

Delivering Insights: A Brief on Data & Analytics within the SAP Business One Community

A Research Study by Know Know Labs, funded by NewIntelligence, Inc.

Introduction

In today's data-driven business landscape, leveraging data and analytics has become paramount for organizations to gain insights, make informed decisions, and drive growth. The SAP Business One ecosystem, designed for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), offers a comprehensive set of tools and modules to manage various business operations. This research project, undertaken by the Know Know Labs team and generously funded by NewIntelligence, Inc., aims to delve into the usage of data and analytics within the SAP Business One ecosystem, focusing on both customers and SAP Business Partners.

The first aspect of this research project focuses on examining how customers within the SAP Business One ecosystem utilize data and analytics capabilities. With access to modules such as finance, sales, inventory, and production, customers can generate a vast amount of data. By harnessing analytics tools such as Crystal Reports, Query Generator, SAP Analytics Cloud and exploring the role of third-party tools, like [QuickStart for SAP Business One](#) provided by NewIntelligence, customers can analyze this data to gain insights into their business performance, identify trends, track key performance indicators (KPIs), and drive data-informed decision-making. This research will investigate the types of data customers generate, the analytics tools they use, and the specific business insights they derive from data analysis.

The second aspect of this research project focuses on understanding the role of SAP Business Partners in supporting customers' usage of data and analytics in the SAP Business One ecosystem. SAP Business Partners, including authorized resellers, consultants, and system integrators, play a crucial role in implementing and supporting SAP Business One solutions for customers. They provide expertise in customizing the system, integrating additional analytics tools, and delivering training and support. This research will explore the extent to which SAP Business Partners promote and enable the usage of data and analytics capabilities among their customers, identify best practices, and examine the challenges faced in leveraging data for decision-making.

By investigating both customers and SAP Business Partners, this research project seeks to uncover valuable insights into the utilization of data and analytics within the SAP Business One ecosystem and identifies where hurdles for adoption exist. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how SMBs harness data-driven insights to enhance operational efficiency, identify growth opportunities, and navigate competitive markets. Additionally, the research will shed light on the role of SAP Business Partners as enablers and facilitators in driving data-driven decision-making among their customers. Ultimately, this project aims to provide practical recommendations and guidance for businesses and SAP Business Partners to maximize the benefits of data and analytics in the SAP Business One ecosystem, fostering innovation and growth for SMBs.

The SAP Business One Ecosystem

SAP Business One is an integrated enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution designed for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). SAP Business One (also referred to as SAP B1) has gained significant popularity and has been adopted by a wide range of industries across the globe. It offers comprehensive functionalities for managing various business operations, including finance, sales, purchasing, inventory, production, and more.

Here are some key aspects of the SAP Business One ecosystem:

Global Presence: SAP Business One has a global presence, with companies across different countries utilizing the solution. It is available in multiple languages, making it accessible to businesses worldwide.

User Base: SAP Business One has a substantial user base. It has been reported that thousands of companies, more than 80,000, have implemented this solution to streamline their business processes.

Industry Coverage: SAP Business One caters to a diverse range of industries. It has been adopted by companies in sectors such as manufacturing, retail, wholesale distribution, professional services, e-commerce, consumer goods, life sciences, and more. The solution's flexibility and customization options make it adaptable to the specific needs of different industries.

Scalability: SAP Business One is suitable for small and medium-sized businesses, but it also offers scalability to accommodate business growth. As companies expand, they can leverage the solution's capabilities to manage increased operational complexity.

Integration Capabilities: SAP Business One integrates with other SAP solutions, such as SAP S/4HANA, SAP Business ByDesign, and SAP SuccessFactors, allowing businesses to build an integrated ecosystem across various departments.

Partner Network: SAP Business One has a network of authorized partners who provide implementation, customization, and support services to companies using the solution. These partners play a crucial role in delivering industry-specific expertise and helping businesses leverage the full potential of SAP Business One. Through our research, we identified at least 35 partners in North America.

What tools does SAP Business One provide for reporting?

SAP Business One provides various reporting tools that enable users to generate and analyze business reports. These tools offer flexibility and functionality to extract data from different modules within the system and present it in a meaningful format. Here are some of the reporting tools available in SAP Business One:

Crystal Reports: Crystal Reports is a powerful and widely used reporting tool that is integrated with SAP Business One. It allows users to create customized reports with formatting options, calculations, and graphics. Crystal Reports can access data from multiple modules within SAP Business One, enabling users to create detailed reports.

Query Generator: SAP Business One includes a built-in Query Generator that allows users to create ad-hoc queries and reports based on specific data criteria. With this tool, users can select relevant fields, define filters, and perform calculations to extract the required information. The Query Generator offers a user-friendly interface and can be used by individuals with minimal technical expertise.

SAP Analytics Cloud: SAP Business One is purported to integrate with SAP Analytics Cloud, a cloud-based analytics solution that provides advanced reporting and visualization capabilities. With SAP Analytics Cloud, users should be able to create interactive dashboards, perform data exploration, conduct predictive analytics, and collaborate with colleagues. It offers a wide range of visualization options, including charts, graphs, and maps, to present data in a visually appealing manner. Our findings indicated few organizations easily use this offering.

XL Reporter: XL Reporter is an Excel-based reporting tool that allows users to leverage their familiarity with Microsoft Excel to generate reports. It provides pre-built report templates and offers the flexibility to create custom reports by accessing data from SAP Business One. XL Reporter enables users to design reports using Excel functions, formulas, and formatting options.

Report Designer: SAP Business One also includes a built-in Report Designer tool that enables users to create and modify reports directly within the application. This tool provides a drag-and-drop interface, allowing users to add fields, tables, and formatting elements to design reports according to their requirements. The Report Designer is particularly useful for creating quick, on-the-fly reports without the need for external tools.

These reporting tools within SAP Business One offer different levels of complexity and customization options to cater to the varying needs of users. The premise is businesses can choose the most suitable tool based on their reporting requirements and the technical expertise of their users. The outcome proved to be a bit different and thus was the focus of our brief in the pages which follow.

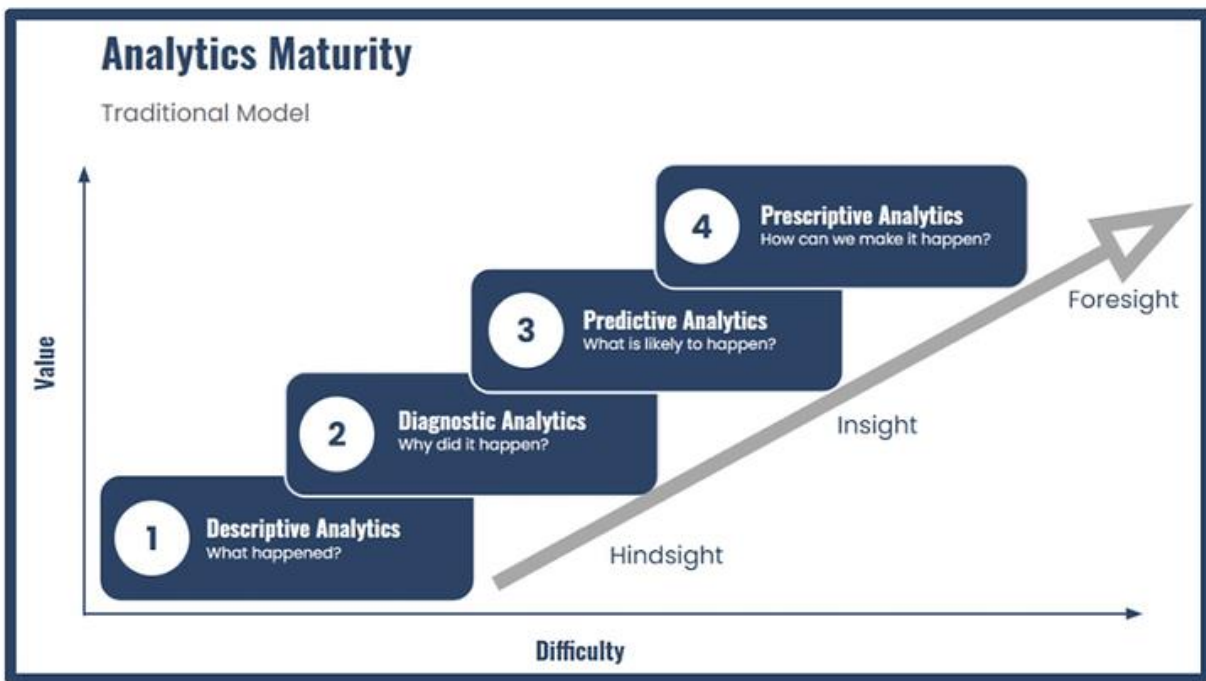
The Fundamental Questions

With tools available, some fundamental questions presented themselves as the research continued. We will address these questions broadly with two specific “WHY” questions after we take a brief look at a framework for describing data maturity.

The Path to Data Maturity

We first shared the information on looking at maturity, with respect to data and analytics, in our blog post, which you can find [here](#).

Below is the graphic, which identifies the spectrum of Analytics Maturity.



(graphic provided by phData.io)

As shown in the graphic, Analytics maturity can be described using four distinct phases, each representing a level of advancement in utilizing data and analytics within an organization. These phases address different questions like "What Happened?", "Why Did it Happen?", "What is Likely to Happen?", and "How can we make it happen?"

Here's an overview of each phase:

What Happened?

In the initial phase of analytics maturity, organizations focus on descriptive analytics, seeking to understand and report on historical data. This phase involves answering questions about past events, such as sales figures, customer demographics, or operational performance. Key activities include data collection, data cleaning, and basic reporting. Organizations in this phase rely on tools like dashboards, basic reporting tools, and data visualization to summarize and present historical data.

Why Did it Happen?

In the second phase, organizations move beyond descriptive analytics and start delving into diagnostic analytics. This phase involves analyzing historical data to uncover patterns, correlations, and causal relationships to understand why specific events occurred. Organizations use techniques like data mining, root cause analysis, and exploratory data analysis to identify the factors that influenced outcomes. The focus is on gaining insights into the drivers behind past events and understanding the impact of various variables on business outcomes.

What is Likely to Happen?

The third phase of analytics maturity revolves around predictive analytics. Organizations in this phase leverage historical data and statistical models to forecast and predict future events and outcomes. Predictive analytics techniques include regression analysis, time series forecasting, machine learning, and data modeling. By identifying trends, patterns, and correlations in the data, organizations can make informed decisions and anticipate future scenarios.

How can we make it happen?

The fourth and most advanced phase of analytics maturity is prescriptive analytics. This phase involves using advanced analytics techniques and optimization algorithms to not only predict future outcomes but also suggest actions and interventions to achieve desired outcomes. Prescriptive analytics helps organizations optimize processes, allocate resources efficiently, and make data-driven decisions. It involves simulation, optimization, and decision modeling to provide actionable insights and recommendations for proactive decision-making.

It is important to note that these phases represent a progression in analytics maturity, and organizations may not necessarily go through them in a linear fashion. Let's focus our attention on where we found organizations to be on the maturity spectrum and the role of customers, partners, and tools in the answers to questions we pondered.

Why are customers without more than reporting?

With an abundance of tools (although many of those available out of the box to SAP Business One customers only address phase 1 of the maturity spectrum), there are several reasons why customers may have limited analytics options beyond basic reporting.

These reasons include:

Tools seem overly complicated

Many advanced analytics tools can be complex and require a significant learning curve. Customers may hesitate to adopt these tools if they perceive them as difficult to use or if they lack the necessary expertise or resources to navigate their complexities. The perceived complexity may deter customers from exploring more advanced analytics options beyond basic reporting.

Need for Deep System Knowledge

Some analytics tools require a deep understanding of the underlying systems and databases to extract and manipulate data effectively. Customers without the necessary technical knowledge or access to skilled resources may find it challenging to utilize these advanced analytics options. Without a solid foundation in system knowledge, customers may feel limited to basic reporting functionalities.

Limited Bandwidth within Organization

Implementing and leveraging advanced analytics tools often requires dedicated time and resources. Small and medium-sized businesses, in particular, may have limited bandwidth within their organizations to dedicate to learning and implementing complex analytics solutions. Other operational priorities may take precedence, leaving little time and resources available for exploring and adopting advanced analytics options.

Cost to get up and going seems extreme

Advanced analytics tools, especially those with sophisticated features and capabilities, can come with a significant price tag. The cost of licenses, training, implementation, and ongoing maintenance may be perceived as prohibitive for some customers, particularly for smaller organizations with tighter budgets. The perceived high cost may discourage customers from exploring beyond basic reporting options, especially if they cannot justify the return on investment.

These factors collectively contribute to the hesitance of customers to adopt more advanced analytics options beyond basic reporting. It is important for organizations to carefully assess their specific needs, available resources, and potential benefits before deciding on the appropriate analytics tools and solutions that align with their capabilities and strategic objectives.

Why are partners not generally driving more use of Data & Analytics?

There are several reasons why partners may not be driving more use of data and analytics for SAP Business One customers.

These reasons include:

Partners providing core ERP services or automating business processes

SAP Business One partners primarily focus on delivering core ERP services and automating business processes for their customers. These tasks often take precedence due to their direct impact on day-to-day operations. As a result, partners may not prioritize driving data and analytics initiatives, which are seen as secondary to the core ERP implementation.

Lack of skill beyond basic reporting with tools like Crystal Reports

While partners may have expertise in implementing and configuring SAP Business One, their skill set may be limited when it comes to more advanced data and analytics tools. Partners may lack the necessary knowledge and experience to go beyond basic reporting functionalities, such as those offered by tools like Crystal Reports. This limitation can hinder their ability to drive broader usage of data and analytics among SAP Business One customers.

No incumbent technology; SAP Analytics Cloud isn't really suited for SAP Business One customers

SAP Analytics Cloud, a cloud-based analytics solution, may not be well-suited for the specific needs and scale of SAP Business One customers. As a result, partners may face challenges in promoting and implementing analytics solutions that seamlessly integrate with the SAP Business One ecosystem. The absence of suitable incumbent technology tailored to the requirements of SAP Business One customers can limit the partners' ability to drive data and analytics usage.

A partner's most knowledgeable staff working on other priorities

Partners often have limited resources and prioritize their most knowledgeable staff for bigger implementation projects. As a result, those staff members may be occupied with larger-scale projects or core ERP implementations that demand their expertise. This allocation of resources can leave partners with limited capacity to focus on driving data and analytics initiatives for SAP Business One customers.

Considering these factors, it is important for partners to recognize the value and potential benefits of data and analytics for their customers. Partners may need to invest in upskilling their teams, exploring alternative analytics tools, like those provided by NewIntelligence, that better align with SAP Business One, and dedicating resources specifically for driving data and analytics usage. By doing so, partners can enhance their value proposition and better support SAP Business One customers in harnessing the power of data-driven insights to optimize their operations and drive business growth.

What's the role of Third-Party Tools?

Since Data & Analytics is all about asking questions and getting answers, this might be the most fundamental.

In our research, we found Crystal Reports really only takes an organization so far (still in Phase 1 of the Maturity Spectrum) and promises like SAP Analytics Cloud come with a high cost and low value.

At the time of this writing, SAP mandates the purchase of 25 user licenses for SAP Analytics Cloud as a minimum purchase requirement. Our math indicates this is well over \$20,000 per year for a tool with no real solutions for SAP Business one.

There are additional third-party tools available but we feel focusing on the capabilities of the NewIntelligence [QuickStart for SAP Business One](#) is a proper way to highlight all the benefits of leveraging solutions from a third-party, whether you are a customer OR a partner.

Let's start with a picture...



(graphic courtesy of NewIntelligence's QuickStart for SAP Business One)

What are the components of a Third-Party Solution?

In the case of NewIntelligence's QuickStart for SAP Business One solution, they have a data warehouse, which is separate from the operations of the SAP Business One ERP. They populate this warehouse from the SAP Business One data source(s) plus possibly other sources of data, such as Excel, other SQL databases, cloud datasources, other applications like CRM or even alternate ERP products.

It's important to note that unlike many third-party solutions, NewIntelligence leaves the data in a data warehouse your organization controls. It can live on the same SQL hardware as your ERP or be in other on-premises or cloud resources you manage. Your data doesn't need to leave your organization (into a third party's cloud) for you to have good insights.

Their solution leverages pre-built, fast-to-implement capabilities of moving the data from these data sources into an environment where the data is made suitable for reporting, analytics and more mature "data focused" endeavors.

In the case of NewIntelligence, they have partnered with IBM to bring forward the best of the analytics capabilities which IBM has to offer in the areas of:

- Reporting
- Analytics visualization via Dashboards
- Forecasting & Planning
- Advanced Data Science with AI

Why do Third-Party solutions accelerate maturity?

All one needs to do is to look at the challenges we explored with both SAP Business One customers and their partners. Let's start with customers...

Tools seem overly complicated – Seems very true of the SAP offerings but tools like those from NewIntelligence and IBM have been proven to be highly usable with literally thousands of customers globally.

Need for Deep System Knowledge – While this may be true of trying to get something like SAP Analytics Cloud working with an SAP Business One deployment, NewIntelligence provides MANY out of the box modules to target the various areas where data lives in SAP Business One.

Limited Bandwidth within Organization – There seems to be a strong correlation between providing tools which are more easily usable (from Third Parties) and a better data platform for decision-making, like the one provided by NewIntelligence. This combination enables a degree of self-service capability, which is not practical in the SAP provided offerings.

Cost to Get up and Running – There are third-party options which are probably great but can “break the bank”. This doesn’t seem to be the case with NewIntelligence. NewIntelligence explained they have exclusive pricing on their solutions (including robust IBM technology), which no one else can provide.

So this addresses the customer challenges but how about those reasons why partners are not generally driving more use of Data & Analytics?

With **Partners providing core ERP services or automating business processes**, the challenge of getting time from them to support a customer’s data journey, is real.

Fortunately, third-party solutions, have a different implementation path. While organizations like NewIntelligence encourage the involvement of partners, it is not an absolute necessity. In fact, the NewIntelligence team reports they often have their solution up and running within a very short period (typically within two weeks) – even if the partner cannot participate.

Fortunately, for partners AND their customers, third-party solutions – especially the technology NewIntelligence has brought forward from IBM – addresses the **Lack of skill beyond basic reporting with tools like Crystal Reports**. Partners (but moreso Customers) can make use of the QuickStart for SAP Business One tools much more easily and effectively than even traditional reporting tools like Crystal Reports.

Third-Party solutions thrive in the face of **No Incumbent Technology** as companies like NewIntelligence have designed all of the pieces needed to get up and running efficiently. This is TRULY a stark contrast to the **SAP Analytics Cloud isn't really suited for SAP Business One customers**, which SAP seems to have created. Solutions like QuickStart for SAP Business One only succeed because they were purpose built for the SAP Business One customer.

Fortunately, third-party solutions mitigate, dramatically, the issues above and deliver cost effectively against the promise of better reporting as a start for a better journey with your data. In the case of NewIntelligence, their customers seem to agree. NewIntelligence have customer testimonials (and a wealth of other information) on their YouTube channel found [here](#).

So, when is the right time to start?

If you are feeling less than mature in your use of data, the right time to start on your data and analytics journey for SAP Business One depends on individual characteristics of organizations but here are a few motivators...

The more quickly you gain insight from your data, the more valuable

Data is a valuable asset, and the sooner you can extract meaningful insights from it, the more you can leverage it to gain a competitive advantage. Delaying your data and analytics initiatives means potentially missing out on valuable insights that can drive business growth, optimize processes, and improve decision-making. Therefore, starting early allows you to tap into the potential value hidden within your data.

Third-party analytics technology makes the journey easier to begin

Without a doubt, NewIntelligence's QuickStart for SAP Business One and potentially other third-party analytics technologies offer powerful tools and solutions specifically designed to simplify and expedite the data and analytics journey. These technologies often provide pre-built integrations, intuitive interfaces, and extensive functionality tailored to the needs of SAP Business One customers. By leveraging such third-party solutions, you can kickstart your data and analytics initiatives without having to wait for a comprehensive solution from SAP.

Waiting for a better solution from SAP might not be worth the wait

While SAP continually enhances its offerings, waiting for a future solution specifically from SAP may not be the most practical approach. The competitive landscape is constantly evolving, and timely data-driven insights are crucial for gaining a competitive edge. By starting your data and analytics journey with available third-party technologies, you can begin deriving value from your data immediately and keep pace with the evolving business environment.

Competition and sustenance are about using data to your advantage

In today's competitive business landscape, utilizing data to your advantage is crucial for sustainable success. Data and analytics enable you to identify market trends, customer preferences, and operational inefficiencies, providing a foundation for informed decision-making and strategic planning. By starting your data and analytics initiatives, you can gain insights that help you stay ahead of the competition, drive innovation, and foster long-term growth.

Considering these characteristics, the right time to start on your data and analytics journey for SAP Business One is sooner rather than later. By leveraging third-party analytics technology, you can begin extracting value from your data, gaining insights, and using data-driven strategies to your advantage. Remember, in a competitive landscape, timely and effective use of data can be a differentiator, making it essential to embark on your data and analytics journey as early as possible.

Closing

It is our sincere hope this brief has helped convey our research learnings of Data & Analytics in the SAP Business One ecosystem while also sharing the value of third-party solutions, such as NewIntelligence's [QuickStart for SAP Business One](#).

We greatly appreciate the generosity of NewIntelligence funding this research coupled with affording the Know Know Labs team the autonomy to arrive at the information we have shared in this briefing.

For additional information or to learn more, please visit NewIntelligence at one of the below links:

NewIntelligence Inquiry – info@newintelligence.ca

QuickStart for SAP Business One – <https://sap.newintelligence.ca>

To learn more about Know Know Labs or provide us feedback, please visit us or email us at the below links:

Know Know Labs Research Home – <https://www.knowknowlabs.com>

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