Mobile to drive BI this year

By Ayanda Dlamini
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Mobile is top of the big four influencers of BI change across Africa this year. The massive growth in mobile across Africa is driving resurgence in business intelligence (BI) growth, as executives across the continent see the value of having relevant, updated data at hand at all times.

The mobile wave

At LGR Telecommunications, we are seeing mobility as the biggest key trend in the BI space in the foreseeable future. With device proliferation and massive surges in mobile data usage - close on 900 Petabytes per month around the world last year - mobility is showing massive uptake.

A large proportion of those users are on internet applications as well as enterprise applications on mobile. This is particularly true in Africa, where enterprises have leapfrogged fixed line into the mobile era, and the cost of mobile data is dropping. We expect mobility to drive the adoption of BI in general, as more and more executives see the value of BI that has become user friendly and portable. Soon, all levels within the enterprise will have to have a dashboard and a 'mini BI engine'. Globally, we are seeing numerous mobile BI suites coming to market, and the focus on this area is likely to continue.

Self-service and interactive BI

As users become accustomed to consumer applications, they are starting to demand the same functionality in their enterprise applications. Thus, we are seeing growth in self-service, interactive BI that allows users to drill down into the information they need - even on mobile devices. This is putting the power increasingly into the hands of the users - they want to be the next 'IT gurus'. In line with this, users are getting smarter in what they use and how they want to see it, therefore data visualisation is also a key trend emerging across Africa.

The demand for access to self-service BI is beginning to extend across the enterprise as executives start regarding data as their 'untapped gold', delivering real business value. It's becoming a case of 'BI for everyone'.

Integrating unstructured data

Unstructured data from outside the organisation is becoming an important factor as enterprises grapple with understanding market conditions, consumer sentiment and demographics from sources outside the enterprise. As social media becomes a key area for gaining an understanding of customer sentiment, social media analytics will see increased uptake.

The incorporation of geographical data is also becoming increasingly important in looking beyond just 'who' and 'what', but also 'where'. And as growing numbers of end users acquire smartphones with map applications, we will also see location-based information playing an ever-increasing role in BI.

Advanced analytics and big data

The massive growth in the amount of data being generated will also force enterprises to look beyond traditional database systems.

Big Data analytics will play a bigger role in future, and with it, we will see increased uptake of in-memory analytics. Even across Africa, we will be seeing increased interest in Big Data focused solutions such Hadoop and NoSQL (which can also take unstructured data), as well as in-memory analytical engines. With these advanced new in-memory analytics engines, enterprises may discover a need for new, specialised skills, possibly driving a need to import skills.

We are also starting to see a great deal of growth in demand for automatic feedback to transactional platforms - organisations are starting to say 'what can I do with this insight?' and seeking automatic feedback to all platforms, allowing for functions such as upselling and cross selling.

This is where you see the true value of advanced analytics - not just using it to understand, but also using it to sway customer behaviour; and this is a game changer.

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