

Standardizing in the Public Sector



**GAIN CONSISTENCY,
EFFICIENCY, AND AGILITY
BY CHOOSING A BUSINESS
INTELLIGENCE STANDARD**

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Introduction

Agencies across the board—military and civilian—are moving toward standardization in nearly all areas of operation.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) recently established standard desktop configurations. The Office of the National Director of National Intelligence and the Defense Department are leading a charge toward IT security standardization. OMB is moving forward with government-wide accounting standards. Homeland Security Presidential Direct 12 (HSPD-12) calls for identity standardization. We are even seeing movement toward geospatial standardization, led by the Open Geospatial Consortium.

The reason for the drive to standardization? Consistency, efficiency, and agility.

“The most agile companies are the ones with the most standardization because they can focus on the most important thing,” said Brad Boston, Senior Vice President of Global Government Solutions at Cisco Systems, Inc. at a recent Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) conference. Boston went on to recommend that organizations standardize as many processes as possible, to deal more effectively with mission-focused activities.

Even more than in the commercial sector, the U.S. government has the most to gain from an increase in consistency, efficiency, and agility.

Most agencies today have stovepipes of information—multiple databases that contain a wide range of data types, from personnel data to financial data to military resources. Operating in an environment of silos, agencies spend valuable time analyzing the accuracy of that data and its sources. Organizations can instead be spending that time determining what that data means, deciding how it can help drive mission success, and sharing best practices across agencies.

Information sharing through business intelligence

A first step toward eliminating these silos is business intelligence (BI). A BI solution can help provide critical inter- and intra-agency performance management capabilities. With a BI solution in place, agencies leverage, analyze, and associate different types of information across different parts of the organization to get a true, integrated picture of agency performance.

BI is forging ahead in the commercial space. According to Gartner Group in its report *Magic Quadrant for Business Intelligence Platforms*, “Organizations are increasing their BI spending, particularly as it evolves from its departmental roots to become more pervasive and strategic, especially as large organizations invest in performance management initiatives and employ BI to comply with stringent regulatory reporting requirements.”

Not so, however, in government. According to a study conducted by the Butler Group, only one in five public sector organizations in the U.S. and Europe have invested in BI. And, over the next two years, while 28 percent of private-sector companies plan to invest in BI, only 15 percent in government are making similar plans.

“In the government, integrated enterprise-level business intelligence (BI) is a bit like the weather,” said Shawn McCarthy, Senior Analyst and Program Manager at IDC Government Insights in a recent article entitled “The Smart Money’s on Business Intelligence” (*Government Computer News*, June 25, 2007). “Everyone talks about it, but only a few organizations do a good job of understanding all its nuances.”

This lack of understanding may be hampering overall operational performance efforts. Different departments and divisions may all have bought into the promise of business intelligence, but they pursue it in different ways, and with different vendors.

As agencies attempt to align departments on one strategic plan, the pockets of BI successes may be counterproductive. One department may consider its reports “more correct” than its peers. You may find one version of the truth in a department, but multiple versions across the agency.

Standardization addresses these problems. It paves the way for BI to be less the tactical tool and more the strategic partner.

“It will happen, so be ahead of the curve,” reads a recent Ventana Research white paper, *Standardizing Business Intelligence*.

BI standardization benefits

What does BI standardization mean? It means implementing a single BI offering to provide a common view. That standard BI offering connects your disparate information systems—finance, personnel, supply chain, operations—for a complete view of agency operations.

A BI standard is a single product that brings together and delivers all BI capabilities: dashboards, scorecarding, reporting, analysis, event lifecycle management, and data integration. Choosing a unifying architecture for all BI capabilities doesn't complicate IT's already complex environment.

The most operationally successful agencies understand the value of BI standardization. BI standardization brings agility. BI standardization brings operational efficiency. BI standardization brings a single version of the truth.

Standardizing on a single enterprise-wide BI solution provides:

- **Reduced administrative, development, and IT costs.** A standard BI solution will eliminate the multiple upgrades and fixes, training time, and IT maintenance that accompany multiple BI solutions.
- **Increased agility and responsiveness, through a simplified IT model.** Single sign-on, a single metadata model, and a single user interface will help eliminate the difficulties of working with overlapping products.
- **Greater mission effectiveness and increased performance.** Less time spent in training means staff is more effective; delivering a single version of the truth provides the foundation for consistent and on-target decision-making; a single platform provides the means to communicate more effectively agency wide.
- **A foundation for managing performance across the agency.** A standard BI solution provides integrated business intelligence and performance metrics so you can define a level of mission success across the organization.

Factors to consider in a standard BI solution

When you choose a BI standard, the technology must meet stringent enterprise-class requirements. For example, it must be able to manage deployments to thousands of users, spanning multiple countries and agency jurisdictions.

In its *Standardizing Business Intelligence* white paper, Ventana Research lists a number of characteristics to look for when considering BI standardization.

- **Broad coverage:** A BI standard must meet the varying needs of the organization. This minimizes the exceptions that can lead to requests for non-standard technologies. Look for solutions that cover production reporting, business reporting, ad hoc query, OLAP reporting and analysis, dashboarding, and scorecarding.
- **Modern Service-Oriented Architectures:** Standards should leverage other standards, when possible. Look for technologies that use Web Services standards such as SOAP, XML, and WSDL. These architectures will be easier to integrate with your existing environments and will be more adaptable as new technologies and standards evolve.
- **Scalability:** The underlying server technology must support the performance and scalability requirements of all users—particularly those who expect fast responses to their mission-oriented questions. Look for vendors who have distributed architectures where load balancing can be distributed across multiple servers. It is best if they can support both UNIX and Windows environments.
- **Heterogeneous data access:** Most agencies have many different data sources, of many differing types. Your BI standard should be able to model and query against these multiple heterogeneous data sources.

- **Global capability:** A BI standard must be able to understand multiple languages to support our military and civilian workforce—as well as our government suppliers—around the world. Ventana Research recommends agencies look for UNICODE throughout, not just support for UNICODE data sources. Choose a solution that doesn't require writing separate reports for each language, or knowing the language of each individual user prior to deployment.
- **Security:** A BI standard should leverage and support your existing security model. The solution should not require that you duplicate, change, or modify the approach you've already implemented.

Choosing Cognos 8 BI as your BI standard

Cognos provides an integrated, best-practices platform for government performance management. Cognos 8 Business Intelligence offers one product, on a single architecture, that delivers all BI capabilities for all users. It integrates and leverages all your critical data, and delivers the tools you need to manage and optimize performance.

Deliver all BI capabilities from a single product:

- **Single product and architecture with all capabilities:** Reporting, analysis, scorecards, dashboards, event lifecycle management, and data integration.
- **Simplify maintenance:** Zero-footprint, browser-based deployment and administration. No duplication among BI capabilities.
- **Increase BI adoption:** One product meets the needs of your entire workforce, from casual users to power users.
- **Proven integration:** Web services architecture simplifies deployment and administration. Single, open API lets you integrate with existing security and IT infrastructure. No single point of failure.

Serve all users with BI that matches their needs:

- **Senior officers:** Deliver scorecarding, dashboards, and reports for quick communication of complex data.
- **Operational managers:** Deliver all BI capabilities, with drag-and-drop simplicity and the same zero-footprint interface.
- **Technology managers:** Deliver advanced features such as high-volume burst reports for distribution, full range of report elements and output types, and reporting and analysis against relational or multidimensional sources.
- **IT administrators:** Deliver a zero-footprint, browser-based environment, modular deployment, consistent metadata, and access to all agency data on a Web-services architecture.
- **BI consumers:** Deliver pixel-perfect reports to all desktops with secure Web portal access adaptable to mobile devices.

Leverage all agency data:

- **Open data strategy and common metadata:** Common process rules, calculations, and filters consolidate your heterogeneous data into a consistent, agency-wide view.
- **Direct access:** Leverage the information directly from existing sources including relational, OLAP, and other multidimensional sources.
- **Enterprise Information Integration (EII):** Access multiple disparate data sources in batch, historical, or real time. Use the built-in EII capability or third-party integration technologies.
- **ETL:** Integrate, cleanse, transform, and aggregate data for a consolidated historical view. A dimensional framework provides information formatted in the way users think and optimized for all BI capabilities.

Customer Success: U.S. Air Force

The Air Education and Training Command (AETC), the recruitment, training, and education organization within the U.S. Air Force, has standardized on Cognos Enterprise Business Intelligence to enable integrated online reporting, stronger data analysis, and more efficient program planning.

Headquartered at Randolph Air Force Base near San Antonio, Texas, the AETC's mission is to replenish the combat capability of America's Air Force with high quality, professional airmen. Each year, the AETC delivers military, technical and flying training to up to 75,000 Air Force enlisted students from across the U.S. and abroad.

Using Cognos online analytical processing (OLAP) software, training managers and instructors at each of the AETC bases can easily drill into student and course program data, analyzing historical trends and other factors to better plan course curricula and staffing requirements. Senior AETC officers benefit from a global view of student and course data across all military training bases. This lets them make more informed decisions on program funding and accurately forecast short- and long-term recruitment requirements.

“Our challenge was getting critical data out of the main administration systems and into the field where a lot of the analysis and day-to-day management takes place,” said Captain Jeff Owen, program manager of the Technical Training Management System (TTMS) integration and sustainment initiative. “Cognos provided a solution that empowers staff at all levels with the information they need to do their jobs.”

“The AETC is the first organization to impact the lives and careers of United States Air Force members. This is a responsibility we take very seriously. To that end, we are committed to regularly evaluating the way we deliver and manage our training and education programs, in the spirit of producing qualified, professional airmen,” added Colonel Greg Neubeck, of the Air Education and Training Command. “Cognos Business Intelligence helps us better mobilize student training, align budget resources, and adhere to Air Force recruitment strategies.”

In addition to being the foundation for all BI capabilities, Cognos 8 BI's open architecture extends to security, OLAP and relational data, application servers, Web applications, portals, networks, and metadata.

Particularly important in government, zero-footprint Web deployment means the solution does not require applets, downloads, or other client software installs. This simplifies maintenance, upgrades, and ease-of-use for the technical and non-technical user.

Realize the benefits of Web deployment:

- Deploy one product on a single architecture for all business intelligence requirements. The standards-based architecture can snap into your existing IT environment.
- Add capabilities or modify them at any time to meet changing operational conditions and user needs.
- Provide staffers across your agency a single, trusted source for information.
- Eliminate the management and maintenance of duplicate services such as security.
- Apply consistent process rules, calculations, and dimensions to your data using the centralized metadata model

Having Cognos as your agency-wide BI standard will ensure you can access stove-piped data in various data sources. Standardizing on Cognos will also let you define consistency across data sources without having to build another database.

If you're already a Cognos customer, standardizing on Cognos 8 BI will let you access technical information on the back end through the familiar Cognos front-end.

With integrated plans, business intelligence, and performance metrics, you can dramatically improve your understanding of the current state of your agency and improve your ability to make timely, informed decisions in all areas.

Conclusion: Standardizing with a BI partner

Operational efficiency, agility, and enhanced mission success are the primary objectives of BI standardization. As a result, choosing a standard BI provider is no small choice.

From a technology perspective, your new standard must address your day-to-day needs as well as your overall mission objectives. It must also be easy to use. If your workforce is not using your newly chosen BI standard, it will not deliver results. And, finally, it must be road-tested, as your mission cannot accommodate new-product glitches.

From a vendor perspective, because your BI standard will be an integral part of your agency operations, the BI provider you select must also be your partner. This provider must have the dedication and technological intelligence to evolve its solution as your agency's needs evolve.

Cognos fills both of these roles. Gartner Group ranks Cognos as a leader and as a visionary. The Magic Quadrant for Business Intelligence Platforms report calls Cognos strong in its breadth and depth of capabilities and distinguished by the “openness and flexibility” of its architecture. These qualities, combined with a proven track record in business intelligence, make Cognos an ideal BI partner.

Cognos 8 BI gives people in all roles an understanding of what happened and why. With this information, you can make informed decisions on what actions will lead you to mission success.

About Cognos, an IBM company

Cognos, an IBM company, is the world leader in business intelligence and performance management solutions. It provides world-class enterprise planning and BI software and services to help companies plan, understand and

manage financial and operational performance. Cognos was acquired by IBM in February 2008. For more information, visit <http://www.cognos.com>.

For more information

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