BI predictions and trends for 2013

By Johan Jurd   28 Jan 2013

I've been spending time recently looking ahead to 2013 and thinking about the new technologies and trends that we can expect to see more of this year. Business intelligence (BI) has come a long way over the last several decades, transforming from a back-office process to a technology utilised by every enterprise department.

These sophisticated uses, such as relying upon BI tools to predict inventory before the holiday shopping season, or using the technology to analyse consumer sentiment before a significant product launch, are really the future of our industry. I'm excited to be playing a part in the deployment.

With that in mind, here's a look at the top six trends that I predict for 2013:

1. Giving BI a voice: The technology available today is actually ahead of current industry demand in some ways. For example, the plethora of new smartphones, tablets and PCs available in today's market has the ability to take and receive voice instruction, as illustrated by the Apple Siri programme, and BI could easily be incorporated into that conversation.

For example, let's say I ask: "Who was the sales person who sold the most blue widgets last month?" I could get back a voice response: "John Doe in Cincinatti." And, better yet, I could also receive a short message that includes John Doe's picture and biography. The only difference between this query and all of the other Siri queries is that BI gets its information from business records.

Translating the voice query to an SQL request is the only task remaining and lots of work has been done in this area already. So, I predict that sometime in 2013 we will see voice added to the BI stack of options.

2. Predictive analytics: Maybe it's due to the popularity of "Moneyball", but predictive analytics is hot and will only get hotter in the coming year. There is a variety of enterprise functions benefitting from the technology, including sales and marketing. The popularity of social media, the proliferation of mobile, and other industry trends are giving rise to new marketing channels for companies to communicate with current and potential customers.

These multichannel marketing strategies are resulting in a wealth of data - both structured and unstructured - that, when properly analysed, can be used to target existing customers better, reach new markets and streamline efforts. In 2013, I expect we will see more companies mining their multichannel marketing data to remain competitive and better predict who their customers are, the products or services that they want, their online and offline actions, and what they need to continue being a customer.

3. Sentiment analysis: In today's socially networked world, it is becoming increasingly common for consumers to learn about a product or service-and begin to form an opinion about it -via a social site or blog. In fact, a recent study in the Harvard Business Review found that more than 60% of a typical purchasing decision now happens before the buyer ever interacts with the supplier.

As such, it is incredibly important that organisations be able to discover what people are saying about their product, service, marketing initiative and any other area that reflects upon their brand, so that they're better able to respond to these conversations in real time.

Many BI providers have incorporated sentiment analysis capabilities into their solution sets, making it relatively easy for organisations to mine for this information as part of their existing analysis activities, which is why I believe we'll see continued adoption in the year ahead.

4. Big data: Predicting that Big Data will be a focus for 2013 may seem a bit obvious, as this has been a key area of growth for our industry for several years. However, because so many other emerging trends are reliant upon the science of Big Data, I think that we will see significant enhancements to this area in the coming year. Those enhancements will come in the form of improved Big Data management tools, with one such tool being data stores.

Although many BI vendors currently offer their own embedded data stores, and these solutions have offered some short-term relief, many are either limited in scalability or require huge proprietary hardware appliances to support Big Data. As we move into a world in which Big Data management is increasingly important, we'll see that begin to change.

5. Mobile BI: There are two aspects of the mobile BI revolution: empowering employees to conduct real-time analysis regardless of their physical location, and mining smartphone and tablet data to develop a more holistic understanding of the customer, the market, the workforce, etc. As these both become more prevalent, there will also be an increased demand for data quality and data integration tools to ensure that information is properly cleansed and combined for mobile analysis.

In the same vein as mobile BI, I also expect that we'll see the continued "consumerisation" of BI in the sense that more organisations will use BI tools to provide employees, customers and partners with applications that enable self-guided exploration of the information that matters to them most. Following this trend, we can expect to see something akin to a "BI app store" to control and curate apps by role, which will allow content to be distributed accordingly. All of these trends will eventually revolutionise how information is distributed throughout the enterprise.

6. Embedded BI: To harness the above trends and other benefits of BI without investing in significant new infrastructure, more and more organisations are embedding BI capabilities into their existing SaaS solutions. I think the industry as a whole will see more of this trend as we head into 2013.

Buying BI capabilities rather than building the technology in-house gives companies a lower total cost of ownership and quicker time to value; benefits that I expect will continue to be in high demand throughout next year.

I've really just scratched the surface of these trends, and no doubt left out a few areas that will have a significant impact on the BI landscape in 2013. As such, I'd love to hear what you think about the above and any additional areas you expect to play a big part in the year ahead.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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