Cloud Business Intelligence Trends to Watch
For the Business intelligence and analytics industry, there were many successes and hypes during 2012. Big data was arguably the star of 2012, but there are some additional progressions for the next 12 months, including Mobile BI and cloud. In this E-Guide, learn about the upcoming cloud business intelligence trends and how they may apply to your organization.

Cloud, Mobile Top Gartner’s List of Big Trends in Business Intelligence

While December tends to mark the end of one chapter and the beginning of another the following month, don’t be surprised if New Year’s resolutions for business intelligence and analytics practitioners sound awfully familiar to last year’s.

That conclusion is based on the Hype Cycle for Business Intelligence report published by Gartner Inc., of Stamford, Conn. It’s one of many where analysts and researchers select technologies within a specific category ranging from the most talked about to the most utilized and chart them along a timeline that includes the typical peak and valley of maturation.

"It’s an overview of what’s happening in the greater scheme of things," said Andreas Bitterer, research vice president and lead analyst for this year’s business intelligence (BI) hype cycle, "and a way to benchmark your own program."

This year is no different, and, because the reports tend to be published in late summer, they help provide a mid-year perspective on how industry conversations are -- or are not -- evolving. Comparisons between last year’s hype cycle and this year’s indicate some progression for trends in business intelligence: Mobile BI, which was added to the cycle only a few years ago, continues to inch along; in addition, two newcomers have been added: a data management architecture concept Gartner calls the logical data warehouse (see "Gartner’s logical data warehouse" sidebar) and an information
capabilities framework, which refers to the alignment of the data infrastructure across the enterprise.

But even the two new hype cycle entrants reflect the same struggles businesses have been dealing with since analytics and BI began -- how to manage data effectively and how to create consistency across the enterprise.

Specifically, Bitterer has observed a growing interest among businesses in the information capabilities framework concept. While they may be familiar with some BI processes, businesses tend to fall down when developing a model for dealing with semantics. Without precise terminology adopted by the entire enterprise, organizations face great difficulty trying to accurately define simple things like customer, product or supplier -- and that makes it difficult when measuring and reporting on financial metrics.

"There are many difficulties within organizations to understand what the data actually means to them," Bitterer said. "And there's a push to really understand the data -- that there's a consistency there and governance there. It's a big trend, and it's painful for organizations."

In fact, language may be one of the quieter trends this year. Freshman technologies entering the hype cycle in 2012, rather than offering new technical capabilities, are instead focused on "innovations in semantics and 'information understanding.'"

The need for clarity is driving businesses to have conversations, define terms and create dictionaries that tie back into the BI platform for users, Bitterer said. But, it's a construction that's easier said than done. For many companies, the problem tends to be an amorphous one. Organizations aren't sure where to start, especially because they can't solve the issue by throwing technology at it.

To help the situation, companies also need governance, Bitterer said, a topic that can churn up resistance from siloed departments that are used to doing things a certain way.
Still, Bitterer said, "There's just no alternative to doing it. … [It] needs to get done."

Four big trends in BI
The report identifies four technologies Gartner believes marks the year's biggest trends: information, mobile, social and cloud.

The list, at first glance, feels vague and even obvious -- information management, mobile BI, social media analytics and the cloud are not fresh concepts. But one of the biggest challenges practitioners face is the regularity and -- even more significantly -- the rate at which the BI and analytics terrain evolves, according to Bitterer.

Take information, for example. It has been a consistent staple of BI and analytics programs. But in the context of this year's hype cycle, information doesn't refer to the type of data businesses are generally familiar with, such as transaction, product or sales data. Instead, it's referring to modern challenges the data is presenting: new sources of information such as sensor, seismic and meteorological as well as the speed at which it moves.

"That's where the whole 'big data' hype started," Bitterer said. "It's about other data and not just the data in your database."

Social and cloud may make for great talk, but the technologies are rarely deployed. While vendors such as MicroStrategy are pushing BI in the cloud, the deployment numbers are low. That's because most businesses are still wary of the technology -- and it calls up trust, technological and legal issues. Meanwhile, businesses continue to question the value of sentiment analysis on social media. Instead, organizations are keeping that kind of analysis at arm's length "because there's so much noise out there," Bitterer said.

The world of analytics and BI, though, looks different through a mobile BI lens. "That's probably the biggest trend in BI," Bitterer said.

These days, vendors are rolling out new and updated editions to software under a "mobile first" initiative, specifically designed for tablets, that can be
scaled up to a PC and down to a smartphone. Mobile devices provide an intuitive platform for dashboards and reporting opportunities and provide the appropriate user with the appropriate data at the appropriate place and time, according to the report.

**Note to Self: Business Intelligence, Analytics Trends to Watch in 2013**

For the business intelligence and analytics industry, the New Year doesn't mean pushing the reset button. Instead, it'll continue to ride the wave of niche and mainstream successes it saw in 2012 -- none more prominent than the role of analytics in the presidential election.

"It's a good time to be a nerd," said Jeff Zeanah, president of the Atlanta, Ga.-based consultancy Z Solutions Inc. "The economy, by all accounts, is going to be slow in its recovery. And having to think harder about how to run your business is a real positive for the field of analytics."

As a new year marches forward, buzzwords that swallowed the spotlight in 2012 like "big data" will continue to have a presence, but not without those old, persistent standbys like data quality, according to analysts and consultants. Here are a few trends to keep an eye on.

**Big data, big hype**

Big data was arguably the star of 2012. The topic headlined a slew of industry-related conferences and the media just couldn't get enough. Yes, the year brought more big data buzz, but it also brought skepticism. "I smirk to myself when people talk about it," Zeanah said. "I wonder at what point when they actually get big data [will they begin to] wonder what the heck they're going to do with it."

Experts agreed that big data exists, but they still question its significance and lack of focus. "We're not talking about one thing," said Howard Dresner, founder and chief research officer for the Nashua, N.H.-based Dresner
Advisory Services LLC. "We need to sort this out as an industry and be a little bit clearer [about what it is]."

Skepticism can be healthy and may indicate big data has turned a corner. "In Gartner terms, it has probably hit the top of the hype cycle and it is coming on the back side of that into reality," said Rita Sallam, a research vice president for IT research firm Gartner Inc. of Stamford, Conn.

Businesses will spend time in 2013 figuring out what it is and isn't, what challenges it presents, where the real value is, and how they'll need to evolve -- architecturally and culturally -- to tap into that value.

**Call it reengineering**

Big data gobbled up the media's attention in 2012, but Zeanah also spotted a more positive, if less glamorous, pattern of integrating analytics into the business -- a pattern he labeled reengineering.

"The real trend I'm seeing is the surprising number of relatively small, successful implementations in all sorts of processes, issues and management decisions," he said.

Increasingly, businesses are grasping onto analytics and data-driven decisions as a way to be more efficient and save money. Whether it's become a more accepted approach, or is simply a way to be budget conscious, businesses are asking better questions when it comes to business intelligence (BI) and analytics, according to Zeanah, and will continue to do so.

Reengineering is a trend that hasn't seen as much attention as big data, but it's an indicator that analytics and BI continue to be a priority for businesses, he said.

**Consumerization: More, better, faster**

Like big data, the consumerization of IT is a concept rather than an actual technology, experts expect the clamor for devices and applications that can cross the personal/professional divide to continue. Tablets and smartphones
are an undeniable example of this, but less obvious are demands for more access to data and a better means to query data.

Brought on by the prevalence and speed of search engines like Google and easy-to-use applications to visualize data, employees are entering the workforce with expectations influenced by their own experiences.

Businesses, Sallam said, are responding, but they’re not the only ones.

For four years now, products from vendors like QlikTech, Tableau and Tibco Spotfire have ruled the data visualization roost, providing software that helps businesses quickly see their data in context. But 2012 saw competition from mega vendors like IBM and Microsoft. "That's what you'll start to see in the next year -- a battle back in the enterprise," she said. "It's the beginnings of a huge shift in the competitive dynamics."

'Play it again, Sam'

Trends for BI and analytics may sound brash and cutting-edge, but for businesses to see success with the new, they'll still need to master the old. Issues of data quality, data governance and data integration, in other words, will remain topical, according to experts.

Zeanah pointed to the presidential election and hoped it sent a powerful -- if apolitical -- message to businesses. While Obama’s win has been attributed in part to better get-out-the-vote efforts, it's also been characterized as an analytics battle.

"It sounds to me like one group did a better job of collecting data," he said. "And better data gets better results. That continues to be an unfortunately overlooked aspect of the whole business."

The same applies to collaborative BI, which is still a hot topic for businesses. While software can help employees pass and share information, the hurdle for successful adoption has been -- and still is -- a cultural one, according to Dresner. Businesses will need to address that barrier before deploying software.
"If you've got a collaborative culture, than collaborative technology is an enabler," he said. "And if you don't, it can be a disruption."

**Cloud: An inevitable disruption**

When Dresner surveyed businesses in 2012 on use of the cloud, interest was, perhaps not surprisingly, lackluster. "Change is hard for all of us," he said. "[And] the cloud is really disruptive, especially for IT."

Businesses still have doubts about reliability, performance, availability, security and privacy, especially in the wake of high-profile outages. While these issues need to be addressed, Dresner believes the transition is inevitable. "Ultimately, we end up in the cloud," he said.

Just don't expect a stampede in 2013, according to Sallam. The rate of adoption will be gradual as big data and cloud product offerings mature and become more entwined. Sallam pointed to Google BigQuery, a Web service for managing and analyzing large data sets, and Amazon RedShift, a petabyte-scale data warehousing service, as examples.

"I don't think it's a matter of 'if', but 'when'," Sallam said. "[But] it's probably not going to become mainstream in 2013."
Contents
Cloud, Mobile Top
Gartner's List of Big
Trends in Business
Intelligence
Note to Self: Business
Intelligence, Analytics
Trends to Watch in
2013

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Contents

Cloud, Mobile Top
Gartner’s List of Big Trends in Business Intelligence

Note to Self: Business Intelligence, Analytics Trends to Watch in 2013