



MAKING SENSE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION'S BIG DATA

A Guide for Small and Medium Businesses

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editor's note

No doubt, your company has a lot of data. Today, companies of tens or hundreds of employees can generate massive amounts of data— but you may not want to hire a team of data scientists to analyze it. You may have invested in a data warehouse, but, more likely, this massive data takes less obvious forms: web analytics, point-of-sale data, email and direct mail campaigns, employee performance, supplier history, customer demographics, and much more.

If you're like most small and medium businesses, you're struggling to make sense of these data points, and to derive actionable insight from what's quickly becoming an overwhelming mass of structured and unstructured data.

This Tableau eMagazine provides a guide for converting data into the insight you need, without investing a small fortune in a team of specialized data scientists.

In this eMagazine, you'll hear how businesses like yours are using state-of-the-art visualization tools and techniques to build a culture of data-driven decision-making. You'll learn about the current state of data in small and medium businesses, 3 tips for spotting trends you can't afford to miss, and 5 best practices for building great data dashboards for you and your team.

It's time to put your data to work for you!

Happy analyzing,

Sasha Pasulka
Tableau Software



Winning with insight:

3 tips to spot trends you can't afford to miss

From the one-person start-up to the medium-sized business with hundreds of employees, the “Small and Medium Business” bracket includes a number of vastly different organizations.

But one thing remains the same: your world is full of opportunities, risks and chances to make your mark. And the environment is anything but static. What separates you from your competition is often a matter of how quickly you can spot the opportunities.

Three tips stand out as ways you can close the gap between you and the insight you require.

1 Empower yourself

You've got a hunch, but digging into the data to investigate the trends can feel next to impossible—or take forever.

Take control of the situation by using self-service, intuitive, robust data analysis tools that let you quickly analyze and visualize data. Point at the data you want to investigate. Drag and drop the information you want to see. Hunches are great, but knowing is better. But if you're stuck relying on someone else to query your data for you, chances are your competitor will beat you to the punch.

2 Interact with your data

Once you start seeing the trends and outliers, you'll want to dig deeper. This is going to raise more questions that become paramount to fully understanding the opportunity at hand. So ask the questions. And get answers immediately.

By using the right analytical application, you will be equipped to not only quickly see the information you're investigating, you'll be able to query it further. Drill

deep into it until you're satisfied that you understand the whole picture. Shift from a time series graph to a heat map to get a new perspective. Blend in related data to provide context that you'd otherwise lack. Do it all in minutes. And then, with insight in hand, you'll be the one getting in the first swing in.

3 Collaborate with your team

Identifying an opportunity or outlier is the first step, but the idea will become more impactful when you and your colleagues push hard against it. By using an analytics application that lets you ask and answer questions in real-time, you're able to quickly harness the power of a lot of smart people in a room to take an idea from good to great.

Equip yourself with the tools you need to do your own analysis, getting the answers you need along the way to fully understand the opportunity you've identified. Setting yourself apart relies on more than a good hunch.

“Without Tableau, we would have been stumbling in the dark. We had a lot of guesswork, a lot of hypothesis. But now we can really show if a hypothesis is right or wrong – in minutes.”

— Per Strid, Analyst, Stardoll.com



Rocket Ships vs. Slow Burners

The interactive chart is a new take on technology IPOs that looks at growth since company inception, not by a traditional timeline. For instance, most successful technology companies aren't rocket ships – only 28% were. This is the kind of analysis a business person can create simply by dragging & dropping—no programming required.

Click on it to explore the technology segments that interest you most.

 [Explore the dashboard](#)



Karaoke service provider sings Tableau's praises

Nick Thistleton, Managing Director of Lucky Voice, needed better insight into the karaoke experiences his company provided to thousands of would-be warblers across the U.K. Unfortunately, his existing reporting solution was slow, ineffective, and it diverted his developers away from more important tasks. After considering other options, including Crystal Reports, Jaspersoft and Microsoft PowerPivot, Thistleton saw a Tableau demonstration. "Within five minutes of trialing Tableau, I knew I had arrived at my destination," says Thistleton. "Tableau did everything we needed straight out of the box."

Lucky Voice now uses Tableau to improve its customers' experiences and increase revenue by looking at a blend of data from its booking system, phones, cash registers, customer surveys, and its online streaming system. "I've think one of the main discoveries since implementing Tableau is just how much data we have," says Thistleton.

“ The technical requirements for using Tableau are really very minimal. In fact, nearly everyone in the organization has a relationship with Tableau. ”

– Nick Thistleton, Managing Director, Lucky Voice.



Read the entire case study

2

two minutes on driving
marketing strategy with data

SHAILESH
GHIMIRE



Shailesh Ghimire, Director of Digital Strategy for EB Lane, discusses how he uses data to optimize marketing strategies for clients of the oldest marketing firm in the Southwest. Shailesh talks about how he uses Tableau to blend data sources to develop richer, more accurate insights than ever before.

“We’re working with sales data. We’re working with social media data. We’re working with the media plans that we generate...we lay it out visually and show them the trends.”

– Shailesh Ghimire, Director of Digital Strategy, EB Lane

 [Watch the video](#)



Visual reporting and analysis: seeing is knowing

Visualizing data – in the form of charts, maps and other graphs – is no longer restricted to specialized applications. Further, using data visualization as a standard part of analysis is enabling business users to better understand data and use it to their advantage.

Incorporating data visualization into day-to-day analysis is prompting a cultural shift toward more analytic, data-driven environments by empowering users to explore data in a graphically inviting medium – data that was previously available only in tabular reports.

This TDWI Best Practices Report, based on a Web survey of BI professionals and interviews with BI practitioners and experts, finds that data visualization is in the middle of a remarkable growth phase. It also reveals that data visualization contributes impressively to improvements in business user insight and productivity as well as the usage of dashboards, the preferred medium for data visualization.

“Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents to our survey rated the influence of data visualization on business insights as “very high” or “high.”

– TDWI Research



[*Read the white paper*](#)



The state of data in small & medium business

The Economist Intelligence Unit: Use of data drives better financial performance

A recent *report by the Economist Intelligence Unit* found a clear correlation between effective use of data and financial performance. Specifically, the report noted that companies substantially ahead of their peers in their use of data are likely to be substantially ahead in financial performance. And the reverse was true, too: companies that were behind their peers in using data were more likely to be substantially behind their peers in financial performance.

Benchmark your company

So how do small businesses stack up against larger organizations? And—more importantly—where are you compared with your small and large business peers?

A recent study by Forrester* can help answer those questions. Forrester surveyed IT leaders and business executives to understand how companies across the board are using data to drive decision-making.

What all companies want from data

Across all sizes of companies, Forrester survey participants clearly stated that the primary goal they consider when planning a business intelligence strategy is to make better-informed business decisions. The second most-important goal was to improve customer interaction and satisfaction. The third most-important goal was to gain an overall competitive advantage.

Data crunches > hunches

In companies with fewer than 500 employees, roughly 54% claimed that decisions in the company were based on quantitative data, rather than on “gut instinct.” When looking at very large enterprises with more than 20,000 employees, Forrester found that the number jumps to 59%.

Dash(board)ing toward the future

In businesses with fewer than 500 employees, Forrester found that approximately 51% are currently using data dashboards and 23% are planning to implement dashboards in the next 12 months. For businesses with 500-999 employees, that number jumps to 55% implemented, with an additional 23% planning to implement within a year.

In contrast, in companies with more than 5,000 employees, over 60% of these leaders said their companies used data dashboards, with just 20% planning to implement.

Conclusion

We are past the tipping point. Businesses of all sizes are embracing the use of data to help find answers and even to spark new questions. And dashboards, with their visual representations of data for faster understanding, seem to be the clear choice for helping business users interact with their data.

Given the evidence of a direct relationship between data usage and financial performance, it seems likely that the numbers will continue to climb as businesses face the choice of either embracing data or falling behind.

*Source: Forrester Strategy Spotlight Business Intelligence And Big Data, Q4 2012, Forrester Research, Inc.



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Smart Media Group analyzes \$1B in political ad spend

The fastest-growing media firm in Washington D.C., Smart Media Group provides media buying services for political campaigns.

Smart Media used to manage its media buying through a series of disparate spreadsheets. “We could never really figure out exactly what was going on as a big picture,” says Sarah Stone, Analyst for Smart Media Group.

“From the moment we found Tableau and downloaded the trial version, we thought, ‘Okay, we might not be computer people, but we can handle this,’” says Stone.

Now campaign staffers can log in 24/7 from the campaign trail to review Smart Media’s Tableau dashboards comparing their media buys with those of the competition.

“Tableau has given me the ability to really offer good insight to our clients about what’s happening with this data and how they should change their media buy because of it,” says Stone.



“Tableau enabled me to track over a billion dollars in ad spending in 2012. If I didn’t have Tableau, there’s no way I could have done that.”

– Sarah Stone, Analyst, Smart Media Group



5 Best practices for creating effective dashboards



When created well, dashboards answer questions that drive success. They help spot trends, monitor hot opportunities and reveal the cause-and-effect relationship between data.

But many dashboard attempts fall short. They can be hard to configure and difficult to update, rendering the data meaningless soon after it's built. They can be hard to understand when cluttered with too much—or the wrong—information.

Take hold of the potential of dashboards and start making them part of your analysis approach. Dashboards can be easy and fast to create, sharing meaningful metrics that make a difference in your decision-making efforts.

“ Before, we were spending four to six man-hours a week producing basic reports. Now it takes us ten minutes a week. And the quality of the report is much better—much more visible and interactive. ”

– Daniel Murray, Vice President and CIO, *Blastrac Manufacturing*



[Read the white paper](#)

About Tableau Software

Tableau Software helps people see and understand data. Placed into the coveted “Leader” quadrant by Gartner in 2012, Tableau helps anyone quickly and easily analyze, visualize and share information. More than 10,000 customers across most industries get rapid results with Tableau in the office and on-the-go. Tens of thousands of people use Tableau to share data in their blogs and websites. See how Tableau can help you by downloading the free trial at www.tableausoftware.com/trial.

 **Download the free trial**