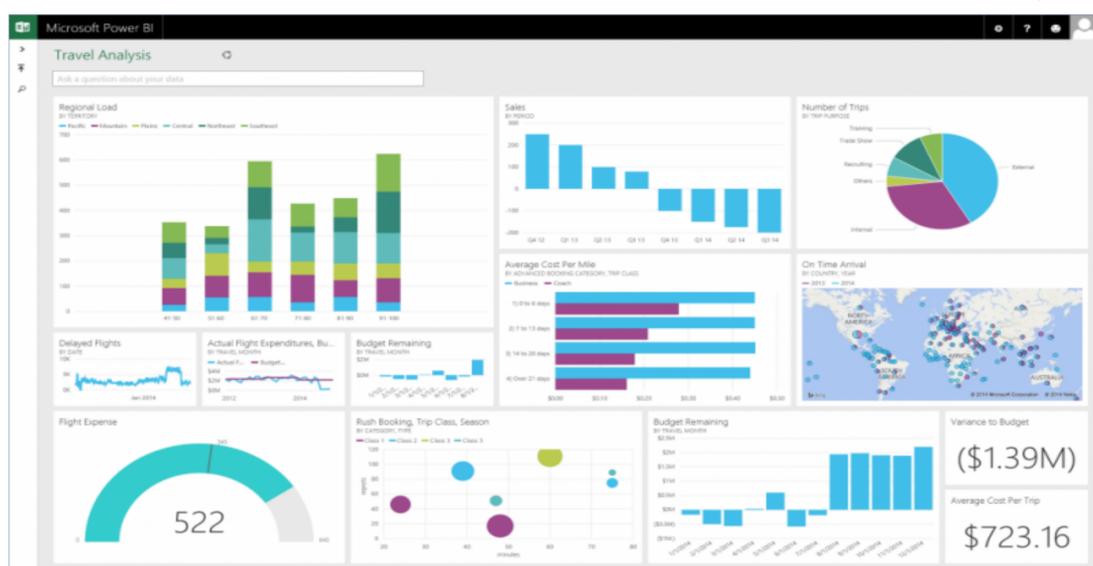


8 Facts about Power BI You Should Know

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If you want to gain a thorough understanding of your business performance, and produce analytics that give you enough insight to make decisions, you need to be able to ask questions of your data. And with the business landscape always changing, you need the flexibility to change the questions from day to day. Can Microsoft's [Power BI business intelligence platform](#) help you get more out of your data?

We've been using it for quite some time now with our clients in Nashville, and would like to break down the important points you should know. We think Power BI can reshape how you think about business intelligence. Below we've outlined 8 facts you should know about Power BI. We will explain what Power BI is and the key features you should know about, and spark your creativity on how you can put it to work.

1. Power BI breaks the mold of traditional BI development and makes the analytics process easier and more flexible.

The traditional model for getting a report requires putting a request in to IT to build a report, which then leads to waiting because the IT team has been fully allocated to many projects. Or, much more often, to bypass IT, who is already too busy, and to find someone on the team with decent Excel skills to stitch together a series of extracts and Excel files into a coherent report.

Power BI is a set of tools that allows non-technical folks to perform the kinds of analytics previously reserved for technical specialists or IT departments. Power BI changes that. Any analyst can connect to any data source and quickly summarize findings into a simple report, no programming required. With Power Pivot built into Power BI, analytics measures are developed using Microsoft's DAX query language, with a comparable learning curve to Excel's built-in formula language. Any Excel user comfortable with building models that reference other sheets or conducting advanced functions like lookup will easily be able to make the change to Power BI.

2. Power BI saves a lot of time and labor.

Many of our clients have resigned themselves to believing that, as a part of the cost of doing business, someone needs to spend a lot of time pulling data out of various databases and shaping it into a format that allows leaders and department members to understand performance of the business.

Power BI includes a data shaping capability known as Power Query. As outlined in his book, *Power Query for Power BI and Excel*, Chris Webb explains why it's helpful:

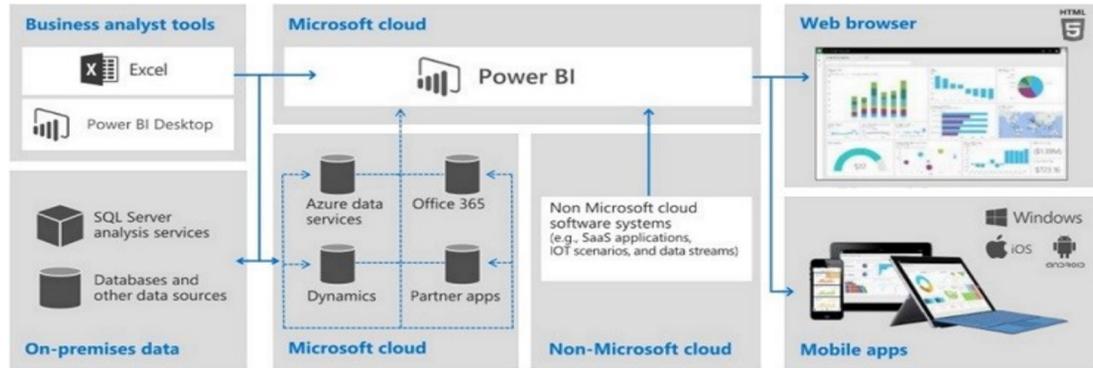
- You can eliminate time-consuming manual steps used to load data to Excel. This allows you to automate refreshing data connections in Excel or Power BI to external data sources, saving time and reducing errors.
- You can filter, sort, and otherwise modify the format and layout of data before loading to Excel. This comes in handy when, for example, you want to connect to an external data source with 10 years of data and you only need the last month's worth of data.
- You can connect to many more data types than in Excel, including Facebook, active directory, Odata feeds, and others.
- You can share queries with other users and use them in other workbooks. As Webb states in the book, "Excel workbooks have a bad reputation for being silos of forgotten code and stale data." Business users often unknowingly do work that someone has already done within the organization in some other Excel file.

3. Power BI has its own desktop app, but is also built into Excel.

Power BI comes with so much flexibility that it can be confusing. Here's the deal:

1. The add-ons Power Query, Power Pivot, and Power View mean that you can effectively use Power BI within Excel. In the same place that you are working with traditional Excel data, you can combine and prepare data sources (Power Query), create reports on large data sets (Power Pivot), and create visualizations (Power View).
2. You can download a desktop tool called [Power BI desktop](#) and build summary reports and visualizations there. This tool is ideal if you are emphasizing visualizations and especially if you want to share.
3. You can share reporting on the web via Power BI.com.

Here's how Microsoft describes the flow of data, from aggregating to developing and publishing:



If you are technically inclined or love details, you will enjoy this blog post which shows a comprehensive [analysis of how data flows in an ecosystem that includes Power BI](#).

4. Power BI was officially released last year, but it is not new.

Those of us who've been in the business world for a number of years know the Microsoft game well: with much fanfare, they release something new. It is buggy. It is frustrating. We wait it out until it reaches maturity (Windows Vista, anyone?). Even though Power BI was officially released last year, it has been around for over five years. Power BI uses PowerPivot as its business intelligence engine. Microsoft built Power Pivot as an add-on to Excel in 2010. That tool alone was a game changer, allowing business analysts to quickly analyze hundreds of millions of rows of data, connected from multiple data sources, in a single place.

5. Power BI makes many reporting packages built in to enterprise applications irrelevant.

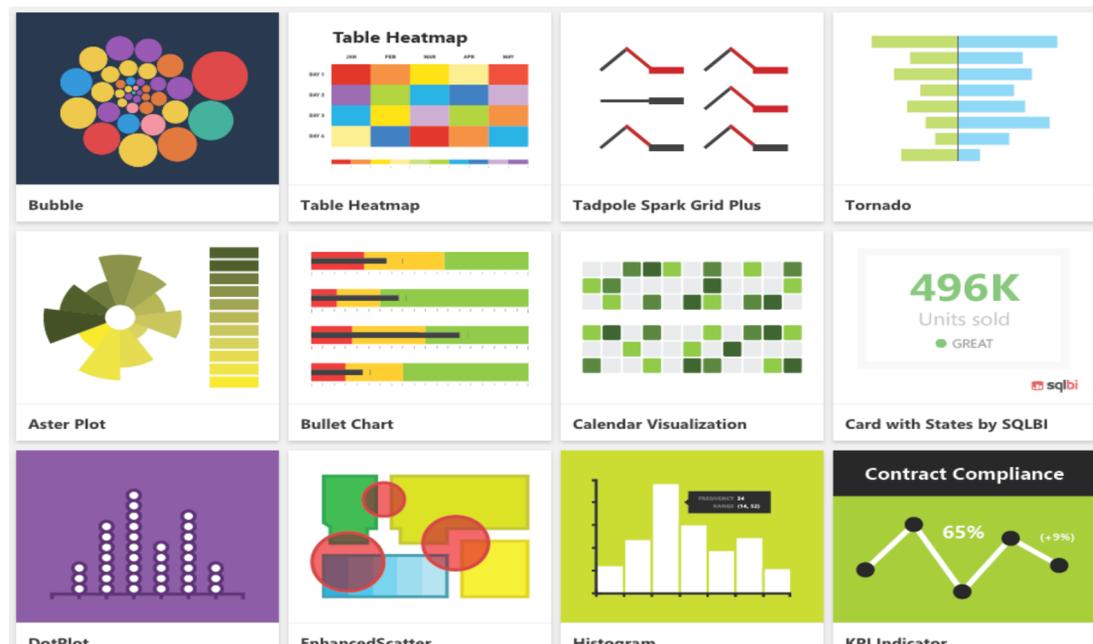
We work with many clients who have ERP and other systems in place. A common scenario we see is that our client seeks to get the vendor to add "built-in" reports in the application, because "out of the box" functionality doesn't suit their needs. Unfortunately, their desires are often frustrated by the inability of the software vendor to customize in a timely fashion. As long as the vendor can provide a connection to the data source, Power BI can give a company the ability to report on anything.

6. Power BI allows super simple sharing.

A major pain many of our clients face is sharing reporting, especially to get people focused on a simple company dashboard. Traditionally, sharing reporting has either been limited by the cumbersome nature of emailing around Excel reports, or, when business intelligence software is involved, sharing has been limited by expensive software licensing. Power BI now allows users to embed live reports in any web page. This is a miniature revolution in and of itself. The below is a simple healthcare report and is a live embed in this site:

7. Power BI offers fully customizable visualization options.

Out of the box, Power BI comes with many attractive visualization options, but Microsoft has introduced open source visualization development. You can access a library of [custom visualizations](#), or build your own. Here are several examples that can be downloaded and used with your own data:



8. Power BI is extremely cost effective.

The "engine" of Power BI – Power Pivot, Power Query, and Power View – is built into Excel 2016 and Excel 2013 ProPlus (and higher). The Desktop application is free. Power BI.com is also free for up to 1GB of data per month. More data costs \$10/mo per user. This is a very effective cost basis!

Power BI is perhaps Microsoft's most promising innovation in years. It can revolutionize how your company uses data, reducing the need for prolonged data development projects and allowing alternatives to very expensive licensing schemes for business intelligence software packages designed for the technology of ten years ago.

With a [free desktop app](#), and since you probably already own Excel, why not give it a try and report on something in your business? You might find that it takes your business intelligence efforts to an entirely new level.

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