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## OPINIONS

### **ENTERPRISE STRATEGIES: Mining for prophets Data inundation swamps our ability to forge clear strategies, but business intelligence holds the lifeline**

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YOUR CUSTOMERS are trying to tell you something. But with so many automated transaction systems and customer touch-points entering the enterprise, would you even be able to recognize them?

The spiffy data warehouse your company installed last year may be brimming with gold nuggets of customer insight, but the question remains, How do you pan for them?

Business processes have become so increasingly complex that isolating and interpreting interdata relationships have become awesome challenges. And the ability to transform the mix of culled demographics, buying habits, and performance indicators into a meaningful strategy has a direct effect on profitability.

Companies are finding themselves without a clear understanding of who their customers are and, more important, what customers want.

If this sounds like your predicament, you may be a candidate for a business-intelligence system.

Business intelligence has become a vital resource for squeezing value out of your customer-facing systems. With intelligence tools, data from your transaction systems and data warehouses can be transformed and statistically modeled to provide meaningful analyses.

Beyond basic reporting and analysis capabilities, these tools typically offer good graphical representations of data that can help detect marketplace fluctuations before their impact becomes critical.

Armed with such metrics, a company can keep on target with its objectives, lower costs by reducing inventory overruns and waste, focus the sales force on new revenue streams, and better gauge the effectiveness of its marketing strategies.

You'll find no shortage of tools available on the market -- there are hundreds in fact.

They run a gamut that includes strict business-intelligence tools from Cognos and Business Objects, CRM-focused tools from Broadbase and E.piphany, and predictive-modeling tools such as those from SAS. Even outsourced solutions such as digiMine are available.

Generally, you will find these tools are easy to master; most teams experienced with data warehousing have the necessary prerequisites.

In a bear market, optimizing returns must be the first order of business. The data your customers are providing will prove to be your best protection.

Capturing and interpreting customer information will enable businesses with an insight that can be leveraged across multiple channels to proactively meet expectations, increase loyalty and retention, and, ultimately, profitability.

Business-intelligence tools must become part of a company's overall business strategy. Without them, you may never hear what those faceless patrons are trying to tell you.

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