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9 Common BI Software Mistakes (and How to Avoid Them)



Business intelligence experts and business leaders discuss the most common mistakes companies make when selecting and implementing a BI solution and what steps to take to avoid potential problems.



By [Jennifer Lonoff Schiff](#)

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According to Gartner, business intelligence and analytics will remain a top focus for CIOs through 2017, with companies spending millions on traditional BI software, cloud BI services and now mobile apps and even social BI. However, as the type and number of BI solutions has grown, so too has the possibility of failure, of picking the wrong business intelligence software for your business problem or problems or of having end users not understand or properly use the solution.

To help you avoid a potential costly mistake, and get the most out of your BI software investment, CIO.com has put together a list of nine most common mistakes organizations make in regard to selecting and implementing a business intelligence software solution -- and how you can avoid these mistakes.

BI Mistake No. 1: Not defining the business problem(s) you are trying to solve.

"Companies [should] not rush into leveraging any BI tools unless they have a distinct business case," says Scott Schlesinger, senior vice president and head of Business Information Management, North America.

"One of the biggest [mistakes in] pursuing an analytics initiative is jumping in too soon without clearly defining what it is the company wants to accomplish," Schlesinger says. "Companies will not be able to generate any real ROI if they don't outline the business case first and determining why and where leveraging big data makes the most sense in their operations."

"One of the biggest mistakes is buying for 'general capability' vs. solving a defined problem," says Charles Caldwell, director of Solutions Engineering and principal solutions architect at [Logi Analytics](#), a business intelligence company.

"Too many folks look for the one silver bullet tool that will solve all analytics problems they ever have without fully defining the immediate problem to solve. And that is why so many BI projects fail," Caldwell says. Instead, "start with the business problem to be solved, understand the specific capabilities required to solve those problems and then purchase the BI tool(s) that meet those specific needs."

BI Mistake No. 2: Not getting buy-in from end users (before you choose your BI solution)

"IT has a tendency to purchase BI tools in a vacuum, without first getting buy-in from the people ultimately expected to use them," says Joanna Schloss, business intelligence and analytics evangelist, [Dell Software](#). But "assuming employees will use newly purchased BI technologies simply because the organization is standardizing on them is a mistake," she continues.

"Even the best BI tools are ineffective if they're not utilized, and no amount of training or standardizing will convince people to use technology they don't feel benefits them personally," she explains. The solution: "Instead of telling employees they have to use something, help them clearly understand why they'll want to use it. Clearly articulate the value proposition and adoption will follow."

"Companies underestimate the difficulty in changing corporate cultures to accept and use the output of BI systems," adds Ray Major, chief strategist, [Halo Business Intelligence](#). "A successful implementation, regardless of which technology you choose, mandates that a company have both executive buy-in and end-user buy in. End-user buy-in requires a concerted and focused internal marketing and educational effort to highlight the benefits of the new BI system," he says. "To ensure successful adoption, companies can influence end-user behavior by tying individual employee goals to metrics driven results."

BI Mistake No. 3: Not factoring in security or legal requirements.

"Don't make the mistake of forgetting about data governance [when selecting your business intelligence solution]," says Steve Farr, senior manager, Product Marketing, [TIBCO Software](#), a provider of BI software. "Giving all the data to all the people and just letting them explore is unwise." To protect the company and your customers, "make sure your new BI system works in accordance with your company's data security policies and legal obligations."

BI Mistake No. 4: Being dazzled by features and forgetting about legacy systems and integration.

"Most companies evaluate BI [solutions] in terms of the features available in the tool, such as reporting and querying, dashboards, exploration and discovery, OLAP and analyses, data visualization, predictive analytics and performance management KPIs (e.g., balanced scorecards)," says Kiriti Mukherjee, director of Information Management, [Collaborative Consulting](#).

Yet they forget one very important feature: integration. "Integration with office applications (many tools integrate with Excel, but far fewer do so with Outlook), embedding BI objects in other applications or enterprise portals and integration with thin and thick clients, including with custom mobile devices," Mukherjee says.

They also forget about "integration capability with enterprise applications (such as ERP), cloud applications (Salesforce.com) or contextual services (MDM, DQ or external services such as D&B)," Mukherjee says. The point: While features are important, it is also important to make sure the BI solution you choose integrates well with your other business systems.

BI Mistake No. 5: Not choosing a solution that can scale and adapt.

"One of the biggest mistakes you can make is choosing a solution that's not agile," says Francois Ajenstat, director, Product Management. "At fast-moving, cutting-edge companies, self-service analytics are becoming the norm," he explains. "The monolithic infrastructure stack is crumbling in favor of solutions that can work with new data sources, and flexibility and usability from dashboards are key."

You also want to make sure the business intelligence solution you choose can grow, or adapt, to your business needs, so you do not have to look for a new BI solution right away.

BI Mistake No. 6: Not factoring in the mobile workforce.

"Many companies forget to consider mobility [when selecting a BI solution]," says Farr. However, "how we consume BI is as important as what we consume. In some cases a simple KPI displayed on a smartphone is as useful as all the paper-based reports in the world."

BI Mistake No. 7: Rushing implementation.

"A successful deployment is not always a rapid deployment, and a rapid deployment is not always a successful one," says Daniel J. Ronesi, director, Business of Law Services, [Aderant](#), a provider of legal software. When deploying a BI solution, patience is a virtue. "It is imperative that the implementation is not overly rushed so that sufficient time is set aside for training to ensure users are given the time to develop or acquire the skill sets needed to use the BI software effectively."

"Deploy your business intelligence software incrementally," advises Southard Jones, vice president of Product Strategy, [Birst](#), a provider of cloud-based BI solutions. "Rather than expecting to solve every business problem all at once, prioritize specific outcomes you want to achieve. When you have answered the first business problem, add on incrementally and be flexible in your approach," Jones says.

"Consider what answers will validate a recently introduced strategy or will have the biggest impact on your business operations," Jones says. "Then choose one as a starting point. While business intelligence can eventually answer all of your questions, don't expect all of the answers all at once."

BI Mistake No. 8: Insufficient training (and miscalculating the costs of training).

"Many organizations exhaust their BI budgets on software licenses and a few short weeks of training for their users," says Steve Litwin, president, [Litcom](#), a provider of IT consulting. However, "today's BI systems are complex structures that require far more training in order for users to be able to acquire genuine value from them. [And] ongoing training is [necessary] so that users become familiar and comfortable with the system," he says. "For example, organizations can host weekly lunch sessions where a different aspect of the BI system is discussed." In addition, organizations should make sure the software they install comes with online training videos that help users "become better acquainted with the new BI system."

BI Mistake No. 9: Not leveraging intelligence (collected data) and reporting.

"Some companies collect valuable information from their BI software, but then don't share it, analyze it or act on it," and that's a big mistake, says Joe Gerard, vice president, marketing and sales. "It's important to think outside the box when assessing what to do with BI. By leveraging the information gathered and applying it to their own business models, companies can avert risk and make informed decisions to drive their business forward."

BI software "can be used to report on many different data points, identify risks and opportunities and forecast trends," Gerard says. Yet "many companies become complacent with a pre-defined set of reports and don't take into account the changing business environment," he says. Instead, companies should "maximize the reporting capabilities of their [BI] software, [so that they are] better able to predict and head off problems and identify risks."

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