Building Bridges to Your Islands of Data

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It wasn't too long ago that data and information were completely isolated to office buildings and peer to peer connections. Some in the industry call it a "data silo". Over the last few years many data mining and business intelligence systems have been completely liberated by becoming web enabled. I was recently speaking with some government officials about creating a "super database" or as my colleagues in the business intelligence world call it, a Data Warehouse. The super database will likely be a very large and complex database, but the very idea of making this data available to people who need it to keep track of high risk energy pipelines is compelling. What better way to make sure that we don't have an accident that could harm our population, harm our environment, and interrupt our flow of energy.

Why is it so important to unleash our data? It is eloquently answered by **Chevron** with their latest ad in Feb 07 Wired magazine, the quote is, " **when investment and expertise are allowed to flow freely across borders, the engine of innovation is ignited, prosperity is fueled and the energy available everyone increases.**" We are talking about a revolution in our thinking about business and commerce by making available all data, historic and real-time to anyone authorized to access the data. You can see that Chevron has seen the light, they feel strongly about cooperation in order to achieve their goals.

There are four important information revolutions that are happening right now and they are:

1. Liberation of data,. The data belongs to the company, not an individual, group, directorate, territory, or discipline, the data belongs to the company and should be made available to every person who needs the data to improve the situation for the company's shareholders and employees. In the case of our government agency referred to the first paragraph, the data belongs to the people, so let's go get it and make sure that everyone authorized to see it can do so without having to learn arcane software applications. Once you have access to the data, put it into a system that is easy to use and easy to access, put the data into your **ERP** or **CRM** systems. The other word of advice is to make sure that the data collection is automated so that as the data is produced it is automatically stored, sorted, and ready for analysis.

2. Historical data is going to create business masters. Can you imagine what is being done with hundreds of years of business information to push marketing and sales to heights never before dreamed of? There are many new businesses and service organizations that can integrate and configure historical data into the latest data warehouses, making the data available for instantaneous analysis and creation of tactical marketing plans. These new tactical plans are created in a fraction of the time required prior to our new collaborative technologies. Your business creates the purest data in the world as you know you can rely on it to be 100% true. Put that old data to work for you, call those old customers, find out if they still like you and are still willing to buy from you, they paid you once, there is a good chance they will buy again.

3. Business intelligence is real and happening right now. There are companies with teams of marketing professionals that acquire data on competitors and businesses in like industries. As data is liberated from silos or islands this data often makes its way into the public sector. There are many decisions this knowledge will support. Even the advantage of having supplier catalogs online and integrated into your ordering system is a big time saver and therefore increases your profits. In the old days this information was rare, hard to find, and very expensive. Now business intelligence is all over the internet, easy to find if you know where and how to look, and much of the information is free.

4. Business Analysis is the next step after accumulating as much business intelligence as possible. The process of analyzing your data gives you insight into the buying habits of your customers by figuring out what they bought, when they bought, who they bought from, what they paid, if they bought a sale item, special offer, or full price item. The list is long and can be "sliced and diced" thousands of ways. The bottom line is that we want to know how to sell our products and services and with Business Analysis we can actually make this goal happen. ERP is a proven way to ensure the capture of data that we are able to then create KPI's, and then we can create relevant marketing strategies. I like the story of a couple of our construction customers, one of which is **Basement Systems Calgary**. Prior to installing their **ERP system** they kept meticulous records on paper (all stored in multiple filing cabinets), Microsoft Access databases, and spreadsheets. After years of filling up filing cabinets and databases they concluded that it is just not possible to properly analyze mountains of paper and disparate and orphaned data. Now that they have an ERP system they can instantly analyze customer information to make sure their customer care programs are always up to date and their warranty programs are being conducted to bring in maximum profits and maximum customer satisfaction.

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