

Cloud-Based Data Analytics – The Time is Now

By Don Arendarczyk

Data is generated everywhere you look: social media sites, opinion sites, online retailers, Web logs, medical sites, product reviews, sensor data, and many more. This data is relevant to your business, and those who embrace it now will gain a competitive advantage.

Enter the cloud, a big balloon you can stuff with all of this data, a balloon with tentacles that can reach out to all of these sites and extract data that is useful to you. These tentacles can reach out to other clouds, like salesforce.com, to get your customer data. They can reach back to your in-house systems and merge in your sales data. They can reach out to social media sites to gather data about consumer sentiment. Embrace it now and you will do better than those who don't.

What Is It

Business intelligence in the cloud is more than just a set of virtual servers hosting your reporting capability. It is a technology stack that enables you to acquire, store, organize and analyze your data in the blink of an eye. Ten years ago, it took six months just to organize your sales data into a format that could be consumed by business users or acted on by executives. Today, new technologies have removed the technical barriers to cloud based analytics.

Now, companies can quickly achieve big value at a low cost. The databases are available to store the data. The cloud connectors are available to acquire the data. Distributed file systems and other parallel engines, like Hadoop, are available to break up the data into manageable chunks and reduce it into something meaningful. Out-of-the-box data models are available to add structure to the unstructured and semi-structured streams of data. Prebuilt analytics are available to deliver business information from the data. Data mining,

hypothesis testing and visualization tools are available to explore the data without knowing exactly what you are looking for. The time is now to gain an advantage.

Key Advantages

The key advantages of a true cloud-based BI environment are scalability, speed and access. Cloud service architectures are often composed of the following three layers: infrastructure as a service, platform as a service and software as a service. Scalability is attained by finding the right cloud IaaS provider-- a provider that has the servers, CPU and storage built from the ground up to support cloud computing.

Speed is derived from finding the right PaaS and SaaS provider that has a preconfigured application infrastructure in place to support cloud-based analytics. This includes preconfigured databases, analytics, security and access. It includes cloud data integration tools that are ready to connect to on-premise systems, cloud-based systems, and social media and other sources in order to acquire the data. The provider must have the data warehousing and business intelligence experience and knowledge to build a software solution.

Better access is achieved by having both integrated data and a proven security architecture, allowing consumption by in-house users, customers and vendors alike. It is also achieved by eliminating hurdles related to access policies that require users to jump through hoops to obtain a merged view of in-house and cloud data.

In-House or Outsourced

Do you have the in-house private cloud infrastructure to support a rapidly scaling data analytics environment? Do you have the in-house expertise and technology to acquire the data, from both in-house systems and cloud sources?

Do you know what to do with the data -- how to organize it and deliver it to business users so it is actionable? If you answered “yes” to these three questions, then there is nothing stopping you from building an in-house cloud data analytics environment. If you answered “no” to any of these questions, then you may consider a cloud platform that is ready for plug and play.

Don't get bogged down trying to develop an in-house strategy when, in today's business climate, time is of the essence. Don't be afraid of a public cloud or confuse “public” with “unsecure.” The public cloud is just a truly commoditized offering by a third party. You can buy your processing power and storage, feeling secure that you are infinitely scalable and fully fault protected. The public cloud doesn't mean less secure, underperforming or undedicated. It does most likely mean less expensive. Public cloud offerings can be a good match for companies of any size. However, there are also plenty of private cloud providers available that can give you

peace of mind. The key is to find a provider that is the right fit for you.

With the value that can be achieved, now is the time to enter the world of cloud-based analytics. There's a very good chance your competitors already have.

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