



Migrating Your BI to the Cloud





Business Intelligence (BI) is the heartbeat of decision making. It is making visible and gaining insights into the data of your organization. With BI, you can see your profits, your sales revenue, your costs and operational efficiency. But most importantly, you can dig into the data to discover how those numbers came to be. Why did sales spike? Why did costs drop? With BI tools, you can visualize your business world.

With BI becoming mainstream, you need to think carefully about how you implement your BI strategy. You need to buy, build and implement with the future square in your sights. BI will become ever more crucial in the climb to the top as more automation brings more data. And more data brings the opportunity for more insights. Soon, it will be the marginal gains that make the difference between you and your competitor when everyone is flooded with data. You need to be set up for growth. You want to stay ahead of the game.

Choose the right BI product to grow with you. Understand your options so you can choose the best solution for where you are now and where you want to be in the future. And when you're looking at where to host your BI product, you should definitely consider 'The Cloud'.

'The Cloud' has been a buzzword for some time now. You have probably heard all the benefits and are now considering setting up there or switching to the cloud. But the cloud's function is often as wooly in the minds of readers as its namesake. So, let's quickly outline the basics so you can be sure of what you're getting and why the excitement surrounding the cloud isn't fluff.

Cloud Deployment Models

There are three main deployment models of the cloud. Each has its benefits and drawbacks, but your organization's situation will dictate which one is best for you. Here are the models you can deploy to.

Public clouds are hosted virtualized environments (data centers) located outside company firewalls. The host environment is external to your organization. In this model, your organization can select specific resources (on demand) from the cloud service provider, which you receive via the public internet.

Private clouds are virtualized environments located within company firewalls - the hosted environment is internal to your organization. In multi-tenancy environments, this can mean that a cloud service provider has created a dedicated and partitioned space within their data center for an individual company.

Hybrid clouds combine the use of Public and Private clouds. Hybrid is the use of both private and public clouds to provide an organization's computing needs to get the best of both worlds.



What is the cloud?

So we're all on the same page, here's our definition of 'the cloud' (the computing type, not the type flying at high altitudes):

The delivery of computing resources, from services and applications to data warehouses, over the internet.



BI Software as a Service in the Cloud

Once you've decided on your deployment model, it's time to choose a BI solution that works in the cloud.

Cloud BI software can be hosted on a private or public cloud and comes in the form of Software as a Service (SaaS) cloud computing.

With SaaS cloud computing, the service provider hosts the software and users subscribe to the software that is accessed over the Internet. This removes the need for you to establish and manage the associated infrastructure and hardware. The service provider takes care of those aspects on your behalf, so you can just connect and go.

Benefits of migrating your BI to the cloud

The cloud has rock solid advantages over an on-premise deployment. Here are just a few of the key benefits.



Speed of deployment

With the cloud comes speed of deployment. Your new environment can be up and running in minutes with your BI tool ready to go as soon as you are. No more long processes of building an on-premise solution from design to purchase, and build to test. On-premise can take months; cloud takes minutes. It's already set up for you.

Speed to deployment means you're faster to market and can be reporting within minutes. Choosing to host your BI in the cloud could be your edge in the market. You can be data-ready first so you're uncovering insights before your competition. Now you can act first for improvements and new opportunities too.



Easy and inexpensive deployment

There's no infrastructure or hardware for you to set up in the cloud, so it's fast to get started. Without infrastructure and hardware set-up costs, you also get a faster Return On Investment (ROI) and a Low Total Cost of Ownership (LTO). You also don't need to manage or support the set-up, so you will save labor costs too, which also helps protect you from skill shortages.

Migrating to SaaS BI in the cloud is a shift from capital expenditure (CapEx) to smaller, ongoing expenditure (OpEx) that you can control according to the number of users and server types you operate the SaaS solution on. This payment method is often cheaper in the long run and helps manage cash flow.

Software updates in the cloud are also free and much faster to implement and available instantly. The infrastructure is maintained for you, so you save costs by not needing to upgrade infrastructure and hardware to keep up with the advancements in the software. That's all part of the service. You focus on what you do best - running your business - and the cloud BI environment is managed for you.



Security with accessibility

Although on-premise BI delivers security, it often comes with restricted access. With cloud BI, you can configure permissions quickly and easily. If your BI solution allows it, you can carefully govern access at every level, even varying your internal users' access levels to the one report. Cloud also makes it easy to collaborate with external parties without the need to give them access to your internal network.

Failover automatically happens with cloud solutions too, so you don't have complex configurations for transferring control in the event of a fault. And, unlike on-premise or desktop versions of BI, your BI software isn't tied to one computer when deployed to the cloud, so you don't lose all your data if your computer fails.

Another security benefit of the cloud is the ability to collaborate with external parties without the need to give them access to your internal network.



Scalability

In the cloud, you pay for what you need. The resources are elastic. So you don't need a large, up-front investment in hardware or infrastructure in anticipation of future scaling up. You simply subscribe for more users with your BI SaaS provider. On-premise environments can take six to twelve months to upgrade to take on more users. But with cloud computing, you can add as many new users as you need, as well as memory, disk space and processing power to the environment to ensure you maintain peak performance for your end users.



Centrality

When you choose to have your BI in the cloud, you centralize your access. All your data is available to everyone you give permissions to, whenever they need it. No more desktop versions of your BI solution where individuals hold reports nobody else can view. No more scattered silos of data only available from certain computers. You can enable access to all unhindered.

But this also means you can govern centrally. This gives you clarity of vision in how the tool is used, who accesses it, and helps you predict when and how you need to scale.



Authority

Because your data access is centralized and governed at every level from within your BI platform, you can build trust in the data. In contrast to desktop BI, you won't get two people with conflicting reports on the same numbers. You'll have one access point for all data from which all data visualizations can be shared.

When centrally governed properly, you can approve data sets and views before the reports and dashboards are built. You then have consistency. Consistency breeds trust and trust breeds adoption. With authoritative and accurate data and visualizations, more people will see the true value of data. You can then rapidly grow a data culture because of the benefits of the cloud.



Flexibility

Want your data at your fingertips on mobile? Got business users in the field who want data on their tablet? The cloud gives you the flexibility to deliver BI when and where you want it, in real-time. Empower your field users to do their job with dashboards and reports that give them up-to-the minute information in a mobile format.

You also have the flexibility to combine internal and external data sources. Pull data sets from your internal data source and view it alongside data from a third party. When so much data is held on websites and SaaS applications – think social media and applications such as Salesforce or your marketing automation – you need the flexibility to see these side by side to gain a bigger picture of your organization's performance.

Another flexibility of the cloud is multi-tenancy. You can spread the cost and resources across a large number of users and govern the user groups.



Solve a specific problem



So, moving to the cloud has a multitude of benefits. But where do you start if you are migrating from on-premise to the cloud?

First, make this your opportunity to tackle specific issues. Don't just move to the cloud because it sounds good. Have specific business problems that you want to solve by migrating to the cloud. Why? This will help you determine how you want your BI delivered and ensure you and your users gain the full benefits of cloud BI.

Don't 'lift and shift'

You are wasting a golden opportunity if you just 'lift and shift' your BI solution as it is without considering how to best address any current issues as you migrate. Make a plan. Go step by step, or function by function. As you only pay for what you use, you can move your sales reporting first, then add marketing, inventory or finance. As you continue to add more functions, the cloud BI environment scales with you. You will be visualizing all your business data in no time.

Use the cloud for all it's worth

This is about maximizing your business' BI potential. You have the opportunity to develop a BI culture in your business, so make sure you make the most of the cloud's capabilities. Make it as seamless as possible for your analysts and users to access the information they want, when they want it and how they want it through cloud BI. The cloud's benefits enable you to probe for the limits of your capabilities and scope out the potential.



Flexible

You can deliver BI in the cloud to anyone you want, with the governance you need, wherever they are. Make BI easy by delivering on every device by choosing the right vendor. This is your opportunity to re-think the way you do BI. Use the flexibility of the cloud to your advantage and make the most of it. Maybe you will want to consider moving more than your BI solution to the cloud. What would it look like to store all your data there too? Think outside the on-premise box.

Choose a cloud BI solution that works seamlessly with mobile devices and that makes consuming reports and dashboards easy. The easier you make BI for users, the more they will use it because they see the value in it and it is tailored to them.



Scalable

In the cloud, you never have to worry about whether you can scale. So, get your foundations right with a few users, then you can scale up as more users come to understand the power of data, trust the content from the centralized cloud BI and see the potential for applying data to their department or team.



Testable

The cloud is also a great testing ground for your new ideas on how to implement BI organization-wide. Its flexibility, ease of back-up and low cost means you can test with low risk. You can test your data acquisition volume or storage. You can test governance strategies and build complex multi-tenancies. Whatever it is you want to test, once your concept is proven, then you can scale up.



Plan for growth

When implementing cloud BI for the first time, it's wise to start small and slow so you can get the fundamentals right. Get all your ducks in a row for a seamless transition to the cloud. Ensure you have taken the time upfront to ensure your ETL tool is working how you want it to, that your data sources are reliable, that you have a solid data infrastructure etc. If you cut corners, moving to the cloud will not solve your problems, it will only compound your headaches. This is your opportunity to get your BI optimized.

Once you have everything ship shape, you can expand and scale up as rapidly as you like. The cloud is your limit.





Enable the whole business to use cloud BI

BI isn't the domain of just the analysts or data scientists. Data is for everyone. So enable your whole business to get the most out of having your BI in the cloud. The cloud brings data opportunities to everyone in your organization.

Give your sales team statistics at their fingertips when pitching to a new client with mobile BI. Provide your IT department with a tool that has thorough and secure governance capabilities so they can ensure the security of confidential business data without restricting access to the data to the people who need it most. Deliver BI in the cloud that empowers your analysts to create the reports and dashboards the business users really need, when they need them.

Ensure that collaboration within your BI tool is simple and easy. That way your analysts get instant feedback from users and the collaboration improves the accuracy and usefulness of the content for everyone. Missing and erroneous data can be flagged and reports shared with a click.

Understand the potential for scalability with your BI vendor. The cloud doesn't restrict scaling up, but ensure your BI tool doesn't develop flaws in areas like governance as soon as you want to bring in more users or tenants. Ask, does the solution work well in an enterprise setting? Does it allow for complex multi-tenancy that can be securely governed?

But remember, you will never scale if the BI solution isn't first adopted. So ensure the tool really does suit IT, analysts and business users. Failing to cater to one of these parties will make the BI solution sure to fail when it comes to wide-spread adoption.

Most BI tools are labeled 'intuitive'. But will it take a business user multiple hours of training to understand how to access the dashboards and reports they need? Do your analysts need to spend hours coding to get the frequently requested comparative reports on basic statistics such as year over year revenue growth? Will a lack of governance at a granular level cause IT to restrict wider access to the data?

Ensure your migration to the cloud is solving real business problems for real users. Then you're sure to have a smooth transition to the cloud and wide-spread adoption of BI in your organization.

Do it right, and the clouds are your limit!

About Toustone and Yellowfin

Toustone is a premium, cloud-based Business Intelligence service. We help you transform data into reliable, accurate and fast visual insights to optimize decisions in an ever-changing business environment.

We utilize the power of the Yellowfin business intelligence tool combined with the fully managed Toustone data cloud service to drive more insight out of your data.

Yellowfin is an intuitive, 100 percent Web-based reporting and analytics solution that operates in the Toustone data cloud service. Once your data is loaded into our secure cloud environment, the information is immediately available for you to analyze so you can start making data-centered business decisions.



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