

We need to revolutionise the way we think of reporting - say The NAV People

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The reporting debate has moved away from 'how do I get this information' to 'which of the many ways should I get this information'. But is that a question that needs to be asked at all? Ian Humphries, Managing and Product Director at The NAV People, explains how he sees a fundamental change in the approach to business intelligence, reporting and data.

Reporting as we currently know it is set to change dramatically. Most reports that are produced by business departments in SMEs, and large enterprises too for that matter, are run because that's the way things have always been done. While we use the term 'reporting' in the same way that we did 20 years, so much has changed that really we need a better word.

Most firms, of every size, need to know the same things about their business. How much am I selling, what is the margin, who owes me too much money or has owed me money for too long? What is my inventory, what are my best sellers, which lines are not worth selling?

Often 'reports' are the only way to get to the figures being sought. For example, an 'aged debt' report shows who owes too much for too long, and includes a lot of calculation.

Originally reports were printed on computer paper. Then with the advent of laser printers they came in the form of A4 sheets. Reams of paper, and all the information we needed was to be found on the last page, ie. the totals. Then we progressed to the contents of the report being imported to spreadsheets so that users could filter, and dig a bit deeper into the detail of the data, for example, which items have a high stock value.

Then along came Business Intelligence (BI) which is very often a high cost IT project that never quite gets finished because the project sponsor moves onto the next big thing before the BI solution can be properly embedded within the business culture.

Now with a modern ERP system, users can interrogate the live system, the total inventory value can be viewed in real time. By clicking on a button only high value items will be shown, another click and the items are listed in value order. No paper in sight, and the user has exactly what they were looking for.

For this panacea to be attained, the ERP system in question needs a range of tools that are easy to use, and where each one is good at a particular job. On our smartphones we have a range of apps - a calendar, maps, something for booking train tickets, and another for identifying stars in the night sky. We don't expect one large app to do everything and it is the same for answering those key business questions. Instead of trying to achieve an all-singing, all-dancing BI solution and suffering from 'analysis paralysis' SMEs certainly should aim to implement something that provides the information needed. And if that comes in the form of several tools then so be it.

In five years' time we won't be having the reporting discussion in an ERP context, business intelligence will be an inherent part of the solution. User interfaces and the range of integration/data mining tools will be such that everyone will be able to find exactly the information they require, with

no special training or additional tools. Thank goodness for that.

The NAV People will be running two seminar days on Reporting in Microsoft Dynamics NAV in April 2016.
For more information on these free seminars and to register to attend visit:
www.thenavpeople.com/news/season-of-knowledge-reporting.

The NAV People (<http://thenavpeople.com/>)

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