The rapid growth of Microsoft Business Intelligence & Power BI

Executive Interview - Rad Anandakumar

By [Will Howard](#)
Building Australia's largest Information & Analytics talent community

Over the past 18 months, there has been no doubt that the Microsoft BI offering has gone from strength to strength and since the turn of the year, this has been reflected by the growth in market share and the growth in staffing requirements that we are seeing for Microsoft BI professionals. Microsoft are now pushing BI stack hard, and investing vast quantities of time and money to establish their offering as a global leader. The product has evolved and matured massively in recent times and it's no surprise that they are now competing with the other leading vendors.

I recently caught up with Rad Anandakumar, Head of Business Intelligence for Tourism Australia and multiple small business investor. Rad has been with Tourism Australia for nearly 4 years and in that time has helped implement a globally award winning solution, with the help of Microsoft Partner of the Year 2015 winner, Bizdata. I asked Rad to share his thoughts on the product, its growth in the market and what the future may hold.

In your opinion, what is it about the Microsoft BI offering that has seen it gain large quantities of Australian market share from traditional tools such as Cognos and Business Objects? What makes them so appealing, and why does Microsoft's product offering appear to be maturing and adapting at a quicker rate than much of its competition?

I think there are multiple reasons for the growth of the Microsoft BI offering in the market. Firstly, the Microsoft BI offering allows for developers and analysts to execute projects with the tools quickly with relatively low overheads. The Microsoft BI eco-system is also very broad and can adapt and scale to solve a vast range of business problems or scenarios.

With regards to appeal, I think Microsoft's willingness to embrace Cloud BI and being one of the first companies in the market to really make it work and allow hybrid data sources has definitely helped set them apart from a lot of their competition. Cloud offerings such as cognitive services that allow companies to leverage API's inexpensively and do not require internal resources have also helped establish Microsoft as a leader in the Cloud BI space.
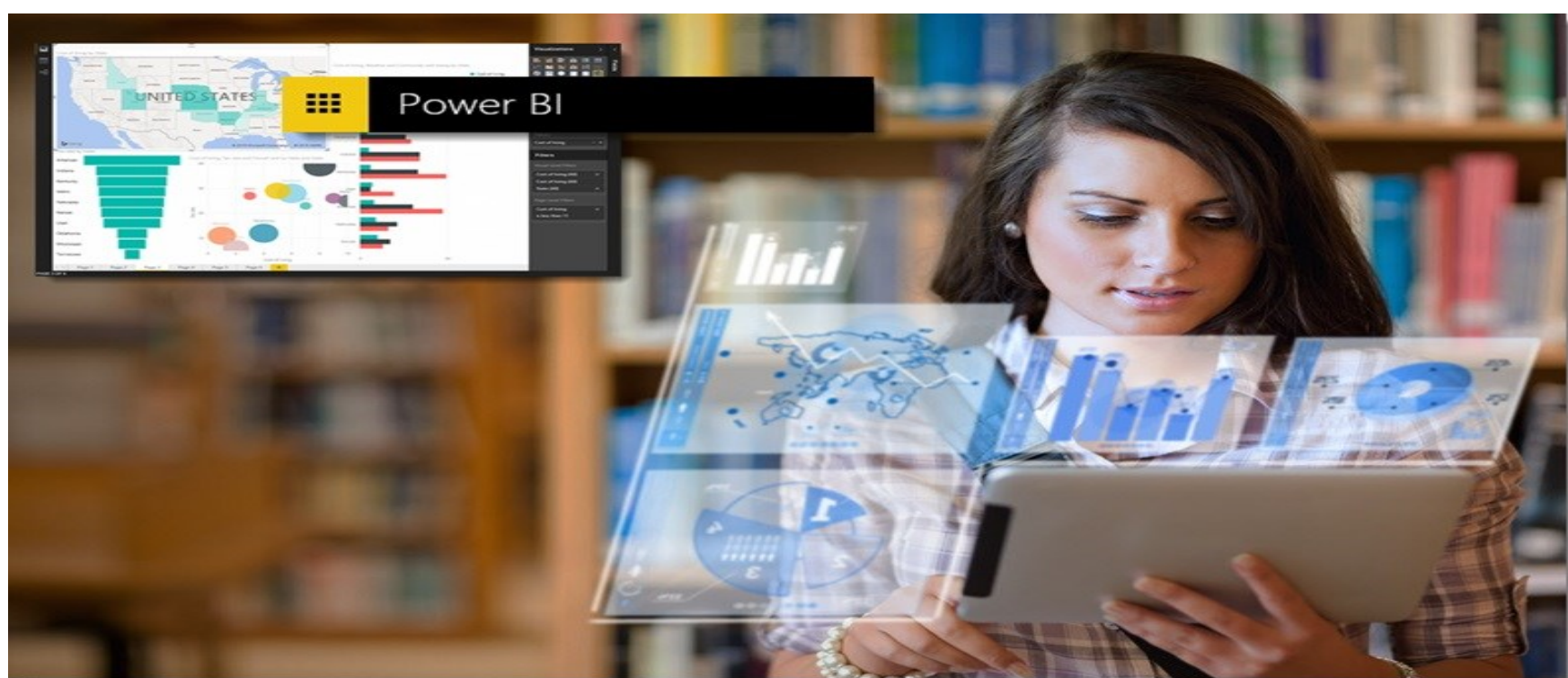
Power BI desktop and cloud solution allows Business Intelligence and Analytics to be accomplished by anyone and removes the bottleneck of IT. Power BI is extremely user friendly and also offers a full cloud based solution, comprised of many services that don't require a great deal of administration. The environment is becoming much more business focused, which is definitely a positive thing for the BI industry. The way that Microsoft have kept Power BI interface to a similar format to Excel makes it familiar for end-users to use. This has certainly helped with market growth, as Microsoft Office is so widely used globally.

Data visualisation is certainly flavour of the month. How is the PowerBI offering competing with the likes of Qlik and Tableau and what are the main benefits? What does the future hold for the Microsoft BI offering, and is there anything that you'd like to see added?

Power BI is now definitely comparable to the competition, however the difference is how Microsoft have open sourced the visuals stack to allow third parties to add to the library. The visuals that you can now utilise in Power BI are simply far more advanced. Synoptic panel being a great example.

Microsoft BI is listening to its community with a dedicated forum collecting information about user needs and a voting platform to prioritise future enhancements. There has been a huge cultural shift in the organisation and Microsoft have realised that by allowing open source upgrades and suggestions, it will allow Microsoft to continuously improve the product and out-perform their competition. I think that this is something that will see the Microsoft BI offering go from strength to strength and become the global leader in data visualisation in the next 12 months.

As a product, Power BI is evolving rapidly with monthly releases containing new enhancements and preview versions of visuals and analytics. This constant upgrading and enhancement of the product offering is not something that we are seeing from other vendors.

So what can we look forward to in the future?

As for the future, I believe we are in for an exciting ride over the next couple of years and expect to see the Microsoft BI offering go from strength to strength and establish itself as the world's leading BI toolset. Integration within analysis languages such as R and Python will become much tighter and there will be less emphasis on building out infrastructure (IaaS) for customers and more focus on gaining value out of the services.

I'd also like to see further integration with external data sets (a process that is already underway). Some further integrations I would like to see include LinkedIn, Outlook, Web Scraping Tools (like Import.io), Government Data Sources (like ABS), Xero for SME, Employee and Performance Management Software, Survey Software, Secure Bank Account connections, and home automation software connections (with possible feedback or write back functionalities). Non Microsoft stack integrations would also be bold and useful!

At the moment, deep dive analysis and flexible ad-hoc work are done through Excel; and interactive reports, visual exploration, exploratory analysis, presentations and dashboards are done through Power BI. I would like to see Excel and Power BI Desktop become more closely integrated and even rolled into the same product... this possibly appears to be the path down which Microsoft is heading.

Microsoft's goal is to "serve over a billion users with the Microsoft business intelligence (BI) platform," (https://blogs.technet.microsoft.com/dataplatforminsider/2015/10/29/microsoft-business-intelligence-our-reporting-roadmap/). Excel and Power BI Desktop in my opinion, will be used the same way, and as pervasively, as Excel is used today at most organisations. I'd be surprised if Power BI Desktop is not rolled into the O365 offering in the coming months/years – this will almost certainly allow them to achieve their target of 1bn users!