

The Enterprise Data Warehouse Roadmap - A Business-Driven Plan for Your Warehouse

Introduction

Driving business decisions from quantifiable insight is the driving force behind the popularity of data warehouses. Organizations have been and continue to leverage data warehouses to gain a competitive edge. The competitive edge can quickly, however, become a dual edged sword. If the measures that are used to make decisions are incorrect or outdated in relationship to the vision and goals of the organization, management can make the wrong decision. Mistakes at that level can be disastrous to a company.

What is needed to reduce the risk of incorrect or outdated reporting capabilities is a detailed and evolving plan for the lifecycle of your data warehouse. This lifecycle or roadmap starts with assessing your organization's readiness, expectations and acceptance criteria for a data warehouse and then leveraging that roadmap to continually assess the implementation. This constant vigilance allows the organization to measure the true business value being driven by the reporting applications. A roadmap will change as the business requires new insight into cost models, profitability, sales metrics or other key performance indicators. What is critical in ensuring the value that a data warehouse provides to an organization is a structured yet flexible plan, an Enterprise Data Warehouse Roadmap.

Assess Yourself

Businesses are driven from the top. Management vision and measurable goals provide the framework with which to structure and measure corporate progress including: sales, profit and expenses. These goals will dictate the reporting chain from the user level to the CEO and Board of Directors. Key Performance Indicators or KPI's are the insight and information needed to run the business and are the discreet bits of business insight that management need to make decisions, decisions that can benefit or harm the organization as a whole. Examples of these are: measures of customer satisfaction, top-line sales, profitability of regions or product lines, or cost ratios of low-volume vs. high-volume products. Key metrics can make or break an organization particularly in an economic downturn. Managing to the wrong metrics is like a ship's captain steering in a fog without any gauges to identify direction, location or potential hazards.

Coming up with a plan

Once the KPIs are established, the vision and goals must be implemented. In most industries, the end users managing the customer expectations have the most current set of rules and practices that are leveraged on an everyday basis. Management directs their associates to move out on objectives that trickle down from the top and ensure that they align under corporate objectives. The process of capturing the rules and one-off measures is the next big step in evolving an EDW Roadmap. Once the rules are documented and agreed to by the business as a whole, the organization can then prioritize the

highest ROI or other critical items in which to invest capital and resources. Projects and timelines can be quantifiable by KPI obtainment or refinement and the goals metrics the organization is measuring itself to today.

Constant Vigilance

Once the infrastructure is in place and the initial reports have been built and maintenance becomes the priority, the organization should continually assess how well their reporting meets the requirements of the user base in managing the business. Identifying those reports that are most utilized and how they align with the current strategic vision and objectives of senior management is a key step in the EDW roadmap process. The data warehouse must flex and grow as the organization shifts priorities or is driven to change by outside factors: new competition, economic down turn, stale technology, etc. An annual assessment of the KPIs and the warehouse's ability to effectively provide insight into those metrics is critical in maintaining the warehouse's value to the business.

Conclusion

An EDW roadmap allows for projects to be broken into discreet segments of work driven by strategic requirements. These requirements are quantifiable as Key Performance Indicators and should be prioritized by the current vision and goals of the organization. As the business evolves, the roadmap will serve as a reference point for the vision outlined by management and implemented in the data warehouse. End user input and perspective must be cultivated into the roadmap to ensure that information being reported is the correct information and rules and processes on the front-line is in sync with management direction and vision. An EDW Roadmap provides not only a destination, but a route to get there. The entire organization must navigate to the same map to ensure a consistent and accurate picture of the business is communicated. As the destination evolves so must the route between where the organization is and that next point on the map. By leveraging an EDW roadmap and maintaining constant vigilance an organization can ensure that its data warehouse continues to provide accurate, business-driven insight.