

2024

Advanced Data Insights: *Why Your ERP Needs a Dedicated BI Platform*



The Growing Need for Advanced Analytics

In competitive business environments, organizations need more than just raw data to succeed, they need actionable insights that drive growth, innovation, and efficiency. Data has evolved from being a byproduct of operations to the foundation of strategic decision-making. While Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems are essential for managing core business functions like finance, inventory, and customer relationships, they often fall short when it comes to advanced data analytics. ERPs are built to streamline operations and store transactional data, but they lack the sophisticated tools needed to extract deep, meaningful insights. The reports generated by these systems are often rigid, static, and limited in scope. This gap between data collection and data analysis leads to delayed decisions and missed opportunities.

Businesses cannot afford to rely on basic reporting tools. They require a solution that enables real-time data analysis, dynamic visualizations, and predictive insights—all of which empower decision-makers to act quickly and with confidence. This is where integrating a dedicated business intelligence (BI) platform like Power BI with your ERP system comes into play. By connecting an ERP with Power BI, businesses can move beyond surface-level reporting and realize the full potential of their data. This powerful combination not only enhances decision-making but also fosters collaboration across the organization. Teams can work with a shared understanding of the metrics that matter most, driving innovation and efficiency from every corner of the business.

In this guide, we will explore the limitations of ERP reporting, the transformative power of a dedicated BI platform, and how integrating these systems can give your business a competitive edge. Whether you're seeking to improve operational efficiency, enhance data-driven decision-making, or gain a holistic view of your business, this guide will provide the insights you need to benefit from the full power of your data.

Why ERPs Alone Fall Short on Analytics

While ERPs are essential for managing day-to-day operations, they often lack the robust analytical tools needed to support strategic decision-making. Most ERP systems provide predefined reports that offer a snapshot of performance, but they don't allow businesses to explore data in depth or customize insights for specific needs. These limitations can leave decision-makers struggling to see the full story behind their data.

Some of the common limitations of ERP reporting include:

Restricted Customization

ERP reports are often predefined and offer limited customization options. This can make it difficult for organizations to create reports that reflect their unique business needs or evolving KPIs.

Lack of Advanced Visualizations

ERPs are generally designed for data entry and process management rather than advanced data visualization. Most ERP systems offer basic tables and charts, but they lack the rich, interactive dashboards and visual tools that allow users to explore data from different angles.

Limited Data Integration

While ERPs offer built-in reporting for the data housed within the ERP, they are not well-equipped to integrate other data sources (CRM, HRIS, etc.) into the reporting. Some systems offer integrations with other data sources, these capabilities are often expensive add-ons or difficult to implement. This limitation can prevent businesses from creating a holistic view of performance, that requires combining datasets from both within the ERP, and from within other key operational systems.

The Bottom Line:

Executives and decision-makers need more than just static reports — they need the ability to interact with their data, identify trends, and make real-time decisions. The limited flexibility of ERP reporting often leads to delayed, or partial insights, which can hinder the ability to leverage data to respond to new market trends, customer behavior, or operational inefficiencies. Without the ability to dive deeper into data and combine data from various systems for a complete picture, businesses risk missing out on key opportunities to innovate, optimize, and grow.



Everyone realizes the need to be data driven, and there is more data available than ever, but getting the right data in a timely manner AND being able to use it to make strategic decisions is key. Blue Margin has helped us do just that.

Are Your ERP Analytics Solutions Meeting Your Business Needs?

Use this checklist to evaluate whether your current ERP analytics are sufficient or if it's time to consider integrating a dedicated BI platform like Power BI.

Do your current reports meet your specific business needs?

- Yes, they are fully customizable to my evolving KPIs.
- No, they are static and offer limited customization.

Can you easily build custom dashboards and reports for different departments?

- Yes, I can build reports tailored to various teams (e.g., finance, sales, operations).
- No, I am limited to predefined templates and report formats.

Are you able to combine data from multiple sources to get a comprehensive view of your business?

- Yes, I can combine data from other systems with my ERP's data for better insights.
- No, I can only analyze data stored within the ERP.

Does your ERP provide rich, interactive visualizations (e.g., dynamic charts, graphs, drill-downs)?

- Yes, it offers a wide range of visualization options.
- No, I'm limited to basic tables and charts.

Are your reports updated in real time, providing the latest business data?

- Yes, reports update automatically in real-time.
- No, reports are generated periodically and may be outdated by the time they are reviewed.

Can your teams access real-time insights to make decisions on the spot?

- Yes, teams can access live insights at any time. They're automatically refreshed.
- No, insights are static and require manual updates to stay current.

Does your current ERP offer advanced analytics (e.g., predictive analytics, machine learning, AI)?

- Yes, my ERP has built-in advanced analytical tools.
- No, I rely on basic reports and want predictive analytics

If you checked "No" for several questions, your ERP analytics might not be sufficient for your current business needs.

Benefits of Advanced Analytics

Advanced analytics goes beyond traditional descriptive reporting by harnessing data for predictive analytics, through machine learning (ML), and artificial intelligence (AI). Going beyond answering what happened in the past, advanced analytics allows companies to start anticipating what *will* happen in the future, and what the company should do in response. Integrating ERP data (and data from other systems) into a modern data platform allows companies to not only automate Power BI dashboards, but to stage their data for these predictive analytics use cases.

Predictive Analytics for Better Forecasting

Using historical data, predictive analytics allows businesses to anticipate future trends and outcomes, providing a clearer path for proactive decision-making. By anticipating customer demand and market shifts, businesses can make proactive decisions in areas like resource allocation, inventory management, sales strategies, and more.

Machine Learning for Hidden Insights

ML enables businesses to uncover patterns in data that traditional analysis might miss. It helps segment customers for personalized marketing and improve operational efficiency by identifying patterns, trends, and relationships hidden in company data.

Real-Time Monitoring for Quick Action

With real-time data insights, businesses can make fast, informed decisions. This agility allows organizations to address issues quickly, mitigate risks, and respond to emerging trends in real time.

AI for Smarter Decision Support

AI-driven analytics automatically generates insights and recommendations based on complex data sets. This enables businesses to make more accurate decisions without relying solely on manual data analysis.



Previously, we had a heavy manual effort to report via static charts. Now we push information to the field where judgment calls are needed in real time. It's a shift to our operating model that keeps us from losing project momentum and performing uncontracted work."

CEO, Construction Firm

The Value of a Dedicated BI Platform

While ERP systems are indispensable for managing daily operations, they are not built to serve as powerful analytics platforms. Businesses that want to derive meaningful insights from their data need more than the basic reporting offered by ERP systems. A dedicated business intelligence (BI) platform, like Power BI, can bridge this gap by enabling advanced analytics, interactive visualizations, advanced data integration, and more valuable insights that ERP systems alone cannot offer.

A BI platform like Power BI is specifically designed to handle the complexities of data analysis and reporting. Unlike ERP systems, which prioritize data management and operations, BI platforms focus on transforming raw data into actionable insights.

Here's why a BI platform is critical:

Advanced Data Visualization

Unlike the basic tables and charts found in most ERP systems, Power BI offers a wide range of interactive visualizations that allow users to explore data from different perspectives. From customizable dashboards to in-depth drill-downs, Power BI's tools make it easier to identify trends, spot anomalies, and visualize key metrics in ways that standard ERP reports cannot.

Holistic View of Business Data

ERPs are often limited to the data generated within the system. A BI platform, however, allows for seamless integration of data from multiple sources—internal and external. This means businesses can combine data from their ERP, CRM, marketing automation, financial tools, and third-party applications into one unified dashboard, giving a more comprehensive view of business performance.

Flexibility and Customization

Every business is unique, and so are its data analytics needs. While ERP reporting is often rigid, a BI platform like Power BI offers nearly limitless customization options. Users can build dashboards and reports tailored to specific departments, business goals, or metrics, ensuring that the insights are always relevant and actionable.

While ERP systems excel in managing the operational side of the business, they are not designed to provide the advanced analytics necessary for today's competitive business environment. A dedicated BI platform like Power BI complements the strengths of an ERP by adding flexibility, advanced visualizations, and in-depth analytics. By integrating these systems, businesses can unlock the full potential of their data and transform how they make decisions. In the next chapter, we will explore best practices for successfully integrating your ERP system with a BI platform.

Key Features of Power BI for Enhanced Analytics

Real-Time Data Monitoring

Power BI allows users to create live dashboards that update in real time, giving decision-makers immediate access to the latest business metrics. This level of agility is essential in a fast-paced business environment, where timely decisions are required on a daily basis.

Advanced Analytics and AI

Power BI goes beyond simple data visualization with advanced capabilities, like machine learning, AI, and predictive analytics. These tools allow businesses to forecast future trends, detect patterns, and even uncover new business opportunities based on historical data.

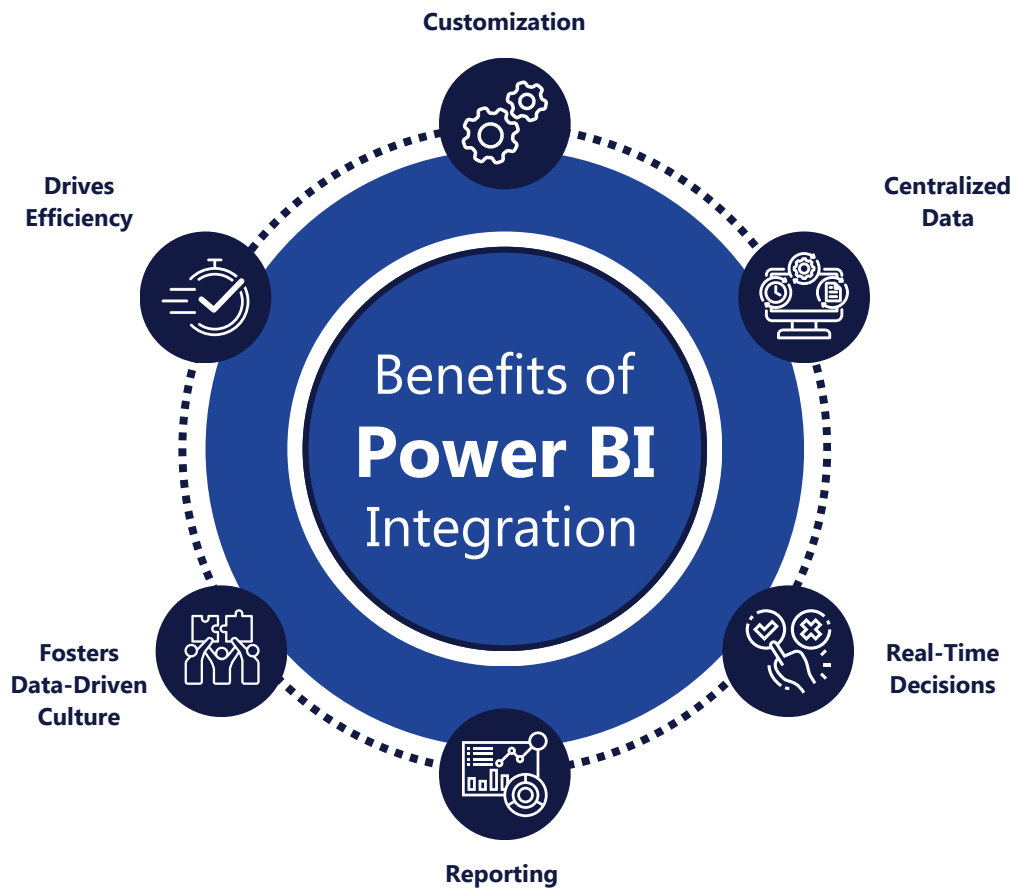


Interactive and Shareable Dashboards

Power BI's intuitive drag-and-drop interface makes it easy for users to build interactive dashboards without needing advanced technical skills. These dashboards can be shared across teams, departments, or even external stakeholders, fostering a culture of data-driven decision-making throughout the organization.

Seamless Integration with Microsoft Tools

For businesses already using the Microsoft ecosystem, Power BI's integration with tools like Excel, Teams, and PowerPoint adds significant value. Users can easily import data from Excel or share insights directly through Teams, creating a seamless workflow for collaboration and reporting.



How Power BI Enhances ERP Capabilities

Overcoming Data Silos

ERP systems often contribute to siloed data, where critical business information is compartmentalized across different departments and systems. A BI platform like Power BI breaks down these silos by integrating data from multiple systems, providing decision-makers with a unified view of the business.

In-Depth Analysis with Custom Measures

Power BI enables users to create custom measures and KPIs that go beyond the default metrics provided by ERP systems. Whether it's forecasting sales, tracking inventory performance, or analyzing customer trends, Power BI provides the flexibility to build metrics that align with the company's definitions and business logic.

Improved User Adoption and Engagement

Traditional ERP reports can be static and difficult to navigate, which throttles user adoption. With Power BI's dynamic and interactive features, employees are more likely to engage with the data, explore insights, and contribute to data-driven decisions, improving overall data literacy within the organization.

Make Data Your Biggest Asset with ERP and BI Integration

Data isn't just an asset, it's a competitive advantage. Simply having data isn't enough. Organizations need to transform and combine datasets to surface meaningful insights that foster profitable growth. While ERP systems provide a strong foundation for managing operational functions, they often fall short in delivering the in-depth, real-time insights critical for strategic decision-making and tactical awareness.

By integrating your ERP with a dedicated business intelligence platform like Power BI, you gain access to the full potential of your data. This powerful combination enables you to move beyond basic reporting to embrace advanced analytics, real-time monitoring, and actionable insights. It empowers decision-makers at every level of the organization to act swiftly and with confidence, guided by data that's both accurate and up-to-date.

The key to maximizing this integration lies in focusing on what matters most—building a flexible data model, ensuring real-time data synchronization, and customizing reports and KPIs to align with your unique business goals. This approach not only improves operational efficiency but also fosters a culture of collaboration and data-driven decision-making.

As agility and innovation become key success factors in the future, integrating your ERP with a BI platform has become a strategic necessity. The businesses that lead tomorrow will be the ones that can turn their data into a competitive advantage today. Now is the time to elevate your business intelligence strategy, harness the full power of your data, and achieve new levels of performance and innovation.



Why Blue Margin?

Our approach begins with a deep understanding of your unique business challenges and strategic goals. We work alongside your team to tailor our solutions, ensuring alignment with your objectives and a focus on driving tangible results. Our partnership goes beyond mere technology deployment; it's about building a lasting relationship based on trust, clear communication, and a commitment to your success. We specialize in rapidly consolidating company data into a data lakehouse—in as little as two weeks—enabling quick access to centralized, reliable data. This positions your business to fully utilize advanced analytics, machine learning, and future AI analytics tools.

Blue Margin's Managed Data Service is a key component of this strategy, providing continuous support and optimization to ensure your data remains a powerful asset that drives faster improvement and higher enterprise value. With over 300 clients served, we pride ourselves on being a nimble, agile team that adapts as your needs evolve, offering real-time collaboration and the flexibility to adjust as priorities shift. Choosing us as your data partner means you're not just selecting a service provider; you're engaging with a team dedicated to enhancing your enterprise value and supporting your long-term growth.



[Blue Margin's Managed Data Service] gives me the ability to plan out the year, gather consensus on initiative priorities, and better predict the budget I need to secure.

Pedro Renteria, Director of FP&A | SimonMed

Data management challenges don't have to be your reality, and you don't need to be a billion-dollar enterprise to have a robust approach to data either. Get a handle on your data and gain access to what you need for visibility and decision making across your business. We make your data accessible, then help you decide what to do with it.

Contact us to talk to you further about our fractional approach to BI.

Let's Talk

Additional Resources

We offer a wealth of resources to support your data management journey. Here are some key resources that can provide further insights and help you make informed decisions:

Whitepapers and eBooks

- [The Dashboard Effect Book](#)
- [Guide to Data and Generative Ai](#)
- [Dashboard Design to Ensure Adoption](#)
- [Buyer's Guide to Data Management](#)

Blog and Articles

- [Advantages of a Fractional Data Team in the Mid-Market](#)
- [How to Become a Data-Driven Organization](#)
- [A Turn-Key Fractional Approach to Data Management](#)
- [What to Look for When Hiring a Power BI Consultant](#)

Tools and Worksheets

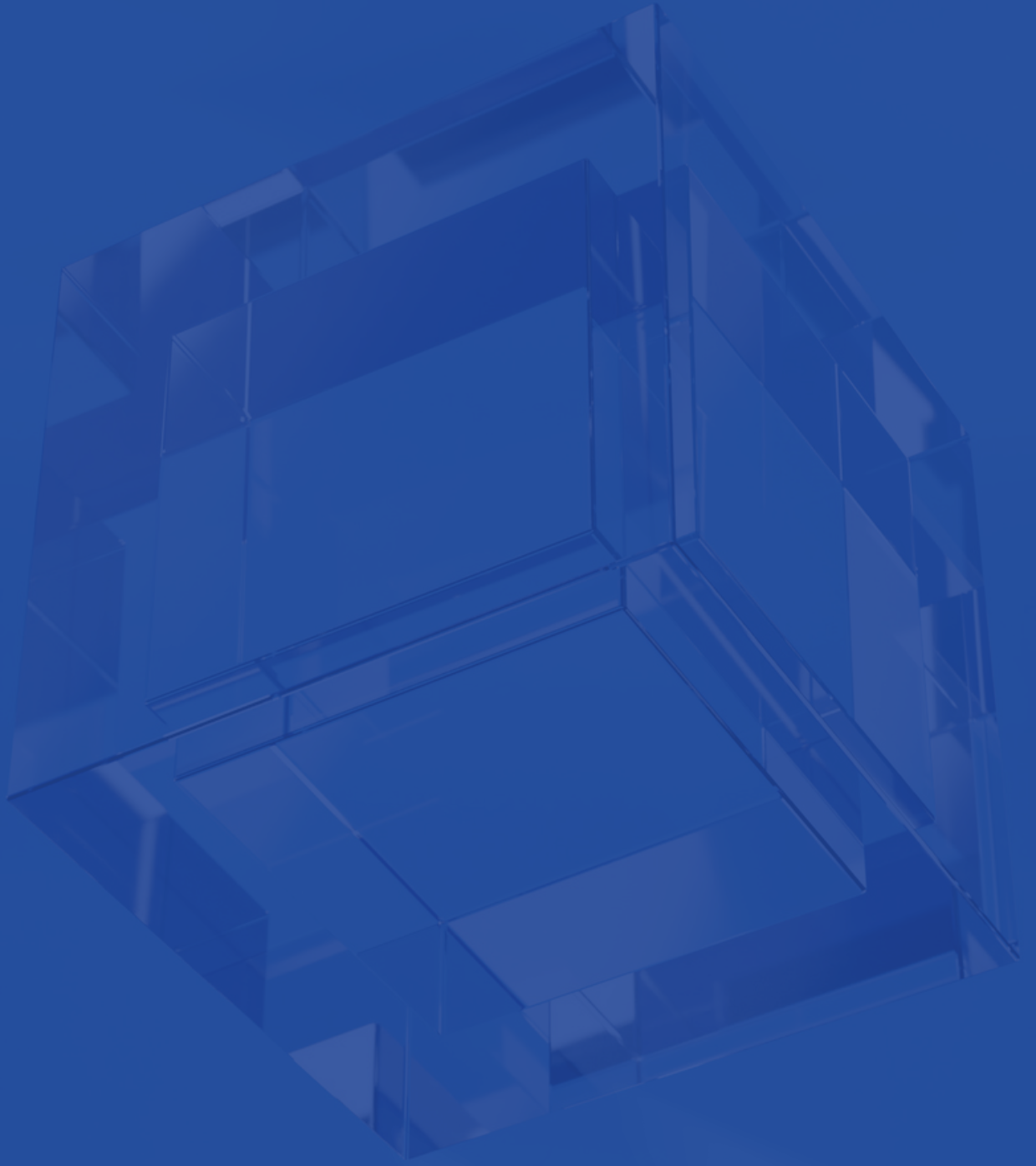
- [ROI Calculator for Data Transformation Projects](#)
- [Middle Market Playbook](#)

Podcast Episodes

- [How \(& Why\) to Prioritize Data Projects During ERP Transitions](#)
- [Nestell & Associates: ERP Digital Transformation for Private Equity](#)
- [The Strategic Edge of Outsourcing Your Data Platform](#)
- [Laying the Groundwork for Gen AI in Business Analytics](#)

For more information and to access these resources, visit our website at bluemargin.com.





bluemargin: 

Data expertise that increases profit
for mid-market industrials and
services companies

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