

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

with Jackie

Executive Dashboards

I have seen an increase very recently in the number of questions I get from iSeries™ server customers on the use and implementation of *executive dashboards*. If you do any reading or research on this subject, you will see that this term is somewhat like CRM in that everyone is claiming they have it, regardless of the actual implementation.

Every executive has some key numbers that they are responsible for. These numbers may be called *key performance indicators*, *critical success factors*, or *balanced scorecard metrics*. The intent behind an executive dashboard is to enable the executive to see at a glance all their key measurements. These will typically be displayed on one page with the areas for concern being highlighted.

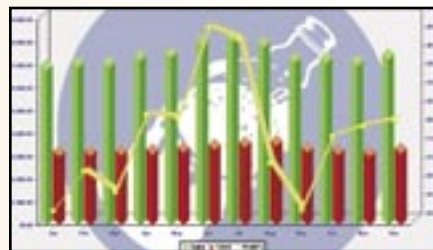


The executive dashboard is a quick summary of the overall state of the business. The executive dashboard is a portal or a starting point for the executive to get more detailed information about the business. For example, if the profit numbers weren't meeting the targets, the executive could click on the profit figure and be taken to a lower-level graph or spreadsheet that showed whether the problem was with revenue or expenses.

Often these dashboards are implemented using multidimensional or Online Analytical Processing solutions such as IBM® DB2® OLAP Server™.

Using a multidimensional database gives your executives the capability to analyze the underlying reasons behind the numbers on the dashboard. In our example, once an executive has drilled down on the profit numbers to see the revenue and expense number, they can then start "slicing and dicing" the data. This might mean asking to see the revenue and expense numbers by sales region or by product or even by individual customer. The possibilities are almost endless.

It is highly likely that each executive in the company will have their own personalized executive dashboard. Some of the measurements will be the same for everyone, such as tracking against overall profit targets. There will also be numbers unique to each executive. For example, several customers recently told me that they wanted to track and analyze scrap quantities on their various assembly lines. While such numbers are often of great interest to the vice president of manufacturing, they are probably not high on the list of concerns for a human resources executive.



Once you have decided what numbers to track for each executive, you then need to decide how to present them. One method might be to use gauges such as thermometers or speed dials. Some software vendors may refer to a graph as an executive dashboard.




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A graph can certainly be part of a dashboard but by itself isn't normally considered a complete executive dashboard.

For some executives, the numbers themselves are all that is needed. Here is one example simply using tables without any graphs or gauges.



In such displays, you often see the variance percent from the budgeted or forecasted number displayed. You will always see some type of highlighting to draw the executive's attention very quickly to the poor or outstanding results. In a popular example of this, called traffic lighting, the colour green indicates targets reached, yellow indicates targets not quite reached, and red indicates targets missed.

In the final analysis, the format of the data is one that will give the executive user the information he or she requires in as simple and meaningful a way as possible. 

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