

A Strategic 8-Step Approach to Successful Business Intelligence Deployments



The Business Challenge:

Assumptions Made From Fragmented Data

Management's ability to consistently make timely and accurate business decisions—at both strategic and operational levels—is extremely influential in determining whether the company surpasses, or gets surpassed by, competitors. Yet for too many business executives, decision making is often based on incomplete, inaccurate, irrelevant, or stale information ... or on a gut feel approach that lacks replication, predictability, and scale of successful outcomes.

Compounding that is the fact that organizations often possess volumes of valuable data, albeit in different repositories like customer data in the CRM system, product and sales data in the ERP system, business plan and budget data in spreadsheets, and so on. Only when the data is consolidated can relationships, patterns, and insight be discovered.

The Business Solution:

Insights Driven by Curated Data

To better execute business strategies and outperform competitors, business leaders are pursuing a combination of processes and business intelligence (BI) software tools that synergize to better source, aggregate, contextualize, and deliver timely business details to knowledge workers, operational managers, and decision makers throughout the enterprise.

What's optimum to start with is a curated data set that's organized, managed, enriched, and inclusive of business logic and data correction rules. This ensures that the data accessed by users is relevant,

accessible, and high quality. It minimizes the risk of analysts making incorrect assumptions or coming to faulty conclusions about the state of business operations.

A curated data set also serves as that “single version of the truth” that everyone goes to for analyzing business information rather than creating their own calculations from various “siloes” sources of information with numbers that don't always match.

Beyond curated data, today's decision makers also need solutions that allow them to spend less time retrieving and compiling historical information and more time analyzing information that supports their most pressing business initiatives. Such solutions also enable them to better plan for the future, quickly identify areas that need attention, and systemically deliver insight to key stakeholders to improve decisions.

Raise the Bar with Your BI Deployment

Considering a move to a strategic business intelligence solution? We encourage you to consider the following 8-Step Strategic approach to achieve predictable outcomes.

1. [Verify the Need for Change](#)
2. [Quantify Stakeholder Objectives](#)
3. [Dedicate Resources](#)
4. [Determine the Most Salient Metrics](#)
5. [Select Your Tools / Vendor](#)
6. [Clean Your Data](#)
7. [Pursue a Phased Approach](#)
8. [Measure & Refine to Boost ROI](#)

[More to Consider...](#)



Where to Begin? Verify the Need For Change & Quantify Stakeholder Objectives



Step 1: Verify the Need For Change

Successful BI deployments are driven by a pressure (or need) to change. Only when the opportunity associated with better decisions (or the pain of poor decisions) is clearly recognized will enough pressure exist to go the distance with a BI solution.



You should define up front what the problems are that you're trying to solve, especially as they relate to the first stage of a new BI and reporting solution implementation. Then, determine the benefits you expect to receive in solving those problems. If you focus on identifying your issues, you'll be better able to identify the best solution for meeting your present-day and future needs.

Step 2: Quantify Stakeholder Objectives

In determining stakeholder objectives it's necessary to first define your stakeholders. As with all enterprise software deployments, visible and vocal executive sponsorship is a must, so soliciting executive team expectations early is paramount.

Beyond that, if you're beginning with a departmental or line of business project, your stakeholders will likely include those business unit directors or managerial staff as well as line managers and support staff who are held to performance standards which materially affect the departments' measurable objectives.

Each of these roles holds relevant firsthand information, is key to a successful deployment, and must be afforded the opportunity to identify their objectives. This human-centered approach to evaluating project needs helps you understand and manage user expectations, preventing possible issues in later project stages when seeking user adoption of the rolled-out solution. Not all objectives may make project scope, but all should be surfaced, heard, and considered.

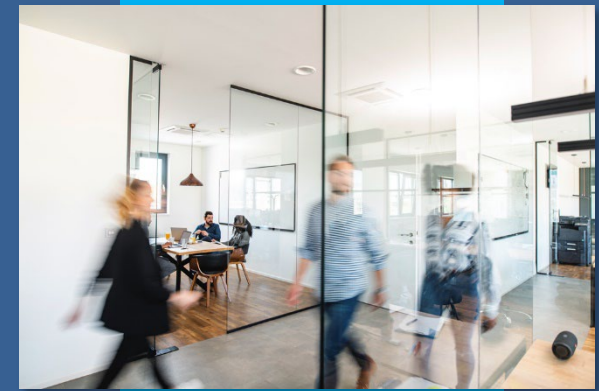
Collecting Your Analysis Objectives

Here are some examples of measurable objectives your stakeholders may identify in Step 2. These are goals that can be addressed with guidance from an advanced business intelligence and reporting solution.



- **Revenue Growth:** Increase revenue by 20% over the next fiscal year.
- **Cost Reduction:** Reduce operational costs by 15% within six months.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** Improve customer satisfaction score by 10% in the next quarter.
- **Sales Performance:** Boost sales performance by 30% in the next quarter.
- **Time to Market:** Reduce time to market for new products by 20%.

People Power for Your Project: Choose a Dedicated & Balanced Team of the Right Resources



Step 3: Dedicate Resources

While executives and decision makers seek business intelligence solutions that can be configured, tailored, and used without much IT involvement, it's a mistake to select or attempt to implement a BI product without IT participation. IT understands data complexities that may not be apparent to other lines of business, and they can shed light on potential challenges.

Even with Software as a Service (SaaS) BI solutions, which are easily provisioned on-demand and more quickly deployed, BI requires data cleansing, data staging and transfer, and integrating and consolidating data from several disparate information systems and technologies. These tasks will certainly benefit from technical talent on the IT team, at least during the initial stages of the BI system's implementation.

Similarly, BI solutions must align with business objectives, focus on business requirements, and deliver business and operational insight. Therefore, BI deployments should not be IT driven. Business intelligence is best accomplished by leveraging the highest and best skills from both IT and business staff, and ultimately results in a symbiotic relationship as each side is dependent upon the other for success.

BI tools are not just for top executives or a privileged few. The goal is to connect as many operational decision makers with operational data as possible. Wider participation leads to better decisions at more levels in the organization, increased operational alignment with the company's top strategic goals, and a culture of learning. Consider naming a cross-functional team or committee to define the information strategy and decision support roadmap.

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For additional best practices, get Silvon's definitive guide:

[**How to Successfully Onboard a New Business Intelligence and Reporting Application.**](#)



What Conditions Will Be Monitored? Identify Important Metrics



“KPI’s must be aligned with the business imperatives they are benchmarking.... It’s key to have fewer (more relevant) metrics than trying to measure everything.”

View [Silvon’s KPI guide](#) to learn more.

Step 4: Determine The Most Salient Metrics

Identifying the key performance indicators (KPIs) which are most influential in advancing business objectives is a pre-requisite to a successful BI program. KPIs must be aligned with the business imperatives that they are benchmarking. It's critical to make sure you measure KPIs that really drive performance, and not measures which are easily retrievable or traditionally reported.

Identifying the right performance metrics is not a one-time event. As business plans, budgets, and management directives change so too will the performance metrics which align to those objectives.

Focus on Mission Critical Performance Trends

To stay abreast with changing business conditions, new opportunities and competitive threats, business leaders must implement a process of continuous review to reaffirm, adjust, or replace metrics and see to it that the metrics measured are optimal for achieving the missions with which they are aligned. It's during this review process that many managers identify new business drivers for the first time.

Performance metrics are unique and highly dependent upon individual business goals; however, several performance indicators are common across industries. It's key to have fewer (more relevant) metrics than trying to measure everything that can be measured. Be focused and discerning. Also, be sure your KPIs are balanced across the business to eliminate conflict.



A Decision Milestone: Choosing Your Analytic Tools & Vendor



Step 5: Select Your Tools & Vendor Partner

When selecting your business intelligence tool and vendor, you should consider both the technology available to you in the solution along with the vendor's expertise.

A business intelligence platform should include all the tools needed to manage data automatically and support multiple ways for users to access and visualize the data. Plus, your vendor should possess not only technical expertise, but domain expertise in your specific industry.

Consolidating data into a central system is an analytics best practice – giving you the means to achieve a system of record and avoid inherent problems associated with disparate and redundant data, including potentially conflicting data or multiple versions of the truth. A [central data hub](#) like the one offered in Silvon's Stratum™ solution will ease data extraction, integration, reporting, and deliverability as well as system administration. Information doesn't need to be delivered in real-time as much as it does in right-time. Real-time may be necessary to capitalize on short term opportunities, however, less frequent periodic data refreshes may be fine for monitoring more strategic efforts.

BI software solutions vary greatly in terms of scope, target market, delivery model, and value proposition. A proper software selection project is your best assurance to make sure you acquire the analytics system that best matches your business requirements and objectives.

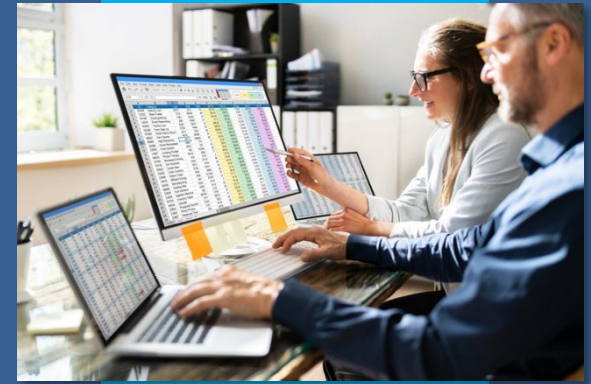
“A central data hub like the one offered in Silvon Stratum's™ solution will ease data extraction, integration, reporting, and deliverability as well as system administration.”

Visit Silvon's website to learn more:

[Silvon's Modern Data Hub for Secure Data Management & Ad-Hoc Reporting.](#)



Trusting What You See: Proactively Cleanup Data to Ensure Its Quality & Reliability



Step 6: Clean Your Data

We've all heard it – GIGO – Garbage In Garbage Out. Nowhere is this more absolute than with BI projects. Dirty data is the top cause of BI project delays. Few organizations anticipate the data quality issues, and subsequent data cleaning requirements, before they initiate the data population phase. To avoid this repeated mistake, sample each of your data sources early to determine data quality and allow for the needed time to scrub the data before it's imported to the data hub.



Data quality is vital to making quality decisions. It's an essential aspect that must be thoroughly reviewed when implementing a BI solution for the data consumers of your organization. However, it must also be an on-going process that's regularly reviewed as your business changes – whether by acquisitions, product restructuring, etc. Business procedures and data transformation rules need to be established and strictly followed to help ensure the highest quality of data.

Improving the Quality of Your Data

Some things to consider when examining the quality of data:

- **Consistency of Aggregated Data** – Watch for the consistent treatment of items such as customer and product numbers. For example, when reviewing data by National Accounts – are all *Sold-To's* correctly aggregating to the same National Account? Did one of your key customers acquire a competitor (which you previously sold to directly) and are you including those sales dollars? What business procedures need to be set-up so that this information is applied to the data?
- **Building Awareness of What Data Represents** – Does everyone understand the definition of '*Net Sales*'? Here again, the data needs to be consistent and understood by all users. Silvon's Stratum™ solution has a built-in glossary that administrators can customize with descriptions that help users understand what every object in your data model, like Net Sales, represents.
- **Cross-Referencing Across Sources** – If you plan to analyze POS data – are the product numbers used by your partners being correctly cross-referenced to your internal product / material numbers? Are transactions being rejected and not included in calculations?

Considerations for Rollout: Pursue a Phased Approach, then Measure & Refine for Sustained Success



Step 7: Pursue a Phased Approach

Scope your project to make sure you focus on the highest value items first. Then, when you're rolling out the BI solution, we've found it most effective to do so with a small set of users who can help validate the data and figure out what issues you may have. Any data that needs additional cleanup should be addressed after that. Otherwise, if users are suspicious about the accuracy of the data, you won't get the adoption you need.

Once rolled out successfully, you can then look at the next phase and make sure you define the scope and what the benefits of the phase will be. Since BI systems are not static in nature, you should have quarterly reviews to see what other changes you should make to maximize the benefit you receive.

- After achieving success, methodically expand your rollouts to include more business units and integration with more information systems or the addition of more types of data.
- Also recognize that seldom do performance variables and factors for even departmental objectives reside entirely within a department. Instead, process flows traverse departments; and often, data resides in redundant operational silos.

Even with a goal to start small and advance in phases, the project should commence with the end in mind. Decision makers in any area must understand the enterprise-wide impact of their decisions.

Step 8: Measure & Refine to Boost ROI

Measurement should begin by actively tracking staff utilization of the BI tools. User adoption will grow over time so tracking who's accessing the tools and the volume of users over time will provide an early indicator toward ROI.

Information analysis reveals learning and insight; however, it also raises more questions than answers, thereby requiring extending the data models for new interrogation of the data, inserting new measures or dimensions to discover new relationships, displaying the data differently for various data consumer roles, and contextualizing the data to make it more actionable.

For sustained success, companies should implement a formal process whereby performance metrics are faithfully measured and learned from—and modified or adapted based on that learning or as the business shifts.



Raise The Bar With Your BI Solution: Follow-on Initiatives to Consider



Ideas For Maximizing Your BI Solution's Impact

Making better business decisions throughout the enterprise is a perpetual journey. Here are some additional follow-on initiatives that you may want to consider for your BI project:

Granting information dissemination to more people or increasing cross-functional information exchange among more lines of business. The goal is to democratize BI analysis throughout the business and improve the speed or timeliness of information delivery. However, not all information needs to be real-time, so align information types with the need for speed.

Implementing alert notifications. These notifications are normally delivered in real-time upon a performance metric threshold value being exceeded—and can provide management the opportunity to remedy a performance deviation before it gets out of hand.

Tailoring data visualization by roles, and experimenting with new information delivery tools, be it new forms of dashboards or tools that permit new methods of slicing and dicing data, possibly by dragging-and-dropping data results with new measures.

Stepping up your BI initiative to include predictive modeling and analysis. This type of analysis uses technology to discover hidden patterns and support 'what-if' scenarios or pro forma modeling. Being able to accurately forecast the effects of new or proposed efforts is a powerful tool in allocating budget and scarce resources among competing alternatives.

Checking out self-service BI solutions, which put powerful but easy to use analysis and reporting capabilities into the hands of staff. This can be an ideal method to keep up with users' growing information demands while minimizing support by often under-staffed IT resources.

In Summary: Takeaway Points

When pursued strategically, analytics and business intelligence solutions apply more relevant information to decisions, involve more contributors in decision-making processes, and reach better decisions in less time. If you improve the quality of your decision-making processes, you will improve the overall execution of your business objectives. Reach out to Silvon at info@silvon.com for more info about the topics in this paper.

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Silvon helps their clients improve operational-level visibility and subsequently drive a more intelligent – and successful – enterprise. We accomplish this through strong partnerships with our clients and strategic, long-term plans that we jointly create to address their enterprise reporting requirements.