

10 Questions to Ask
Before Buying BI



INSIGHTSQUARED

Introduction

Business Intelligence can transform a company's future by empowering its leaders to make more informed decisions and identify unexplored opportunities. But these game-changing results hinge on your ability to find the right solution for your particular circumstance, stage and industry. And this task is becoming more challenging every day: The BI landscape is more crowded and diverse than ever, and BI itself is now just as essential for young, growing organizations as it is for Fortune 500 companies.

But not everyone has kept up. Many small and medium businesses (SMBs) are apprehensive about dipping their toes in the BI waters because they don't fully understand the nuances and value propositions of the widening range of options. What solution is best for them? What are the features they should be looking for? What are some common pitfalls or red flags that could jeopardize their chances of achieving full adoption and obtaining real, actionable results?

This whitepaper sets out to end this confusion. Filled with the 10 questions all **executives at SMBs should ask potential BI vendors before purchasing a solution**, it is designed to arm executives with the information they need to make the most informed BI decision. Drawing on conversations with CIOs, IT directors, administrators and engineers, "10 Questions to Ask Before Buying BI" will help you navigate the BI landscape and find the perfect solution for you – regardless of your company's size or industry.

Finding the Right Solution for Your Business

Buying a BI solution is not something you should take lightly. Done right, this decision could transform the way you run your business. Done wrong, it could sap thousands of dollars, waste countless hours and never provide a shred of meaningful data. That's why, before you sign on the dotted line, you should ask all prospective vendors these 10 questions.

1. What were the implementation times of the last 10 customers?

Odds are, if you're considering buying BI you have a relatively urgent need for it. If that's the case, you should make sure you ask a prospective vendor exactly how long it takes to get their product up and running. Not simply installed on your computers, but **actually integrated into your process and analyzing your own data.**

Be wary here, though – vendors are liable to fudge or underreport this number if they can. Implementation time is often the Achilles heel of BI, so it is an understandably sensitive issue for many vendors. If possible, ask for phone numbers of current customers to get a truly accurate figure. You'd be surprised how long many BI solutions take before they return a single piece of meaningful analysis.

2. How easy is it to pull data from multiple sources?

Modern businesses rarely rely on a single CRM or data source. Instead, they are built around a complex web of business software: sales data sources, marketing automation systems, customer support software, etc., etc. Unless you want to buy multiple BI solutions to match up with your various data sources, you should **ask a prospective vendor how their solution handles and integrates data from multiple sources.**

3. How easy is it to generate a report from multiple data sources?

This should be a follow-up question to the one above. The real value of BI lies not only in its ability to pull data from multiple sources, but also in its ability to **create meaningful, coherent reports with that data.** If it is difficult, expensive or impossible to create a single report that tells a clear story using data from multiple sources – Sales and Marketing data, for example – your BI solution will provide limited value and adoption will suffer.

4. How much training will it take to get an average, non-technical person successfully using your software?

BI solutions always look amazing when they're demoed by experienced sales reps trained rigorously on how to use them effectively. But this ease and expertise probably won't be the case once you bring the solution to your own company – at least not at first. Therefore, you should ask the vendor **how much training is required to get a typical businessperson up to speed**. The answer should be zero.

5. What is the Total Cost of Ownership of your solution?

A BI solution's true cost is rarely what's displayed on the price tag. Instead, you're likely to pay for an ever-expanding list of additional services and features. Do you need to bring on an employee just to operate the BI solution? Will you need constant (and costly) help from the vendor's own staff of consultants and experts? Are there other components (not included in the product you were shown) that are necessary for getting the most from the solution? How much ongoing configuration or assistance is required, either from the vendor itself or from an integrator? Again, this is a question that some vendors try to gloss over or obscure, so you may want to ask for the average TCO for the last 10 customers. And be wary: TCO is often 5x – 10x the sticker price...per year.

6. What kind of support do you offer, and how do I get it?

Business Intelligence is complicated, and most companies that rely on it need help every once in a while. The question is: **What will the process for getting assistance look like?** Will you have to schedule it far in advance? Will you be connected directly with someone who can help you, or will you have to navigate a complex web of middlemen?

Furthermore, it is important to understand the process for building custom dashboards, which are critical for both adoption and convenience. Support in designing and implementing these dashboards can be complicated, so you will likely need support in-house or from the vendor. How convenient or expensive will this process be?

7. Can I try your software with my data before I buy?

You wouldn't buy a new car without taking it for a test drive, would you? So why do so many companies shell out thousands of dollars for BI without first seeing how it works in the real world? Before you purchase BI, make sure you spend a significant amount of time using the software (in a variety of different settings) to make sure it suits your needs and fits your use case.

It's not enough to get a demo with generic data, though. **Make sure you can try out the software with your own data** so you know exactly what it will be like if you ultimately buy the software.

8. How frequently is data refreshed?

Stale data is almost as dangerous for decision-making bad as no data at all. Ask any potential vendor how frequently data is refreshed – Daily? Hourly? Real-time?

9. How long does the average report take to load?

Reports that take more than a few seconds to load are reports you will never look at. No one has the time to sit idly as a report loads. Ask for a clear answer to this question, or better yet, test it yourself during the trial period (if you get one!). **Put a filter on a report and wait for it to load.** If it takes more than 2-4 seconds, the solution will not be used by busy businesspeople and the project will ultimately fail.

10. How can I share a report?

The whole point of BI is to get useful information to the people who need it. If you can't hit "share," add a note, and send a report easily, the solution won't get adopted, information will remain siloed, and the project will fail.

Conclusion

As the BI landscape has become more crowded and varied, it has become even more difficult for companies to find the right solution their particular circumstances. And this poses a real problem: **The wrong BI solution is worse than no solution at all** – it will sap thousands of dollars and work hours from your business and obscure rather than illuminate.

Because of this, it is more important than ever for anyone considering BI to know the right questions to ask. Hopefully this whitepaper helped you identify and understand these questions so you can feel confident that you are making the right decision.

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InsightSquared is the #1 Salesforce Analytics product for small and midsize businesses (SMB). Unlike legacy business intelligence platforms, InsightSquared can be deployed affordably in less than a day without any integration costs and comes preloaded with reports that real business people can use. Hundreds of companies and thousands of users around the world use InsightSquared's award-winning analytics to maximize sales performance, increase team productivity and close more deals. If you want to see how InsightSquared can help you, request a FREE trial today.

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