




Take these  
4 key steps  
to refresh  
your analytics  
strategy





Over the past few years, businesses have been so focused on implementing and expanding their analytics capabilities that they haven't had even a spare second to pause, take stock of what they've accomplished, and reconsider the path forward in light of that view.

If they did, they might be surprised at what they would find. The truth is, for all our collective hand-wringing over the years about the need to seize the potential of analytics capabilities, many have made impressive progress. They have a legitimate analytics infrastructure in place that is - dare we say it - mature. And that has serious implications for determining how best to move forward, especially as a new crop of incredibly advanced capabilities, in areas such as AI and machine learning, begin to sprout and mature themselves. How well can all these capabilities be expected to work together in the context of a quickly maturing infrastructure?

We believe we are standing on the verge of a whole new phase in the evolution of analytics. This view acknowledges the fact that the business world has made demonstrable progress in building a true analytics infrastructure, and is now facing a host of emerging capabilities that must be accommodated by that infrastructure. It's an exciting time. And there are some moves you should be making right now in order to prepare for it.



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## Put on your walking shoes: Go talk to your counterparts in the business

It's been said a hundred times before, of course: Business-IT collaboration is the determining factor in your success. But if anything, it's even more true as we move into the era of analytics modernization, where new capabilities will force business leaders to stretch in ways they probably never imagined. But you know what? We encounter organizations every day where there is still either no relationship between business and IT, or there is one - and it's completely dysfunctional. Meanwhile, it can be nearly impossible to find people who are experts in both business and analytics, making collaboration that much more important.

The simplest solution is the only one that routinely works: face time. That's where relationships are cemented and the foundation is set for collaboration. It's where you get to ask questions such as "if I move these analytics capabilities to the cloud behind our website, what's the benefit to our customer experience?" Or "what would you really like to find out from all this IoT data we're gathering?" Or "how will it affect operations if we bring analytics to the edge devices, rather than bring it all back to the data center?" Or "can you give me a sense of the real impact these analytics capabilities have for your business?"

These conversations can be invaluable in better understanding the relative value and real impact of IT's work on behalf of the business in the field of analytics. When you hear that seemingly minor segmentation app



## What to do right now

- Identify your top three business users of analytics.
- Make a list of their top three priorities for business insights: What do you and your team think they need most from analytics, and why? What tangible impact do these analytics capabilities have on the company's bottom line?
- Set up an in-person meeting with each of those three users. Bring your list to the meeting as a conversation starter, comparing with what they've identified as their own priorities. Where are the gaps?
- Commit to leaving the meeting with a beginning plan to address the gaps between your expectations, needs, and commitments.

your team is deploying for the Marketing team has already led to a 500% increase in offer acceptance from new prospects, that tends to change your calculations - what would happen if you invested a little more of your team's time in improving it? What other parts of the business may benefit from it as well? Plus, when your team members understand the impact their work is having on the business, they tend to be more motivated and engaged. The more everyone is connected to the business, the better.

Plus, you're going to need a strong foundation for collaboration in the future - because just at the moment business leaders are getting comfortable with analytics capabilities, things are going to change again, especially as AI and machine learning hit their stride. You should already be planning to collaborate on the entire analytics lifecycle - it can't just be "IT is responsible for deployment and the business is handling everything else." Collaboration can and should blur the lines that have been in place for years, in much the way that DevOps has emerged as a leading practice that can reduce the conflict between operations and development.



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## Get out your pen: Draw a direct line to the impact on people

Think for a moment about your current portfolio of analytics projects and capabilities. How many of them are directly, explicitly attached to the experiences of people, including customers, your own employees, and others (like patients, for health care organizations) who are directly impacted by analytics insights - and how many are the business equivalent of science projects? Because one of the greatest impacts of analytics is on human behavior. This isn't a question of whether there's a good case to be made for the potential value of analytics capabilities at some point. For analytics, it's probably not a stretch to make that case. Instead, this is a question of whether you have formally connected what you're doing in the analytics arena to its direct impact on people - today. It's not enough to simply be able to make the case: You have to actually make it. Because your organization doesn't need science projects - it needs results.

Understand the business drivers, speak to your colleagues in other parts of the business, bake your findings into your strategy, and let analytics' real value to people be a leading factor in every key decision you make about




## What to do right now

- Gather your top analytics leadership together, preferably in one room.
- Identify your most significant analytics projects - could be a list of five or fifty.
- Determine together how each of these projects affects the customers, employees, and other people within their domain.
- For those that do, document their specific impact.
- Flag those that don't have a significant impact on people, with an eye to either scaling them back, ceasing them altogether, or modifying them to have a more direct impact on customer value.

which analytics capabilities to pursue and how to go about doing it. Ultimately, this is about making the shift from "cost center" to "profit center" - a perennial challenge in IT, but one that is particularly important in this phase of the evolution of business analytics. In practice, it means starting with deployment in mind first, then working backwards - no more starting with an algorithm, then trying to figure out where to apply it.

What's at stake? Without making this connection, critical analytics projects run the risk of being sidelined as "just another IT thing" - a dangerous proposition in a world where data and insights are fast becoming the most valuable currency in business.





## Move analytics to wherever the data lives – and not the other way around

Think about the trajectory of business analytics: Twenty years ago, it was typically the sole domain of a small cadre of math PhDs working together in one department, set off from the rest of the company. Then, in recent years, analytics became more democratized – more people in the organization enjoyed more access to analytics-generated insights. But those insights were still served up by a centralized analytics infrastructure. That is changing very quickly, however, pushed along by developments in cloud computing, the Internet of Things, and more, in recognition of the fact that huge volumes of data are being generated in places far removed from headquarters, for example.

In this world, analytics isn't a secondary consumer of data – it's a primary driver. And analytics capabilities need to be located wherever the data is being generated. If the data is being created in the cloud, that's where your analytics capabilities should be. If analytics needs to drive forecasting capabilities, it needs to be located in the operational systems. You get the idea. Before, we moved data to analytics systems. Now we must put the analytics systems where the data lives. This shift will affect every infrastructure, in terms of RAM, compute power, IO, you name it.

### What to do right now

- Identify exactly which existing systems in your organization touch your customers.
- Find out what types of analytics are used in each part of your technology ecosystem. Maybe your ERP or supply chain solution relies heavily on forecasting capabilities. Your CRM solution may use analytics primarily for customer segmentation and targeting.
- Work with your counterparts in the business to determine their most common sources of data. Are they always using the data warehouse? Drawing from their own sources? Make a map – this is critical information for determining how best to bring analytics closer to the data itself.





## Lay the groundwork now for massive computing power demands

Analytics is already the single most compute-intensive activity in which your organization will engage. Period. So when you're building new solutions, you need to build with that in mind - especially when you consider that AI and machine learning in particular introduce new volumes of data into the process. In one sense, data is driving demand - and it often spurs the creation of more data. Similarly, customer expectations are generating more demand as well - users increasingly expect to be able to simply speak to AI-enabled technology, like that used in the intelligent speakers they have in their homes, or in the smartphones on which they rely every day. And that requires massive computing power. Fail to plan for this inevitability, and you're likely to end up with a portfolio of analytics capabilities that are not delivering the desired value because they're not supported by the required amount of computing muscle.

What does that mean in practice? For starters, it means that when you're considering implementing new solutions or capabilities, you should be asking smart, specific questions about how well they are integrated with the processing/hardware assets on which they rely.

## What to do right now

- Identify which data is relevant so you'll know what to store and what to ignore.
- Ask smart, specific questions about analytics tools/tech/solution integration with processing/hardware assets.
- Make sure people are aware of this fundamental dynamic. Business users making more purchasing decisions need to be more informed, too.

At this very moment, across your organization, business buyers are being pitched new solutions and tools that come with analytics embedded in them. But can those analytics tools easily sync with your analytics platform? If not, it may not have a place in your organization. Right now, it's possible that nobody's even asking the question, though - and that's a problem. Your people - whether IT or business leaders - need to be actively aware of this fundamental dynamic, especially at a time when more empowered business users are making more and more ad hoc purchasing decisions on their own.



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## Ready to take that next step?

Transforming your analytics infrastructure to take advantage of all the new opportunities afforded by recent advances can have a direct impact on performance - both operational and financial. A modern analytics platform can go a long way toward giving your organization the flexibility it needs to maneuver in this new environment - especially if it's able to accommodate a wide range of new and emerging commercial and home-grown analytics tools. Because that's the world we live in today - one in which good ideas can come from anywhere.

If you're ready to take the next step with technology designed for this type of flexibility, SAS and Intel can help.



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