

MicroStrategy Gives Business Users Visual Insight

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MicroStrategy has released Visual Insight, a business-user-oriented interactive visualization capability as part of Report Services in MicroStrategy 9.2. As MicroStrategy customers try to serve a broader range of business user and interactive data analysis use cases, this introduction may limit the buying of alternative independent data discovery tools, such as QlikView, Tableau, and Tibco Spotfire by MicroStrategy customers. This is because Visual Insight provides a similar value proposition at an attractive price point and integrates with MicroStrategy's existing, traditional business intelligence (BI) platform.

Key Findings

- Visual Insight is a new feature of MicroStrategy's core Report Services product (MicroStrategy's tool for creating reports and dashboards) in the MicroStrategy 9.2 release and is included with each Report Services license. It is available to Report Services licensees under maintenance and therefore can be easily adopted by existing MicroStrategy customers.
- Visual Insight is fully integrated with the MicroStrategy 9.2 platform. It therefore has the potential to expand the use cases and number of users of the MicroStrategy platform, to limit the attractiveness of alternative data discovery platforms in organizations where MicroStrategy is the enterprise standard, and to expand the attractiveness of the MicroStrategy platform in new accounts.
- New customers, particularly business users, looking solely for a rapid-to-deploy data discovery tool, may still be finding the current deployment model of Visual Insight in MicroStrategy 9.2 less attractive than stand-alone business-user-oriented data discovery tools. Tools such as QlikView, Tableau, and Tibco Spotfire might appeal because Visual Insight would require the deployment of MicroStrategy's enterprise BI platform which has a larger IT-oriented footprint.

Recommendations

- Customers looking to invest in a data discovery tool, or who are coming under pressure to allow the business to adopt one, should include the MicroStrategy's Visual Insight tool as part of the evaluation. Since Visual Insight can leverage and integrate with existing MicroStrategy infrastructure and metadata, this will be particularly compelling for existing MicroStrategy customers, or for customers looking for a platform that can deliver both traditional managed reporting and data discovery capabilities.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Over the past three years, business users have been taking greater control over the BI platform purchasing decision, demanding easier to use tools, faster time to deployment, and the ability to build and conduct analysis themselves without having to rely on IT. Data discovery tools, such as QlikView, Tableau and Tibco Spotfire have experienced significant growth and momentum because they address this need. While MicroStrategy has been a traditional IT-oriented, report-centric BI platform without a business user interactive analysis capability, the introduction of Visual Insight is a good first step toward addressing this growing need.

EVENT

Event Facts

On 30 March 2011, MicroStrategy released its Data Discovery tool, Visual Insight as part of MicroStrategy 9.2. Visual Insight is a new feature of MicroStrategy's core Report Services product in the MicroStrategy 9.2 release and is included with a Report Services license. The Visual Insight feature is available under maintenance at no additional cost to any customer with MicroStrategy Report Services licenses.

Analysis

The struggle between IT's need for control, and business users' need for ease of use and flexibility is as old as BI itself. Traditional report-centric architectures featuring IT-centric data modeling and content authoring, along with capabilities for managing and administering large complex managed and parameterized reporting deployments, give IT maximum control over all aspects of a deployment. However, business users often find that traditional report-centric tools are too difficult and inflexible to use without IT assistance, which creates a significant bottleneck to meet their needs. In response, there has been a seismic shift in the market where business users are increasingly taking control of the BI purchasing decision and demanding easy-to-use tools that allow them to do rapid data modeling, application development

and analysis, without having to go through IT. As a result of this shift, there has been significant momentum in the buying of data discovery tools, such as QlikView, Tableau, Tibco Spotfire, offering ease to use, business-user-oriented data loading and mashups, interactive data visualization and fast performance based on in-memory architectures. These vendors have grown much faster than the overall market and are often being successfully deployed alongside traditional BI platforms that are the enterprise standard or as complete replacements. The tremendous success of the data discovery tool vendors has caused the traditional BI players to announce plans to respond with data discovery and interactive visualization capabilities of their own, which can also integrate with the rest of their respective BI platforms.

Visual Insight represents MicroStrategy's stake in the interactive visualization space. Visual Insight builds on business user data mashup capabilities introduced in MicroStrategy 9.x released in December 2010. Business users can upload a single personal or corporate data source (such as, Excel spreadsheets, .CSV files, text files or relational data sources) without any modeling or MicroStrategy architecting required. MicroStrategy Visual Insight will automatically join data in-memory and users can immediately start exploring their data without any IT involvement. Although Visual Insight is a version one product with some functional limitations (the most significant of which is that currently, end users can only mash one data source in) when compared to the existing data discovery tool alternatives, it has a core set of interactive visualization functionality and is fully integrated with the MicroStrategy 9.2 platform, an advantage for MicroStrategy customers. For example:

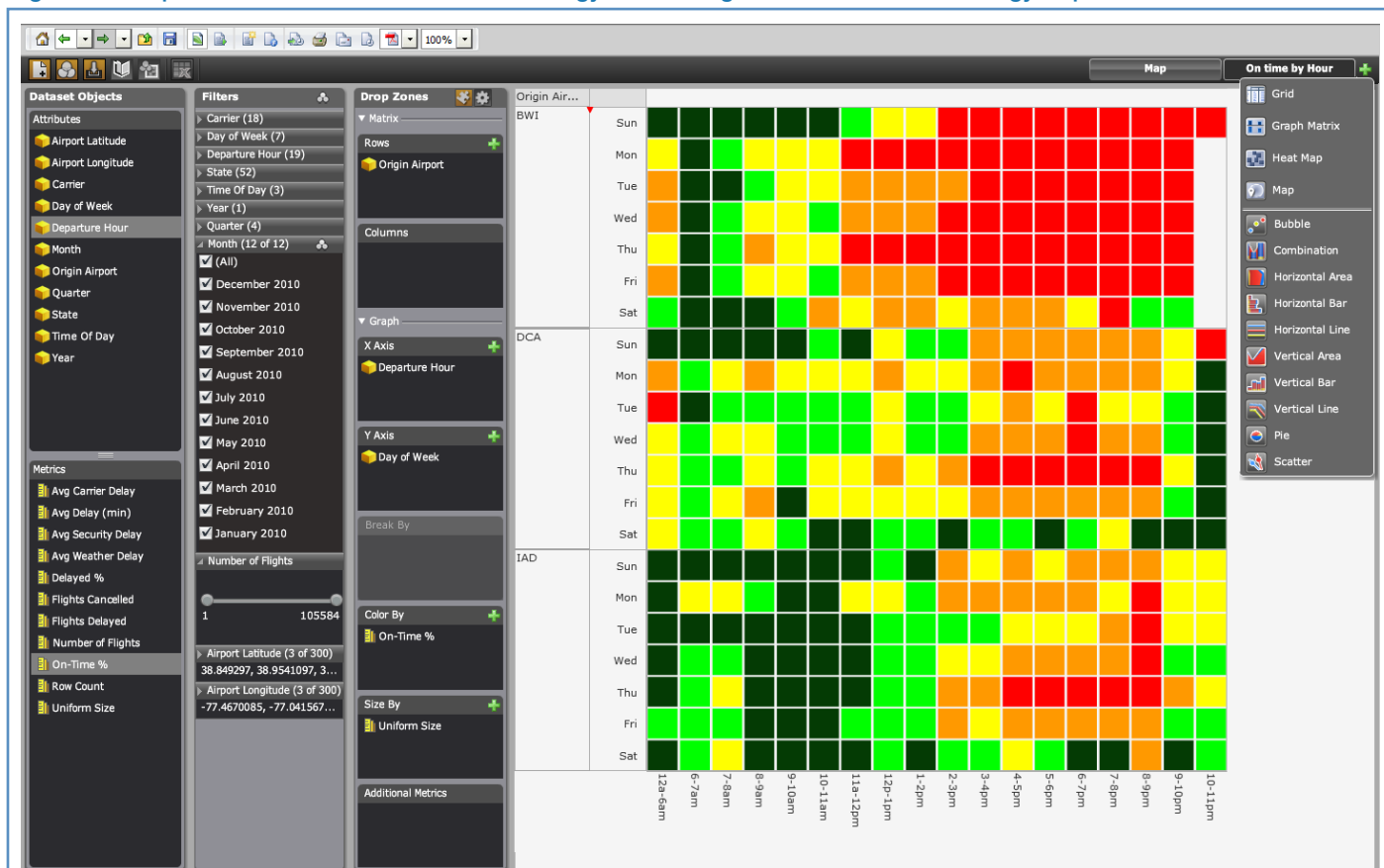
- IT can promote mapped-in models created by a business user to the MicroStrategy enterprise semantic layer.
- Visual Insight analyses can be viewed and edited on MicroStrategy Web so there is no need for the desktop version.
- In addition to personal data sources, Visual Insight users can consume data from existing MicroStrategy reports and Intelligent Cubes.

Figure 1 is a screen shot of an interactive visualization created with Visual Insight. While MicroStrategy has had a strong set of visualizations available with its Interactive Dashboards capability, with Visual Insight, users can now interact freely with the data using size, color and shape to find patterns in the data without going back to IT. Data points can be lassoed for drilling down to fine detail, among other interactive features. MicroStrategy's introduction and bundling of Visual Insight with Report Services has the potential to reduce the attractiveness of deploying alternatives

in organizations where MicroStrategy is the enterprise BI standard. Along with MicroStrategy's investment in mobile, rapid deployment of interactive dashboards and support for "big data," Visual Insight gives new customers in need of an enterprise BI platform another reason to consider MicroStrategy. It also opens up opportunities for existing MicroStrategy customers to serve a broader range of users and use cases – thereby expanding MicroStrategy's revenue opportunities in existing accounts. Although Visual Insight provides an alternative to data discovery tools that have data mashup, a built-in performance layer, and a consumer-friendly front end, it

will be a challenge to adopt in purely business-user-driven data discovery scenarios. For example scenarios where a light footprint, easy-to-deploy platform is needed – since Visual Insight requires the deployment of the full, IT-oriented, MicroStrategy 9.2 platform including the Intelligent Server and Report Services. However, in future, we expect that MicroStrategy will make Visual Insight available on its Cloud Intelligence BI platform-as-a-service offering. This cloud-based delivery option would reduce the infrastructure and overhead associated with an on-premises implementation of Visual Insight.

Figure 1. Sample Visualization from the MicroStrategy Visual Insight Feature in MicroStrategy Report Services 9.2



Source: Microstrategy