

: What are key questions to ask business intelligence solution providers?

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Companies have differing business intelligence (BI) and reporting needs. Some companies are upgrading or reimplementing a BI capability while other companies are exploring introducing a BI system for the first time. There are many vendors in this software category. For example, Oracle claims to be the #1 vendor in business analytics with the industry's most complete and integrated range of enterprise-class business intelligence (BI) solutions. IBM Business Intelligence is a one-stop solution for business analytics. SAP claims companies can boost the organization's collective IQ with business intelligence tools that provide real-time insight. Teradata advertises it provides back-office strategic intelligence reports and analysis and Teradata customers can provide operational intelligence to front-line employees, business partners and customers.

The following 10 questions are fundamental to evaluating BI vendor solutions. The questions are appropriate whether the need is a first-time solution, an upgrade, or a re-implementation of an existing system. Information Systems staff should ask each prospective vendor the following questions:

1. Does the BI package provide a complete or comprehensive solution? Will the solution meet immediate and anticipated needs?
2. How long will it take to deploy an initial solution and realize value? What is the experience of adopters of the solution?
3. Will company data be both available and secure? If so, how is this accomplished?
4. What internal information technology capabilities especially staff expertise are needed to implement the solution? Will new hardware need to be acquired?
5. Does the vendor offer an integrated solutions or do components from one or more vendors need to be assembled? Does the vendor provide support for installation and if necessary data conversion?

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6. Can business users prepare their own analyses and reports and publish them to a secure website? How easy is it for business users to learn the system? Will hands-on training be needed?

7. Can the BI solution scale from a few developer users to thousands of concurrent business users while maintaining performance requirements?

8. Is it possible to expand and alter the configuration of the solution as business needs change? How difficult is this task?

9. Can the BI solution support both internal and external business users, including suppliers and customers?

10. Is the solution provider a solid company with experienced staff who will provide helpful service?

If you can answer all of the above questions in a definitive and positive way, then that solution vendor is a strong candidate for the contemplated project. So get a bid, check the price, (re)assess the value and timing for the proposed BI project.

Weblinks

IBM, at URL <http://www-03.ibm.com/software/products/en/category/business-intelligence>

Oracle, at URL <http://www.oracle.com/us/solutions/business-analytics/business-intelligence/overview/index.html>

SAP, at URL <http://go.sap.com/solution/platform-technology/business-intelligence.html>

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Teradata, at URL <http://www.teradata.com/business-needs/business-intelligence/>

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