Whitepaper

5 Tips for a Successful Proof-of-Concept for Business Analytics Solutions
Introduction

Buying Business Intelligence & Analytics (BI) solutions has changed dramatically in the past few years. Traditionally, vendors did not offer a Proof-Of-Concept (POC) stage during the buying process and when a vendor did offer one, it would often take months to set up and could easily cost tens of thousands of dollars to launch.

Today, a POC is a critical and mandatory step in selecting a BI solution and all respectable vendors offer one. But POCs can still go horribly wrong, primarily due to the misalignment of interests around the POC. While your goal for a POC is to ensure the right choice of solution and reduce risk, the vendor’s goal is to spend as little time and effort as possible helping you do that. Additionally, during a POC, vendors are motivated to focus you on their ‘killer’ features, not leaving you enough time or capacity to thoroughly investigate your full use case.

For the buyer, the misalignment of interests often results in poor product selection and a high cost to selecting the most suitable tool. To avoid this, here are 5 tips that will put you on the right track of conducting a successful BI POC:
I. A POC That Doesn’t Use Your Own Data, Doesn’t Prove Anything

From the vendor’s perspective, the most challenging part of any POC is getting familiar with the buyer’s data sets and dealing with the unique challenges of that data.

Therefore, most vendors will try to limit the scope of the POC by reducing the scope of data sources involved, trimming the data down, using sample data sets instead of your own data, and so forth.

Since dealing with your unique data challenges make up 80% of the ongoing technical challenges you will be facing throughout your deployment, taking shortcuts here really means the vendor’s POC has proven nothing.
2. Do Not Get Distracted By Pretty Visuals

The visualization of data is important, of course, but the biggest mistake buyers make is to judge the vendor based on the pretty dashboard samples it shows you on its website or during a demo. With visualization software components a dime a dozen, a vendor can easily ‘fake’ these pretty graphics.

The real challenge is customizing these dashboards to your own needs and having them show your own data. This part can takes most vendors months and thus can end up eating a large percentage of your budget. If a vendor can’t get your own data to display in dynamic and creative ways within just a few days, you should probably find a better one.

3. Address Future AND Present Requirements

Most vendors insist that you define your requirements very clearly to ensure the success of a project of any scope, POC or otherwise. The catch is that it doesn’t matter who you are or how much experience you have – it is almost impossible to know in advance what your future requirements will be.
BI requirements tend to be highly dynamic because businesses change all the time and business users are continually refining and adjusting their requirements. Today’s reporting needs will look very different in a year from now, and today’s analysis will likely be relevant for only a short period of time before becoming obsolete.

The best advice in cases like these is to focus the POC on the ability to meet ad hoc requirements, not just a set of fixed reports that might end up becoming irrelevant by the time the project ends.

4. Consult Your Own IT Professionals, Even If They Are Not Directly Involved

In many organizations business analytics solutions are already set up that are highly reliant on IT. Business professionals, frustrated by not being able to extract relevant data quickly and independently, will look for BI solutions that cut IT completely out of the loop, giving them the ability to manage his or her own analytics processes independently.
Nonetheless, it is still highly recommended that you consult your organization’s IT professionals regarding topics with which they are more familiar: scalability, integration cycles and so forth. Remember, the vendor has no real interest in sharing issues that can trip up the success of any well-intentioned project.

5. A POC Should Not Require You to Make a Financial Investment

Some vendors will promise you the world, but will demand significant upfront investment to prepare the projects, hardware and software you need for a POC. Don’t agree to this. Demand at least one solid report or dashboard running over your own data before you agree to any financial commitment.

If a vendor is not willing to work with you before you put money down, it’s probably because that vendor would have to spend weeks on development before it can reach that point. That typically means the vendor is either trying to sell you archaic technology or simply trying to pull the wool over your eyes.
Conclusion

With these 5 tips in mind, you are now equipped to select a vendor who will not only be there for you throughout the POC stage but will work with you through all your Business Intelligence & Analytics needs.

Next Steps

- Try SiSense for FREE
- Join a Sisense Analytics Expert for a Weekly Live Demo
- Contact us