



How IBM Cognos 8 Business Intelligence meets the needs of business managers

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Abstract

Jacks and Jills of all trades

Business managers have never had it easy. Not only are they accountable for day-to-day operations across a broad swath of the organization, but they must also answer requests from more senior leaders for detailed information and real-time insight. They walk a tightrope every day as they attempt to tactically guide their teams while also providing critical input into strategic decision-making at higher levels of the organization.

Overview

Today's accelerated pace of business is making business managers' lives more challenging than ever. Their teams are more dynamic and far flung. Their executives demand a more precise view into the workings of the organization. And all stakeholders want their answers now. If this isn't enough of a party trick, they have to accomplish this without the layers of support staff that earlier generations of managers might have had. No assistants. No report writers. No support staff to handle delegated tasks. It's up to the business manager to produce results. Working a 24-hour day isn't the answer. Getting more out of the information that's already at hand, however, is.

IBM® Cognos® 8 BI version 8.4 gives business managers the capability they need to do the seemingly impossible – to actively track performance against metrics and make higher quality, more timely decisions within an increasingly fast-paced environment. IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 delivers those results for today's already overstressed business managers, all without consuming what little precious time they already have.

Business problems

Make the impossible possible

It's difficult to overstate the pivotal role that business managers play in today's fast-paced environment. Because they're on the ground every day, they have an ideal view of how each facet of the organization is performing and where things may be falling short of the plan. They're also in an excellent position to interpret what they see for the benefit of more senior leaders. Thus it should come as no surprise that strategic decision-making often depends quite heavily on these unsung operational heroes. That's why it makes sense to put the best possible tools into their hands – tools that paint a clearer picture and require significantly less effort to get to the requisite answers.

It's a tall order that, at first blush, might seem impossible. Indeed, not too long ago, it may very well have been. IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4, however, makes the impossible eminently possible. It puts more horsepower directly into the business managers' hands and makes it easier for regular people to use. It's BI for the rest of us. No longer do business managers have to request reports from IT and then wait for them to be completed. The days of crossing their fingers and hoping the report writer got it right are pretty much over. Instead, IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 lets business managers independently get the answers they need.

This new, significantly more realistic approach to deploying BI fits the managers' existing workflow much more closely than earlier generations of BI. Business managers have a tough enough job to begin with. They don't have the time or the energy to coax responses out of their tools. They can't wait for IT or dedicated report writers to run the numbers on their behalf. They need to be in charge of their own destiny if they are expected to deliver results.

Business drivers

IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 is built for this new reality. It takes what was already a leading solution and turns it into an even more robust solution for today's forward-thinking business managers. Here's a brief look at some of the advanced new functionality:

Dashboards – Enhancements to these at-a-glance tools give managers highly customized views into organizational performance. RSS support also facilitates external data importing and integration with internal content. Self-created, customizable views of evolving data drive better, faster decision-making.

Search – Upgraded search tools allow managers to Google search for required information, then add it directly into a new cube for additional analysis. Advanced reporting capabilities let them integrate internally and externally sourced data into a dashboard to track its evolution over time.

Familiarity – Enhancements to IBM Cognos 8 Go! Office and IBM Cognos 8 BI Analysis for Microsoft® Excel® make it easier than ever to analyze data within Microsoft® Office®. This is particularly important for business managers because it lets them work in a familiar, comfortable environment while minimizing the need for retraining. Workflow is also streamlined by not introducing yet another interface into their toolset.

Mobile updates – Business managers need to access the same information on their mobile devices as they do on their office computers. IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 seamlessly distributes reports to the leading mobile platforms, including the BlackBerry, to allow uninterrupted workflow wherever the manager may be. Unlike other solutions which often force new reports to be written for each platform, our updated solution reformats on the fly – which saves time and preserves scarce report writing resources.

Whatever the challenge, IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 brings BI to business managers in a way that lets them finally deliver to their full potential. It's the best of all worlds for an audience that clearly needs all the help it can get.

The solution

The status quo risk

What are the pitfalls associated with not moving to a leading edge BI solution?

Making decisions in the dark is the business manager's worst nightmare. The pace of business today is so rapid – and getting faster all the time – that business managers risk making the wrong decisions if they base their analyses on inaccurate or obsolete information. Sub-optimal decision-making costs the organization in wasted resources and missed opportunities. Over time, competitiveness lags and the organization itself can be threatened.

Managers are accountable for knowing what's going on in their businesses at all times. If their tools fall short, they simply can't have an accurate or complete picture. They may end up looking at specific pieces of the picture, but without an end-to-end, sufficiently deep view; they have no sense of overall context. The big picture, frankly, eludes them.

While some managers can get by on instinct alone, today's increasingly regulated business environment places much more scrutiny on managers' activities. Better BI tools help render business decisions more defensible, which can be crucial when senior executives, regulators and auditors ask for background and expect viable responses. Their individual – and the organization's – credibility and security could be at risk if managers don't base their decisions on the right information.

Flying solo

How can business managers contribute to a streamlined operational environment?

Traditional BI products resided firmly in the hands of IT and related specialists such as report writers and power users. As effective as these tools were, they were simply too difficult for mainstream use. Thus business managers were often forced to submit requests to IT when new reports – or even variations of existing reports – needed to be generated. This process was, and presumably still is, expensive, time consuming and error prone. Often, the requested report would fail to meet the original business need. This would in turn initiate another round of requests, all of which did little to get the business manager the answers necessary to get the job done.

IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 puts this power right in the business manager's hands. With IBM Cognos 8 Go! Dashboard, for example, users can build their own complex visualizations of data. More than just a pretty face, these instantly-updatable, visual and dynamic tools let business managers manipulate data any which way they can – all without needing to call IT and submit a request. The updated IBM Cognos 8 Business Viewpoint product gives managers another means to get the job done independently by allowing them to view their data on their own terms. Since these terms are specific to the individual managers' roles, they support decision-making much more effectively than a more general report produced by IT. As effective as IT resources are, they do not live and breathe the business manager's reality.

The net result? Managers have a much closer relationship with the data they need to get their jobs done. At the same time, organizational teams in IT and beyond are free to focus on their core competencies instead of monitoring and managing a ticket queue.

Dig deep

How does IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 help business managers find needles in the middle of haystacks?

You have to find the right information before you can start assessing and analyzing it. Because business managers may not always know where the right data is stored, IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 incorporates a range of updated search capabilities. IBM Cognos 8 Go! Search, for example, allows business managers to Google reports and find resources and assets that might otherwise remain hidden. Once the target data has been identified, it can be easily integrated into new cubes for further analysis.

Finding data is one thing; having confidence in it is quite another. Because business managers base crucial decisions on data, they need to know that they're using the right data. They need to know where the report came from, who modified it, and who approved it. Pulling figures off a non-validated spreadsheet just won't cut it. Advanced report lineage tools built into IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 give managers the confidence they need to stand behind their high profile, high impact decisions.

Conclusion

Summary

Business managers are often viewed as the unsung heroes of the modern organization. Unfortunately for them, their heroism will be in higher demand in future. Ever-widening groups of stakeholders are leaning more heavily on them to produce better answers, and turn them around faster than before. They are increasingly challenged to back up their decisions with verifiable data, and the strategic importance of their work continues to grow as senior leaders realize just how capable they are.

Worse, business managers are expected to deliver on all fronts without a supporting team of dedicated resources. Beyond their core accountabilities, they're responsible for actual delivery. To accomplish all this, they need analytical tools that remove the administrative load imposed by earlier generations of software. They won't twist their workflow to adapt to their tools. Instead, their tools should seamlessly fit them by integrating into solutions they already – and comfortably – use.

IBM Cognos 8 BI version 8.4 delivers on this previously elusive promise. It gives business managers the ability to do for themselves what once demanded a help desk ticket. It gives them the ability to control their own destiny, as well as that of the organization at large.



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