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Digital Dashboards

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Overview

In management information systems, a **dashboard** is "an easy to read, often single page, real-time user interface, showing a graphical presentation of the current status (snapshot) and historical trends of an organization's key performance indicators to enable instantaneous and informed decisions to be made at a glance." In real-world terms, "dashboard" is another name for "progress report" or "report." Often, the "dashboard" is displayed on a web page that is linked to a database which allows the report to be constantly updated.

Like a car's dashboard (or control panel), a software dashboard provides decision makers with the input necessary to "drive" the business. Thus, a graphical user interface may be designed to display summaries, graphics (e.g., bar charts, pie charts, bullet graphs, "sparklines," etc.), and gauges (with colors similar to traffic lights) in a portal-like framework to highlight important information.

For example, a manufacturing dashboard may show numbers related to productivity such as number of parts manufactured, or number of failed quality inspections per hour. Similarly, a human resources dashboard may show numbers related to staff recruitment, retention and composition, for example number of open positions, or average days or cost per recruitment.

History

The idea of digital dashboards followed the study of decision support systems in the 1970s. With the surge of the web in the late 1990s, digital dashboards as we know them today began appearing. Many systems were developed in-house by organizations to consolidate and display data already being gathered in various information systems throughout the organization. Today, digital dashboard technology is available "out-of-the-box" from many software providers. Some companies however continue to do in-house development and maintenance of dashboard applications. For example, GE Aviation has developed a proprietary software/portal called "Digital Cockpit" to monitor the trends in aircraft spare parts business.

In the late 1990s, Microsoft promoted a concept known as the Digital Nervous System and "digital dashboards" were described as being one leg of that concept.

Types of dashboards

Digital dashboards may be laid out to track the flows inherent in the business processes that they monitor. Graphically, users may see the high-level processes and then drill down into low level data. This level of detail is often buried deep within the corporate enterprise and otherwise unavailable to the senior executives.

Three main types of digital dashboard dominate the market today: stand-alone software applications, web-browser based applications, and desktop applications also known as desktop widgets. The last are driven by a widget engine.

Specialized dashboards may track all corporate functions. Examples include human resources, recruiting, sales, operations, security, information technology, project management, customer relationship management and many more departmental dashboards. For a smaller organization like a startup a compact startup scorecard dashboard tracks important activities across lot of domains ranging from social media to sales

Digital dashboard projects involve business units as the driver and the information technology department as the enabler. The success of digital dashboard projects often depends on the metrics that were chosen for monitoring. Key performance indicators, balanced scorecards, and sales performance figures are some of the content appropriate on business dashboards.

Benefits

Digital dashboards allow managers to monitor the contribution of the various departments in their organization. To gauge exactly how well an organization is performing overall, digital dashboards allow you to capture and report specific data points from each department within the organization, thus providing a "snapshot" of performance.

Benefits of using digital dashboards include:

- Visual presentation of performance measures
- Ability to identify and correct negative trends
- Measure efficiencies/inefficiencies
- Ability to generate detailed reports showing new trends
- Ability to make more informed decisions based on collected business intelligence
- Align strategies and organizational goals
- Saves time compared to running multiple reports
- Gain total visibility of all systems instantly
- Quick identification of data outliers and correlations

Source: Wikipedia