



Newsletter Vol. 47 - Introduction

Softengine News is dedicated to keeping you up to date with the latest information regarding SAP Business One systems, Softengine solutions and Best Business Practices.

What's New?

Spotlight on Product - Seven Rules for Dashboard Success

By Simon To



While not every corporate executive understands what business intelligence truly is, every executive wants dashboards because they're sexy and beautiful. They transform boring data into an attractive visualization.

But how many executives know exactly what a dashboard is for and what it should be? Very few. It's just like those hot trendy spring fashions that everyone wants to have but don't exactly know why.

To make things more complicated, every Jane, Jack, and Harry thinks they know how to build a dashboard or what it should look like—or perhaps they're simply afraid to ask.

Below are some of the dash-boarding rules that I live by.

Things you *shouldn't* do:

1. Be an Excel junkie

Don't develop a dashboard based on an existing Excel spreadsheet report; and don't mimic the charts, graphs, and layouts from your Excel file in your dashboard. Think outside of the box instead of being bound by the traditional Excel style graphical user interface (GUI).

2. Create the all-mighty dashboard

Don't make your dashboard the "be-all, end-all" data analysis tool. It's a common mistake that many make. While dashboards are an essential tool for better decision making, a single dashboard isn't going to answer all of your business questions and solve world hunger at the same time. Consider how your dashboards can integrate with and support other tools and processes.

3. Put the cart before the horse

Never start designing the visual aspect of a dashboard before identifying the metrics that are needed. It's very tempting for managers to start designing and dictating a dashboard's look-and-feel because it's the fun part. But first things first, you must ascertain what data to load and what business question(s) the dashboard is going to answer. After that, you can determine which graphical display is most effective for answering the business question(s).

A dashboard *should be*:

1. Intuitive

If you have to explain to business users what the dashboard is illustrating or how to navigate it, you should redesign your dashboard. The best way to test your dashboard is to hand it to a business user, without any explanation or instruction. Then observe how far they can go without your help. A well-built, well-designed dashboard should be self-explanatory.

2. Concise

A dashboard should represent summary or high-level information. It's not meant for drilling down to the lowest level of details. If the users need such level of detail, they should look at a detailed report, not a dashboard.

3. Agile

If it takes longer than 8 – 10 seconds for the dashboard to launch, you're including too much information. You might need to re-evaluate the scope. Do you need all of the information on the same dashboard? Or does it warrant separate dashboards?

4. Clean

If you're displaying a lot of different metrics on a single dashboard, it becomes too crowded and defeats the whole purpose of a dashboard.

Don't fall into the me-too trap. Don't build a dashboard just for the sake of having a fancy data presentation. Make sure you know exactly what you're doing and what information you're conveying to the business users. Not everything can be or should be presented on a dashboard.

For more information about Dashboards for SAP Business One, please contact Barry Lederman: 818.704.7000, blederman@softengineusa.com.

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