

Reports that leverage data that is days or weeks old doesn't cut it anymore and many aren't considering real-time data. If you aren't looking at real-time data and using it to make quick business decisions, you're behind the curve.

## **Real-Time Data | Making Informed Decisions**

Forget SSRS, SSIS, Crystal Reports, Business Intelligence, Analytics, and all of those IT terms. Just imagine the value of making informed decisions based on relevant (near) real-time data. Manufacturers and distributors could tune factory production as products roll off the line and as customers' orders are processed rather than looking at daily or weekly (or longer!) reports. Utilities could react more quickly to power demands and deploy smarter grids through the use of Internet of Things (IoT) data from smart meters.

I'm not talking about simple dashboards based off of Excel spreadsheets and single SQL database tables. I'm talking about gaining real insights based on the relationships between longer-term and (near) real-time data.

## **The Value Proposition | Real-Time Data**

But, before I go any further let me explain “(near) real-time data.” Your senses provide you real-time data about your surroundings – sight, sound, taste, touch, smell. If you were to tell someone what you were seeing as you were seeing it, however, that would be “near” real-time data. Similarly, any data generated by your business is being processed by computer systems and transmitted across the wire so it is only “near” real-time. It's still VERY valuable, it's just important to make that distinction. In the interest of simplicity, however, I'm going to just refer to this type of data as real-time data from here out.

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So, back to gaining real insights from real-time data (see what I did? no “near” that time...). If you want access to more recent and relevant tools, you need different tools to present the data in a meaningful way. The problem with real-time data is that it is often more, well, raw. Try making sense of raw numbers coming out of an assembly line without any analysis. What

is the relevance of a smart reader reading for a power utility company unless there is historical data with which to compare and contrast it? How much more useful is that data if you could put it in perspective with all other readings from the same neighborhood? Or for all other buildings of a similar square footage and age?

### **Your Challenge**

This is the challenge with most existing analysis tools - they're designed to connect to and report on big databases. Even if you run this type of report daily, the data is hours old. More likely, you'll wait until the end of the week or after the end of the month to get enough data to give you a good report. This gives you enough time to clean the data and analyze it for trends and to surface interesting or important information. What it is not, however, is recent. Much could change between when you read a report and when the data was generated. That lag is understandable but annoying.

How much better, then, if you could blend existing data and real-time data in dashboards that presented the best of both worlds? With tools available now, you can leverage data from a SQL database or data warehouse, access real-time log data from a text file or CSV, and connect to an ERP system and provide insights that tie all of those various bits together in a way that you could not do just a year or two ago.

Here's another challenge in dealing with data. You have to store it somewhere. That requires infrastructure... hardware and software that you purchase. Oh, and you'll need somewhere to put the hardware... a data center. That requires power and cooling. And... you'll need staff to install and support the hardware and software. Your quest to realize value from your data is rapidly becoming very complex and expensive. Data warehouse projects often take months or years to complete. And, by the time you're done with it, the requirements have changed and it's time to start over again!

Your final challenge is the data scientists and Business Intelligence consultants... you're going to need some really smart people with an expensive skillset to pull relevant information and insights out of that data. It's even harder with more recent data unless you have the right tools...

What if I told you that you could leverage your real-time data in a matter of days or weeks?

And what if you could give a console to your average business analyst and make it useful to them without sending them off for IT training? With just a bit of help at the beginning, you could be realizing the true value of your data without expensive outside help in short order.

But what about the complex and expensive infrastructure I talked about above? Do you need to invest in a new data warehouse and in building cubes? Maybe, in some cases, but it's entirely possible you could deploy your solution in the cloud, without purchasing a dime of new hardware. Oh, and you could pay as you go, only paying for the computer and storage you use, as you use it.

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Imagine turning a few knobs, pushing a couple buttons, installing an app and a template and having a fully functioning BI dashboard without purchasing any new infrastructure or perhaps even without talking to your IT department! All your IT people need to do is publish some data sources and provide access and then you can do the rest.

Real-time data, available without a heavy investment in infrastructure and staff is available now. You might need a little bit of help to get started, consultants, like we have at Oakwood, are good for that. When we're done, you're going to be asking us for more, though, because it's so easy.

All of that and I didn't mention a single product! I'll tell you now though. Last week I delivered a presentation at a Business Intelligence event in Kansas City that we put together called BrainstormKC. It was a great success and we showed our attendees, live, how Microsoft PowerBI could provide instant data insights through real-time analytics. And we used various Microsoft Azure services instead of powering up a physical or virtual server. The data was sourced from a combination of Azure SQL DB and through Azure Stream Analytics. Stream Analytics allowed the audience to see their live data updates presented on the screen as they watched. The software and services are all available on pay-as-you-go subscriptions.

Oakwood built the system used in our demo last week in less than 4 weeks, on the side of our

regular work, without any physical infrastructure. The costs for the “cloud” computing services on Azure were less than \$100 for the event.

## Conclusion

Imagine what you could do with your data... if you only freed yourselves to do it. Don't waste your data, and don't blame inaction on the cost of infrastructure. If you want IT to become a value-producing partner to your business rather than a cost-center, create real value with new solutions!

If you don't say “yes” to trying new things... working with the cloud... using real-time data... your business is ignoring powerful tools that your competitors are likely looking at. Don't get left behind.

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## Next Steps

Review our [case studies](#) and engagements where we helped companies just like yours solve a variety of business needs.

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## About Oakwood

Since 1981, Oakwood has been helping companies of all sizes, across all industries, solve their business problems. We bring world-class consultants to architect, design and deploy technology solutions to move your company forward. Our proven approach guarantees better business outcomes. With flexible engagement options, your project is delivered on-time and on budget. 11,000 satisfied clients can't be wrong.

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