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Metricsphere is a thought leader in the business intelligence (BI) consulting market—an innovator in products and services with an unrivalled success rate with enterprise projects. As an Oracle partner, Metricsphere works with customers throughout the world to deliver cost-effective BI and data warehouse solutions that exceed client expectations. Writer David Baum spoke with Erik Lavin, managing partner at Metricsphere, to learn how Metricsphere helps customers achieve best practices and drive measurable returns with their BI initiatives.

IN POSITION



Achieving Best Practices with Business Intelligence

Q *Tell us about the unique products and services you offer in the realm of data warehousing and business intelligence.*

A We started out about four years ago with a focus on Siebel Analytics. Since then we've developed a number of best practices around data warehousing, reporting, balanced scorecards, performance tuning, ETL and other domains. Because of our breadth in these areas, we're able to offer very attractive, fixed price solutions. We're confident on our estimates because we have done so many successful projects.

Q *Has Oracle's acquisition of Siebel broadened your market horizons?*

A Absolutely. Over the years we have implemented BI solutions for CRM, financials, HR, manufacturing and many other domains encompassed by Oracle E-Business Suite. Since Oracle acquired Siebel, the company has been applying Siebel Analytics to many parts of the Oracle E-Business Suite. This puts us in a natural position to help Oracle customers implement multi-domain solutions.

Q *How does Siebel Analytics stack up against other BI tools on the market?*

A There are lots of great things about the Siebel Analytics tool that make it stand out. The obvious one is that it's a modern application built for the Internet and is Web-based. It's also very accessible to business users, thanks to a unique technology called Siebel Answers, which allows nontechnical users to create reports and modify them at will. Finally, Siebel Analytics is highly scalable. We've created several multi-terabyte applications that demonstrate its prowess as an enterprise tool.

Q *As customers recognize the importance of corporate standards, can you help them consolidate their BI assets around one or two prominent tool sets?*

A One of our operating principles is to help customers devise standards that lend cohesion to BI activities throughout the organization. For example, we enforce consistent security standards, so that every department uses the same types of access methods. We also help customers implement standard data models and naming conventions as the foundation for establishing a single source of truth. We identify everything from how they define revenue to what their basic performance metrics should be, so reports are consistent across the board. We often encourage customers to devise a project management office to roll out standard procedures and policies. We get different people from different groups involved, not just IT folks, because it's important to have various parts of the business represented. This helps BI stakeholders share information and develop best practices for the entire organization.

Q *You appear to have an unrivaled success rate with these projects. What's your secret?*

A We strive to convey best practices in everything we do, from status reports to internal training to BI theory to practical implementation. At the same time, we're very realistic about what clients can accomplish, based on where they are in the BI life cycle. Each company is on a different path with business intelligence. Some are just starting out and others have been doing it for ten years. We help each client develop a maturity model, and then recommend various types of services. Leveraging the best practices we have developed gives them a solid basis for moving forward. Also, many times we develop a proof of concept to demonstrate tangible assets with real value, in a very short period of time. This allows clients to move forward with confidence as they go further and deeper down their BI roadmap. We place a big emphasis on education as well, to help clients build self-sufficiency.

Q *Where does the ROI come from in these projects?*

A The initial ROI often comes from replacing paper reports with Web based reporting tools. But that's just the start—kind of like paving over cow paths, to borrow an old phrase. Ultimately we help clients optimize their business processes based on new insights derived from their BI applications. For example, if you have a BI dashboard that monitors inventory levels as they relate to sales activity, you'll know instantly how one domain affects the other, which gives you better control.

"Genuine insight comes from information delivered in context. If you're getting financial information without understanding what's happening on the shop floor, or in the warehouse, or in the call center, you lose sight of how your business decisions impact the organization as a whole."

Erik Lavin, managing partner, Metricsphere