble, explains self-service as such: "Self-service analytic tools allow power users to quickly explore, blend and visualise data from disparate sources to produce new business insights and to validate business data requirements to support application development and data management. Consequently, business-owned and operated data islands are forming that include data from enterprise data warehouses and big external sources such as Web logs, industry hubs, social media, sensors, et al."

Cook continues: "We are seeing the same scenario play out in South Africa. A business shift the country has undergone is that today we are selling to both business decision and IT decision-makers; moving away from our purely IT focused interactions of the past. There is a definite requirement for both fact-based decision metrics that enable strategic decision making and a solution that satisfies the bottom line.

"Self-service in the business intelligence information era is relatively new – it is however a massive evolution from the 'excel' based graphs that allowed employees to analyse data sets. Dashboards developed by IT also gave managers certain insights, but a frustration was the time it took to obtain reports. Certainly not satisfying the real-time decision-making that is required in today's economy. And so the need arose for self-service BI – tools that allow business users to build their own reports without having to rely on IT."

It is no surprise that data is still growing at a rapid rate and businesses need insight from this data. "If you want to be a frontrunner in your business, self-service BI provides you with the necessary fuel."

The reality is that business-led BI requirements are changing the vendor landscape radically. So much so that Gartner has reimagined its BI and analytics (BI&A) Magic Quadrant for 2016. Defining the modern BI&A platform, Gartner notes that "the most significant difference between a modern BI and analytics platform and a traditional, IT-centric reporting and analysis platform is the amount of upfront modelling required, as well as the skills needed, to build analytics content. Creating analytics content via IT-centric reporting platforms starts with IT consolidating and modelling data in advance. By contrast, a modern BI&A platform supports IT-enabled development of analytics content."

Gartner also stated earlier this year that the BI&A market is in the final stages of a multiyear shift from IT-led, system-of-record reporting to business-led, self-service analytics. As a result, the modern BI&A platform has emerged to meet new organisational requirements for accessibility, agility and deeper analytical insight.

"The shift to the modern BI and analytics platform has now reached a tipping point," said Ian Bertam, managing vice president at Gartner. "Organisations must transition to easy-to-use, fast and agile modern BI platforms to create business value from deeper insights into diverse data sources."

Educating customers on what self-service BI is and what it can do for an organisation remains important "Strategic decision making capability at our fingertips is invaluable in the current economy. Customers need to have the foresight today of what will be a requirement tomorrow," concludes Cook.

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