Maintain Momentum by Showcasing your BI Initiative

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You've made the case for Business Intelligence (BI). You got early executive buy-in and active, end-to-end support from senior leadership and you implemented BI across the enterprise by aligning technological solutions with business priorities. You wore many hats to bring the right tools, people and processes together, and bolstered this work with gold standards and best practices.

Think the sales pitch is over now that you're in the execution phase? Think again.

Getting executive buy-in for your BI initiative is absolutely key, but that support has to be sustained once achieved. Early buy-in must also snowball into broad user adoption during execution. The best way to keep the momentum going and get the troops on board is to showcase your BI initiative – communicate success and demonstrate value, and keep on doing it.

How to demonstrate value and communicate successes

If you're in IT and fought to get BI working for your company, chances are you've already become pretty good at marketing, communicating and selling the initiative. However, as one IT specialist explained, "You need to be able to build on small successes and then sell your capability. We sell ourselves every day. The tightrope we walk is to avoid appearing as if we're selling technology and selling a product, rather than selling a solution."

To help you walk that tightrope, here are some straightforward ways you can showcase BI to your organization and ramp up company interest to the next level. But before you try any of these showcasing tactics, make sure you're speaking the right language. Keep in mind the audience you're trying to reach and demonstrate the value of the initiative in the business terms they'll understand.

Select a marquee project and publicize it

What pain did a BI project help to solve in your organization? Pick something that's not too complex (for example, a simplified process for aggregating sales results across a number of regions), and start telling the story through e-mail campaigns, word of mouth, face-to-face meetings, etc. Your marquee project will demonstrate that the value of BI far outweighs the change it requires.

Solicit and share other success stories

When that marquee project story gets a bit tired, identify other wins you can talk about. Constantly be on the lookout for BI success stories, and share them widely. Talk to the Communications department about using existing platforms to get the BI message out. For example, send out a regular newsletter out by e-mail, with user tips, success stories, news and recognition. Pepper the intranet with BI FAQs, tips, a user blog, news, etc.

Relate the successes back to established metrics

IT and business have partnered to understand the key metrics they need to measure and monitor. Now articulate that ROI to the whole organization by reporting on your reports and sharing the major benefits various business units gain by using BI solutions. For example, maybe Finance can now close the books in hours instead of days. Or perhaps sales have increased or marketing campaigns have become more effective. Measure the value and demonstrate it.

Demo, demo, demo

You can engage everyone by gathering people together often and showing them what BI can do for them. Live or interactive demos are almost always better than static feature lists. Use various media creatively to maximize exposure and involvement. Make sure you show some before-and-afters: What was the pain? How did BI solve it? Lunch and learns, webinars, BI user groups or vendor-sponsored BI User Days are all great ways to demonstrate what BI is doing for your organization.

Train the trainer

Training is one of the most organic ways to articulate and showcase the value of BI. A good place to start is by training and certifying business users willing to act as trainers, as they become the point people for sharing knowledge and in-house training for general users. Next, train power-users and flow major reports and analysis through them. Hold workshops every month to go through basics in areas such as analysis, scorecarding and reporting, and send individuals for vendor-held training when appropriate.

Get management to eat its own dog food

Those key executives who bought in early are going want to push the platform out to more users. It needn't be much more complicated than the CEO standing up in front of a crowd and endorsing the BI initiative. You can hardly get a better showcase than that.

Go viral

We've talked a lot about starting at the top and getting executive buy-in, but while you're at it don't neglect the ranks further down. Use the early adopters and natural marketers in your organization to help spread the word on BI. For example, one company's IT department actually engaged the Sales team to talk up the great things IT was doing with BI.

Be creative

Recognize innovators and early adopters, and encourage everyone else to get on board by having some fun with your BI initiative, while boosting morale at the same time. One company promoted its BI system with a week-long scavenger hunt. Each morning they asked the contestants to find the answers to questions on the BI system, which got progressively harder as the week went on. The idea was to get users to explore the whole system and learn some of the more advanced aspects of it, while also learning how BI could help answer their own business questions. The game ended with an awards ceremony with management recognizing the best players and teams.

Summary

When deploying something as large-scale as BI, project champions and their teams should be prepared to use proof-of-concept successes and a variety of communications tactics to acquire the mandate and then get users progressively more involved throughout the execution phase.

Demonstrating the value proposition of your BI initiative through a marquee project and building on that success with other wins, communications tactics, demos, training and recognition will help maintain high-level interest in BI and keep the whole company on board.

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