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### **Unleashing your mobile business dollars**

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Mobile business intelligence (BI) offers huge advantages for Australian organisations, particularly those with increasingly mobile and remote workforces. It means that staff and management are never disconnected from the tools that help them make business decisions.

Imagine a typical Australian company with its head office in a capital city, satellite offices in each state and small regional offices, retail stores, factories and warehouses dotted across the country. Now think of how easy it would be for regional managers to carry out site visits armed with nothing but their smart phones.

Having taken its business intelligence function mobile, the executive team is able to use a mobile BI reporting application to recognise their GPS location and automatically filter reports for each specific store or office.

Instant, real time reporting allows this Australian company to better manage its regional outlets and make improved business decisions based on precise, location-specific, up to the minute information.

#### **Information wherever and whenever you need it**

Mobile BI enables organisations to upload and access BI information wherever and whenever it is needed. By tapping into the technology in smart phones and tablets,

organisations can interact in real time with their team and customers and access current information anywhere.

Smart phones and tablets such as iPhones, iPads, Blackberries and Android devices can now become access points for a business intelligence system. Much of the information management industry is already developing smart phone apps for their products, including MicroStrategy Mobile, Cognos Go! Mobile, and the BusinessObjects Explorer app for iPhone and iPad.

The real attraction for mobile BI is that it detaches workers from the desktop. In addition to this, there will no longer be a need for reams of reports to be distributed (either via email or on paper) resulting in additional time and money savings.

Mobile technology also enables reporting to be location-aware, meaning that the system can automatically filter report information based on the mobile device's GPS location. In a business environment that is already focused and reliant upon smart phones and mobile technology, it's hard to argue against the benefits of mobile BI. The big question, however, is whether the technology is financially viable. Is an organisation going to have to invest millions of dollars in new hardware across the business? And do the benefits of taking business intelligence mobile really outweigh the potential costs?

### **The costs of mobile business intelligence**

Looking at the cost of hardware, it's realistic to assume that most of the workforce requiring access to business intelligence on the move already owns the right mobile device. As a result, functionality is provided by the download of an application or link rather than an entirely new hardware device. People already carry the device, so the technology is easy to incorporate into existing routines.

The other major benefit of mobile BI is that, in most cases, people already know how to use iPhones, iPads and other smart phones and tablets, meaning less time and effort goes into training.

For organisations that do not have a workforce using mobile devices, a decision to provide the entire business with smart phones or tablets would come at a substantial cost. The best financial option in this case is to review the number of people that will benefit from the use of mobile BI and provide devices accordingly.

If your organisation has an existing reporting infrastructure with the right tools, for example Cognos, BO, or MicroStrategy, there should be no additional infrastructure required to deliver the mobile BI capability and therefore, no additional infrastructure costs. Building applications from existing reporting structures can be easy depending on the tool employed. There may be additional license costs for mobile devices, so it's important to speak to your solution provider about this.

Finally, there is likely to be a small cost from your business intelligence vendor or solution provider to configure existing reports for mobile delivery.

### **Other considerations**

Costs aside, mobile BI highlights a number of other issues that need to be reviewed.

Take a serious look at your organisation's security. The danger with storing valuable information on any mobile device is that smart phones and tablets are easily lost or stolen, and with them goes your business critical information. Ensure your business is set up to manage such security issues before deploying mobile BI.

While the power of mobile devices has increased exponentially in recent years, it's safe to assume that a smart phone or tablet doesn't have the same level of processing power as a desktop computer. This limited computing power means users can't always ask the *really* complex questions until they are back using a more powerful machine.

### **Making the decision to go mobile**

Mobile business applications have become a vital part of most organisations. The increase in maturity and adoption of mobile technology has created a workforce reliant upon instant access to information. Business intelligence is no exception.

For those that rely on business intelligence to make important decisions and define future direction, mobile BI is a cost-effective and sensible addition to the organisation. Consider its adoption carefully, and you could be reaping the benefits of on-demand business intelligence whenever and wherever you need it.

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