: What is mobile business analytics and intelligence?

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Decision support "on-the-go" is expanding in terms of capabilities. Off premise BI, Mobile BI or Mobile Intelligence is increasingly viewed as necessary to compete. In Summer 2011, Power explained that "mobile business intelligence refers to data-driven decision support applications on mobile devices like smartphones and tablet computers." Mobile business analytics broadens the capabilities available to managers, sales staff, and anyone else away from place-bound decision support.

Wireless networks have expanded and gotten faster and that has facilitated development of more and better informational and decision support applications. Mobile analytics and business intelligence use wireless devices to provide information transfer that enhances decision making. Mobile BI applications exist for all Mobile operating systems. In general, mobile delivery platforms are a rapidly maturing decision support application area. More applications are becoming available from start-ups and traditional BI vendors for innovative dashboards, live reports, CRM and performance monitoring. The main software vendors in the mobile analytics and BI market are Birst, Information Builders, Micostrategy, Tableau Software and SAP.

Many organizations deliver mobile BI as a native application as well as providing mobile responsive web-browser access. Given the significant appetite for iOS (Apple operating system) mobile BI, many vendors start by offering native Apple applications for iPads and iPhones, it is then they develop mobile BI for the other platforms. For most users the mode of delivery is not hugely important, users of mobile BI are concerned with the accessibility of the data coupled with the analytical and visualization capabilities of the analytics/BI tool. Advances in mobile technology, networking infrastructure and BI software has supported the opportunities for advancing mobile BI. However, the wide range of mobile devices in terms of screen size, processing and storage capabilities makes the design and delivery of great mobile BI a challenge for BI designers and developers.

Mobile delivery of analytics and BI is about providing tactical information needed to make immediate decisions. "People are looking for information to address a particular question or to complete a transaction," says Gartner analyst Ted Friedman. "The biggest value is in operational BI — information in the context of applications — not in pushing lots of data to somebody's phone. What you want to send them is the exceptions, the alerts or what they really need to act on now (see Vaughn, 2008)."

According to the Aberdeen Group mobile BI empowers a greater number of business leaders and

other expert users with access to BI analytics providing access to accessible and timely decision support. They articulate three tangible benefits that may be derived from mobile BI analytics. These include:

1. Accelerated access to information in the face of the perceived "shrinking decision window",

2. Extended access to decision support enabling heightened operational and process efficiency, and

3. Greater BI capability on the ground can mean business expansion in the form of valuable cross-selling and upselling opportunities.

Samir Sakpal, an analyst at Frost & Sullivan, predicted that mobile analytics will move beyond niche markets, like the financial sector, into mainstream use because, he says, it helps businesses do two things: "Make faster decisions and drive a higher quality of customer service."

Mobile decision support and BI provides a greater number of employees with analytics capabilities and promotes enhanced interaction and collaboration among staff. However it is important to keep the business use case at the centre of an organization's mobile BI strategy. Mobile IT is expensive, the decentralized availability of valuable data means there are security implications that must be taken care of. Finally, it is important to consider how your mobile BI solution will integrate with existing mobile applications. Mobile delivery of decision support is accepted and necessary.

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