

Data Analytics Buyers' Guide

Top Questions to ask when choosing a BI tool

How to get the maximum out of Analytics Platforms!

Becoming a Data-driven enterprise is what every organization wants, to use data to solve challenging problems and improve decision making to boost revenue and profitability.

But the traditional BI tools are not capable of handling the volume and the pace of today's digital economy. Therefore, there is a need to utilize Modern BI solutions which can handle every use case your business needs, from robust reports to real-time intelligence to analytics, even AI and ML integrations on the go is required.

In this guide, we explore multiple criteria for a modern analytics platform- Use Cases, Platform capabilities, and a discussion of the top platforms. By the end of this, you should be equipped to decide on the right platform for your business.



Important topics to consider

Where will the value come from?

To know how will BI drive value and how you expect Analytics to impact your business you are looking to-

- Align with your long term and short term goals
- Understand key KPIs and reasons behind the same
- Make better decisions and take informed action with generated insights
- Create advanced analytics roadmap to support large strategic decisions
- Decrease reaction time based on changing data
- Embed analytics in workflows for teams, partners and customers

What will it really cost?

The TCO can be more than the cost of initial purchase. You'll have to look at additional costs which can be based on-

- Are there any software subscription and maintenance costs?
- Whether you be working with Software-as-a- Service (SaaS) offering, or an on-premise solution?
- Any need to spend on support activities like IT or Vendor Management?
- What would the additional spending be on user training, storage, and enablement?

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Who are your Stakeholders ?

To have a far-reaching impact on your business not just today but also for the future, you should cater to users with varying levels of proficiency. So, ask yourself -

- Who would be responsible for implementing and supervising the platform?
- Will your scope be extending to Embedded analytics in operational workflows?
- Who are the intended end users - small set of analysts or multiple groups of beginners?
- What are the security levels needed - which users will have access to dashboards, reports, NLP, etc.?
- Whom should you react out to in case any roadblocks arise during implementation?



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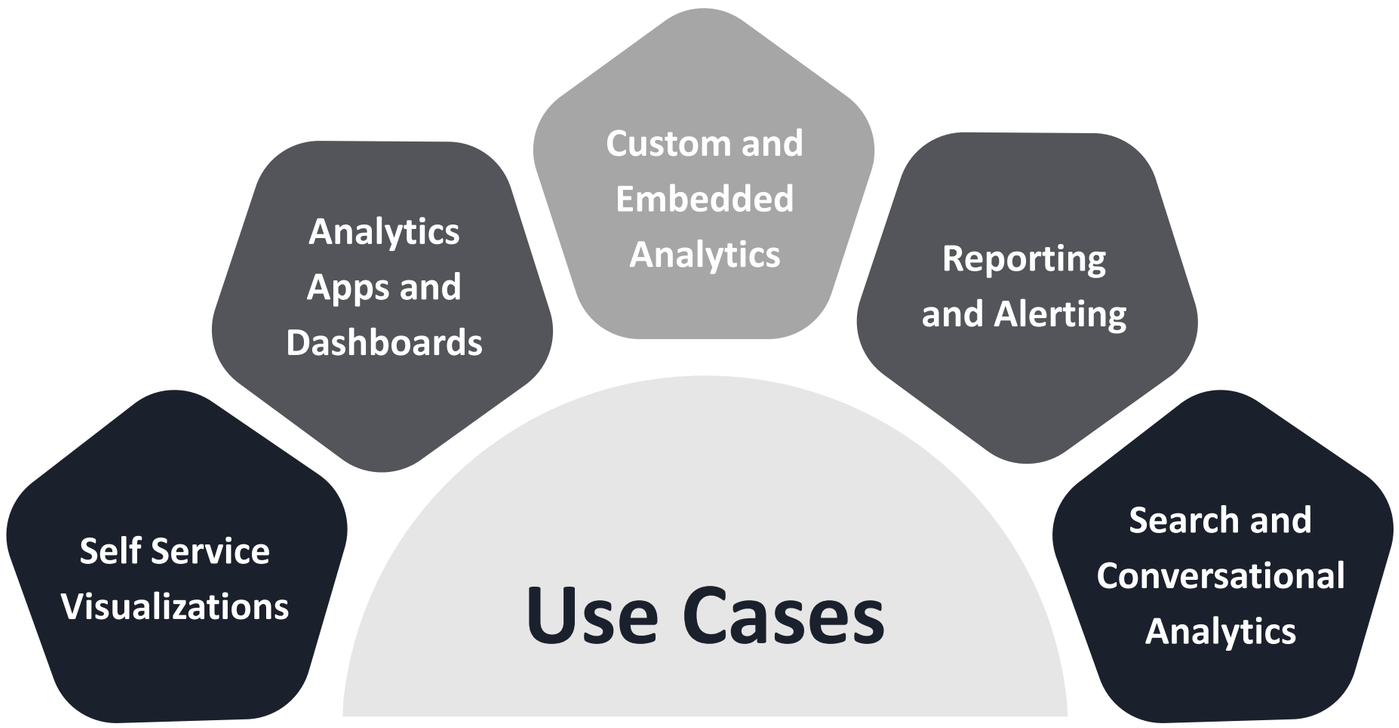
Analytics Use Cases

With the broad range of users who would have different proficiency levels, you should think of multiple use cases by taking them into account. But you need to also think about what your main focus is - Is it reporting, or keeping an open mind for the innovations yet to come or NLP, etc.



In addition to these use cases, further capabilities which are included in current BI solutions are:

- ❑ Mobile Analytics
- ❑ Geospatial Analytics
- ❑ Governance & Deployment
- ❑ Full-enterprise SaaS Capabilities
- ❑ Advanced Analytics & Augmented Intelligence
- ❑ In-memory processing
- ❑ Interactive Exploration
- ❑ Natural Language Processing
- ❑ Custom Apps

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Self Service Visualization

Self-service capabilities are of importance especially to power users like business analysts and analytics creators. In such scenario, it is important for users and teams to collaborate and analyze data to make meaningful discoveries.

Visualization & Creation

- Can the platform automatically adapt data and visual representations to multiple layouts with a creative interface?
- Are repositories of dimensions or visuals available for reuse?
- Is there a library of functions including forecasting, trend lines, clustering etc, available for use?
- Does it have a robust expression language for complex calculations and the ability to create data subsets and variables?
- Is ML integrated to create visualizations and have intuitive geographical mapping?

Data Preparation

- How many different data sources can be integrated for analysis?
- What data transformation capabilities are possible like - data manipulation, table concatenation and cleaning, etc.
- Is there a central repository of reliable data sources that users can access?

Collaboration

- Can users publish, share content, and add comments within and across teams?
- Is the content searchable?
- Is the storytelling based on live or static data?

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Analytics Apps and Dashboards

Users need a way to search and explore data to uncover patterns, connections, and insights to drive meaningful decisions. Interactive Dashboards & guided analytics apps benefits a wide range of business users and executives even with less sophisticated data skills to do just that.

Centrally deployed Apps

- Are there tools for developing dashboards and analytics applications intuitively and rapidly?
- Can you deploy applications across geographies with application-level controls and an interactive functionality
- Can the same app be deployed across users by reducing the data dynamically?
- Can data and dashboards be combined and deployed together within apps?
- Does it have an intuitive environment to take the user in an exploratory journey?

Interactive Exploration

- Are the visualizations in charts simple and natural and interactive?
- Is it possible for users to modify the attributes of a chart for their own purposes without impacting the master object?
- Is performing Comparative analysis possible?
- Can users run what-if scenarios?
- Can users explore multiple components in a free-form fashion without restrictions?
- Is search-based navigation possible, to expose matching data or charts and graphs?

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Custom and Embedded Analytics

The technology has grown so much that developers can create fully customized apps by utilizing public APIs for any situation. And with Embedded Analytics users can imbibe dashboards and visualizations into their existing workflow.

Open APIs

- What public and documented APIs are available for customizing and integrating applications?
- Does the supporting API have access to documentation, tutorials and examples
- What level of management and administrative access do APIs require?
- Can the same APIs be used by the product developers?
- What knowledge is required for developers to use the APIs - HTML5, JavaScript,or .NET?

Custom and Embedded Analytics

- How easily can developers create scalable web applications and mashups?
- Is it possible to build fully customized analytics applications?
- How feasible is it to embed analytics in the existing workflows and how much interactivity can they be given?
- Can the platform support integration with technical support offerings in an OEM framework?
- Can access be given to partners and customers for the web apps created?

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Reporting and Alerting

Distributing reports and monitoring performance has become a part of the basic business necessities than a niche that only certain companies follow. Therefore, it is important to have analytics platforms that make reporting and alerting intuitive and easy.

Reporting

- Is the platform capable of replacing legacy BI/reporting systems?
- Is it possible to access reports on a self-service basis?
- Does the reporting environment take advantage of the analytics and objects that are already present in the platform's core applications?
- Can data from analytics applications be exported to spreadsheets, presentations, or PDF documents?
- Can users build reports with data based on their choices directly from analytics apps?

Alerting

- Can users get alerts and notifications depending on the data set's conditions?
- Can administrators create, manage, and disseminate centralised alerts to large groups of users?
- Is it possible for users to create their own alerts using a simple self-service UI?
- Are warnings unique to certain visualisations or do they apply to the full data set?
- Is it possible to send warnings by customisable email, the online interface, and mobile devices?

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Search and Conversational Analytics

Business Intelligence is no longer just a visual medium. With Natural Language Processing, users can converse with their analytics in the form of Q&A using natural language, mainly English. Search and conversational analytics, powered by AI, will become more sophisticated and useful over time.

Search-based Visual Analytics

- Can Natural language processing (NLP) be used in simple conversational language?
- Does NLP support multiple languages?
- Are visual analytics generated automatically to the questions asked?
- Is the platform based on ML to improve insights over time?
- Are any narratives added along with the visuals as insights?
- Can analyses like Clusters and correlations be generated automatically?

Conversational Analytics

- Is it possible for users to ask the assistant more complex questions concerning comparisons and predictions?
- Is NLP being used to give data-driven narrative insights and significant observations?
- Is there an AI chat assistant available to aid users with data analysis?
- Can the chat assistant provide graphic information in addition to narrative responses?
- Can the users ask follow-up queries without having to go through the full framework again?

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Future-proof Your Analytics Platform Capabilities

While the uses cases were endless and showcase the potentials of what a ground-breaking analytics platform can unlock, this section stresses on bare-minimum or necessities of a successful analytics platform for your expanding enterprise, keeping in mind the exploding technological landscape.

Hosting & Connectivity

- Would the platform offer public, private, hybrid cloud or on-premise accessibility
- Would the data reside in the vendor's environment or would we have control over selectively pushing the data into a third-party environment?
- What are the security or downtime protocols in the case of a public cloud environment?
- Do we get a single access point for all the data be it on-premise or cloud?
- Would it support integration with third-party platforms like CRM, ERP, etc.?
- Are there any limitations like paid connectors or the inability to connect to certain software vendors?
- Would the data get updated in real-time if a user does any modifications? If not then, what is the update frequency?
- Would the charges be a fixed amount or will it be usage-based with the provision to scale up or scale down basis requirements?

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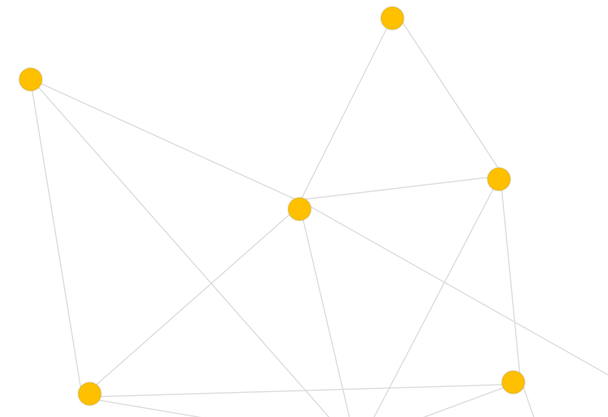
Advanced Analytics and Augmented Intelligence:

Technologies like ML & AI have been talk of the town for year now, but we have only started to see the returns matching the hype. Organisations - small and large are at different stages in this journey - the focus should be to have it in your enterprise goals.

- Can the platform offer prescriptive and suggestive insights to the user basis historical data?
- Does it come with in-built AI & ML capabilities or does it require to be implemented separately?
- Can it offer edge and streaming data analytics?
- Is it capable of handling big data and its analysis for pattern identification?
- Are advanced functionalities like clustering and correlation be performed on large data sets?
- Does it come with NLP and text mining capabilities?
- Is it possible to perform forecasting and scenario modelling?
- Does it offer report automation and triggers criteria-based notifications?
- Can the solution utilize the locational component of data for geospatial analytics?



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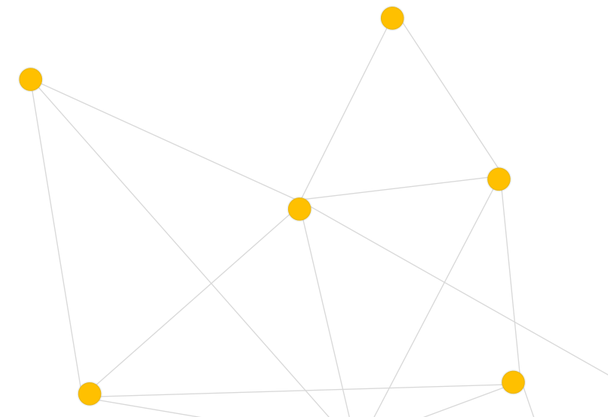
Collaboration & Master Data Management (MDM):

Collaboration amongst the users is necessary to completely remove the informational-silos & fuel innovation, but it comes at a cost. MDM is known to the IT departments but associated problems come in disguised shape and sizes - a well governed MDM is a necessity too.

- Is it possible to define and limit role-based access to data and reports?
- Can I invite new users on reports or charts to collaborate?
- Is it possible to search and request access to pre-existing reports?
- Can I embed the reports in PowerPoint Presentation or Word Doc?
- Does the system stores the trail of interaction to a data set or report?
- Is the accessibility of data and reports governed centrally?
- Can I utilize the same dataset in multiple reports?
- What is the frequency for maintenance, validation and profiling of data?
- Is there a mechanism in place to get prioritized access to new reports?



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Heavyweights of Self-Service BI

Though there are multiple platforms which offer BI solutions, we believe that Power BI, Qlik, and Tableau are the leaders. Therefore, here is very short brief on the three platforms to help you decide what's suited for you.

Power BI

The leader in Gartner's Magic Quadrant for Analytics, Power BI has features including:

- Attractive visualization and powerful Data modelling
- Seamless Integration with Applications
- DAX for complicated analysis
- Connectivity with Azure ML, R, and Python for advanced capabilities

Check out our Power BI Portfolio >>

Qlik

As the Next-gen BI tool, after QlikView, Qlik Sense has become the tool for Active Intelligence with:

- Smart Visualizations and Analytics
- Conversational Analytics and NLP
- Attunity and Qlik Data Integration Capabilities
- Data Storytelling and Reporting
- QAP & Embedded Analytics

Click to know our Qlik Expertise >>

Tableau

With an interactive and colorful interface offering in-depth analysis, Tableau's features include:

- Real-Time Data Analysis
- Drag and Drop Clusters
- Collaboration and Online Availability
- Trend Lines And Predictive Analysis
- Robust Security and Mobile View
- Modern Cloud Analytics

Check out our Tableau Services >>

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Make the right choice for your data.

With a modern analytics platform, you can empower your team with the capability of data-driven decision making. By utilizing the power of Active Intelligence, you can move from passive to active BI and accelerate value creation across the organization.

We hope this guide has provided you with some of the questions you might want to ask before choosing your BI tool.



Additional Resources -

Read More about Tableau -Qlik- Power BI

Our Embedded Analytics Product - Accio Qlik

Our Business Intelligence Portfolio

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Why Choose Polestar Solutions as your BI Implementation Partner?

With our detailed discovery process combined with our experts in Business Intelligence including

- A pool of 200+ BI consultants, developers and architects
- ISO 9001 and ISO 27001-certified to assure the quality of project deliveries and data security
- Qlik Elite Partners and Members of ‘Qlik Partner Advisory Council’ for the APAC Region
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