

The art of business discovery

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“Computers are useless,” the artist Pablo Picasso once said. “They can only give you answers.”

What we need, he implied, isn't answers, but better questions. Some business intelligence software allows users to discover both questions and answers, thanks to a unique structure that allows users to unearth new questions while digging for answers.

This approach offers users something genuinely new: not just intelligence, but business discovery. To understand the difference, it's important to first clear your mind of existing paradigms. Some functionality will remind you of what's possible in BI and in spreadsheets, but if you cling too tightly to those ideas, you won't understand how it works and why it may be important to your business.

The value in memory-associated search and the key to its differentiation from past approaches is best expressed in a three-step process: Consolidate, search and visualise.

* Consolidate refers to the process of assembling, associating and preparing data for analysis in a simple and straightforward way. When data is loaded into the application, you explain how it is related to the other data you are looking at. This associative model along with the fact that the data is stored in-memory sets the stage for rapid-fire analysis and ease-of-use.

* Search represents how QlikView allows users to interact with data in

the way they think - associatively, with one thought, one idea, and one sequence of questions and answers leading to another. Associative Search means finding not only the answers you're looking for, but also answers to questions you've never even thought to ask. What sets this concept of business discovery apart from most BI applications is that you also see the records that don't match, as well as the ones that do. This has significant implications in the third step.

* Visualise has a double meaning that refers to the visual display of summarised forms of information, and the ability to see those displays change as the selected data is changed.

Powerful tools for representing data as graphs, charts, tables and all of the visual elements create a full-featured BI solution. You can build measures (that is, metrics, statistical calculations, and equations) that summarise data quickly, like you would in a spreadsheet. The in-memory architecture means that measures can be recalculated quickly. Every time you click a new set of search criteria in list boxes, you see those measures in the context of your selection. Watching the metrics change as the selection changes brings the data to life.

With new methods of quickly unlocking data from sources you previously couldn't access, and the ability to interact with and explore data in a visual format, this new order of Business Intelligence is gaining traction. Because it is as easy to use as office productivity software, business users tend to not only use it, but rely on it to gain answers for decisions that will make them better at their jobs.