

BAO Inc. gets ahead of the competition with help from Ironside Group



Offering clients real-time insight fuels dramatic business growth

Overview

Business challenge

To improve the quality of the market intelligence it delivers to its clients, BAO Inc. wanted to analyze the findings from its research projects in real time – even while those projects were still in progress.

Solution

BAO created an automated reporting solution based on IBM Business Analytics software, which enables users to analyze completed and ongoing projects and present the results in accessible, dynamic reports that sales teams and clients can view anywhere, any time, using PCs or iPads.

Headquartered in Andover, Massachusetts, BAO Inc. acts as a partner for sales and marketing teams in the high-tech industry, developing powerful, aggressive go-to-market strategies. BAO gives organizations the real-time insight, tools, and resources they need to transform their businesses – to drive new revenue while increasing the profitability of existing accounts; to optimize sales and marketing operations; to outcompete the competition; or all of the above. BAO has a proven track record for success – generating more than \$10 million in pipeline for its clients every day.

“Our clients tell us that they gain an average of \$30 in new pipeline for every dollar they spend with us,” states Jim Higgins, CEO of BAO Inc. “That’s a pretty compelling proposition, and many of the world’s largest technology companies are already taking advantage of it.”

Targeted market intelligence

One of the main areas in which BAO adds value for its clients is market intelligence. Its researchers speak to thousands of prospective customers at companies across the US, and conduct detailed surveys that provide insight into the potential demand for all kinds of IT services and solutions. For each research project, the BAO team creates a report that includes all of the data collected, and draws conclusions that help the client decide where best to focus their sales resources.

“We used to build these reports using spreadsheets, which was a laborious process,” says Jim Higgins. “Our analysts would spend hours just doing the dirty work – extracting the data from our contact management and ERP systems into Excel, and then formatting and checking it – before they could really start on the analysis itself. Moreover, for large projects, the spreadsheets were often huge and complicated. When you’re trying to present a report with 25 columns and 400 rows to your clients, it’s difficult for them to see the wood for the trees.”



Business Benefits

- Enables BAO to adjust and optimize its research projects in real time, allowing researchers to identify and focus on market areas that offer the strongest opportunities for their clients.
 - Provides clients with dynamic reports that are much easier to use than traditional spreadsheet-based reports, differentiating BAO from the majority of its competitors.
 - BAO estimates that the ability to offer real-time analytics as a service will generate 25 percent growth in sales through new business and increased retention of existing clients.
 - Generates reports at the click of a mouse, eliminating approximately \$5,000 of manual spreadsheet work per week.
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Enhancing client-facing reporting

BAO wanted to find a way to make these reports easier for analysts to create and clients to understand, and decided to invest in a business analytics solution.

“I used to work for Hyperion, so I was familiar with the business intelligence concept,” says Jim Higgins. “My team and I began researching the current state of the analytics market: we read a lot of research and downloaded demos of various products to get an idea of what the best options were. The demo of IBM Cognos Business Intelligence really impressed us, especially because of its mobile capabilities. We’re constantly on the move, visiting our clients, and we’re big iPad users, so the ability to display and navigate through interactive reports on a tablet device was very appealing.”

Making analytics more accessible

Better still, the latest version of the software, Cognos 10, offers a new capability called Active Report, which allows subsets of data from the central Cognos system to be packaged into a single report file that can be viewed and manipulated even when a user is offline. These Active Reports can simply be emailed to clients, who can open them in any web browser and interact with the data without any need to connect to BAO’s main Cognos environment.

“Active Report is an incredibly convenient way to share information with clients, because there’s no need to give them a user account in our Cognos system and expect them to log in and do everything for themselves. They don’t even need to download any software – the reports just run in a normal web browser. They can start exploring immediately; and in a few clicks they can drill down from a high-level overview to the data itself.”

A huge new opportunity

BAO quickly realized that the ability to generate Active Reports in a few seconds – as opposed to several hours of spreadsheet work – provided an opportunity to transform the way it managed its research projects. Instead of completing the project and creating a retrospective report at the end, it would be now possible to create interim reports in real time. The implications promised to be hugely significant, as Jim Higgins explains:

“Previously, we might not be aware of a trend in our results until we had completed the final analysis – by which time it was too late for us to take any action. So, for example, if our findings showed that there was a big opportunity to sell storage systems to telecoms companies, we could advise our clients to focus on that sector, but that was it.

Solution Components

Software

- IBM Cognos® Business Intelligence v10.1

IBM Business Partner

- Ironside Group
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— Jim Higgins, CEO, BAO Inc.

“With the Cognos solution, if our early findings suggest that telecom is the best area to concentrate on, we can alter the parameters of the project in real time and focus on speaking to more telecoms companies and finding out exactly what they want. So the result is much richer insight that provides a better guide for our clients’ sales strategies.

Building the solution

To support the implementation of the new Cognos solution, BAO worked with Ironside Group, an IBM Business Partner that specializes in business analytics and data warehousing solutions. The first step was to re-architect BAO’s Microsoft SQL Server database landscape and clean up the data, with a view to both the immediate project and the company’s longer term use of analytics. Next, Ironside and BAO worked together closely on the design for the client-facing reports.

“It was absolutely crucial to get the user experience right,” says Jim Higgins. “We wanted a look and feel that was intuitive and gave the user an immediate grasp of the overall results – basically, exactly the opposite of the old spreadsheet-based approach! The consultants from Ironside really did a great job of translating our requirements into a solution that is simple, elegant and easy to use. And best of all, we had the first deliverables ready for our clients within just two months.”

BAO initially tested the new reports on a small number of key clients; based on the positive feedback from this test group, the plan is to complete a full rollout to all 150 clients over the next few months.

“The analyst firm we work with thinks this could be a real game-changer for the market intelligence sector,” says Jim Higgins. “Certainly, we’re not aware of any of our competitors offering a similar service, so it definitely differentiates us in the market. As clients begin to see the benefits of our real-time approach to market intelligence research, we expect to see a significant increase in both customer retention and market share.”

He concludes: “The value to our business is potentially enormous. If we can increase our sales by just four percent, the IBM Business Analytics solution will have delivered a full return on our investment. Our current growth prediction is around 25 percent, which means it will pay for itself many times over. And this is just the beginning of our analytics journey: when we start using Cognos for internal financial and sales reporting too, it will bring even more value to our business.”

About Ironside Group

Founded in 1999, Ironside is headquartered in Lexington, MA with offices throughout the eastern United States. Ironside Group is an IBM Premier Business Partner. Its main focus is enabling its customers to build best practice solutions in the area of business intelligence, financial performance management, predictive analytics and data warehousing. Its strategic partnership with IBM, along with its consulting, training, and cloud hosting business areas provide a strong foundation for customer success.

To learn more about Ironside Group, visit www.ironsidegroup.com.

About IBM Business Analytics

IBM Business Analytics software delivers actionable insights decision-makers need to achieve better business performance. IBM offers a comprehensive, unified portfolio of business intelligence, predictive and advanced analytics, financial performance and strategy management, governance, risk and compliance and analytic applications. With IBM software, companies can spot trends, patterns and anomalies, compare “what if” scenarios, predict potential threats and opportunities, identify and manage key business risks, and plan, budget and forecast resources. With these deep analytic capabilities, our customers around the world can better understand, anticipate and shape business outcomes.

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