ANALYTICS LIKE NEVER BEFORE

The business intelligence (BI) trend is making waves across the globe, and the Gulf region is certainly a part of it. Marc Haberland, Managing Director, Clariba, shared his insights on the trends of business intelligence solutions in the Gulf region.

Marc Haberland is the Managing Director of Clariba. He looks back on 14 years of BI and EPM experience across many industries throughout Europe, the Middle East and North America. He currently leads his team of BI experts in Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Spain to deliver projects across the Gulf, KSA, in Europe and North America. He received his Masters in Technical Marketing and his Bachelor in Electronics Engineering from Polytechnical University in Munich, Germany. Marc can be contacted at marc.haberland@clariba.com

If you haven't heard the buzz about business intelligence (BI), you certainly will in the near future. The most basic way to define business intelligence is as a computer-based technique used in spotting, digging-out, and analysing business data such as sales, marketing, customer satisfaction, finance, production, and similar. The ultimate aim is to transform these business data into actionable and meaningful information for business purposes.

The solution provides employees with self-service access to the data insight that they need, and it can help companies increase their overall productivity. Likewise, by providing managers and C-level executives with "dashboards," as an overview of their departments, they can better manage their teams, and decide faster on the basis of facts rather than guesswork. Companies can measure and improve their key performance indicators (KPIs) to control the most important business areas for their organisations.

The world wide trends
BI has been a top priority for CIOs and IT managers across the globe for some years now, and it was quoted as one of the top IT trends for 2013 by Gartner, as published by David W. Cearley and Carl Claunch in "T*he Top 10 Strategic Technology Trends for 2013*", February, 2013. No longer is BI a set of tools available only to the privileged few in IT or business analysts since it is becoming ubiquitous in many organisations, and it is rapidly reaching into many areas of our lives as consumers. So, one may ask, has BI reached full maturity globally? Have we reached a saturation point with only limited evolutionary, incremental value in the years to come? Quite the opposite!

Gartner saw a slowdown of growth for BI software from 17% in 2011 to 6.8% in 2012 to total USD 13.1 billion worldwide, according to "*Market Share Analysis: Business Intelligence, Analytics and Performance Management*", by Dan Sommer, Bhavish Sood, May 2013. However, we have been seeing a tremendous shift in the industry, especially in Qatar, with a series of innovations that are game-changing and will deliver growth when organisations effectively adopt and transform. Gartner's view is that the market for BI and analytics platforms will remain one of the fastest growing software markets. The compound annual growth rate for the BI and analytics space is expected to be 7% through 2016, as stated in "*Forecast: Enterprise Software Markets, Worldwide, 2011-2016, 4Q12 Update*"

Innovation in BI and enterprise performance management (EPM) solutions is happening globally, but it is definitely taking off in the Gulf region. BI/EPM solutions, which help organisations manage a variety of issues such as dealing with big data, a mobile workforce with "bring your own device" (BYOD), desktop visualisation tools, and other solutions that offer a platform covering all cases of the required use across the enterprise, will continue to lead the wave.

Furthermore, by tapping into the in-memory computing (IMC) realm, organisations have the opportunity to delve into information faster and more effectively than ever before. With IMC, organisations can explore and analyse vast quantities of data from virtually any data source at the speed of thought alloing them to be on top of changing business realities as events unfold.

Gartner's *Report on Top Technology Trends, 2013: In-Memory Computing Aims at Mainstream Adoption*, January 2013, stated that the in-memory data grid (IMDG) market may still be small, but the decline in costs of flash memory prices, and the maturation of specific software platforms will make IMC more accessible to companies, promoting fast growth reaching USD one billion by 2016.

Massimo Pezzini, Vice-President, Gartner, said that companies do not consider the use of IMC as a risk of being out-innovated by competition, "During the next two to three years, IMC will become a key element in the strategy of organisations, which are focused on improving effectiveness and business growth."

Qatar's footsteps in BI
Clariba has experienced firsthand how these innovations can help transform entire business processes while simplifying the IT landscape.

Although slightly behind in the global wave of BI adoption, the Gulf region is now booming, especially the Qatari market. Several companies have already committed to BI solutions and have taken control of their most important metrics, and, thus, started reaping immediate benefits. While before the majority of companies were relying solely on spreadsheets to manage and control their business data, nowadays we have seen these companies realising that they need an automated, reliable process to guide them in their decision-making processes.

Since Clariba began its first project in Qatar at Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development in 2008, we have been fortunate to work with many more companies in order to deliver successful BI/EPM solutions in leading organisations such as, Doha Bank, Qatar Aluminum, Qapco, Ooredoo, Qatar Steel, Qafac and QDB.

The common pain points that led these organisations to look for a BI solution were:
- The information needed for decision making was not readily available
- Lack of visibility on company performance
- Difficulty to control important metrics
- Slow reporting process with time-consuming information consolidation
- High dependence on IT to answer business queries
- Static and unappealing information delivery

After implementing their BI platforms, companies can expect to see immediate benefits:
- Reduction of manual effort to extract data to display management KPIs
- Self-service capability for ad hoc reporting
- Improvement in data transparency, accuracy and accessibility
- Faster data gathering and presentation
- Increase in information visibility
- Improvement in performance metric tracking
- More accountability as managers can easily control KPIs by line of business
- C-level executives can quickly grasp the information they need at-a-glance

As the Qatari BI market matures, we also see local companies gradually becoming interested in innovative solutions such as in-memory computing (IMC). We have just recently deployed an in-memory computing project at Spinneys, a well-known supermarket chain, in Dubai. This technology, coupled with an enterprise-wide BI solution, will help Spinneys have real-time visibility of their metrics for sales and inventory optimisation. We are confident that Qatar is soon to follow the trend towards in-memory computing.

How to tackle a BI/EPM project?
Unfortunately, not all BI/EPM projects in the Gulf region have met expectations or have completed successfully. Here are some tips to consider when looking for a BI/EPM solution and implementation partner:
- If your company is considering a BI/ EPM solution, our advice would be to carefully research vendors, and analyse the solution that best fits your needs.
- When you are looking for a partner to advise and implement a BI/EPM solution, make sure they have experience, and a successful track record of implementations for the particular solution you are looking for. Do they know your industry? Do they apply best practices in their project implementations?
- Another important factor is the qualification of their technical team. It can be expected that the sales person will leave you after the contract is signed and you will then need to rely on the capabilities of the technical staff. So, don't go for the cheapest rate. You will be happier in the long-term if you look for quality and track record. Ask for consultant qualifications – Are they certified in that particular solution? Have they worked in similar projects? If not, you may be setting up yourself for disaster and endless hours of rework.
- Another important point to check is the partner's ability to carry out the project end-to-end. Can they provide training after the product is implemented? The success of your BI/EPM investment depends ultimately on the staff using the solutions. In order for that to happen, they need to be properly enabled.

What to expect?
This revolutionary wave that is currently happening in the BI and analytics market will not stop here. The winners shall be those organisations that seize the opportunity to re-imagine their business to drive competitiveness and profitability.

We see a tremendous growth opportunity in business intelligence and enterprise performance management solutions in the next years, as customers in the Gulf region adopt these new capabilities and transform their organisations effectively. "Analytics like never before" is a theme used by a BI expert, Timo Elliott. I couldn't agree more. ∎