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Advancing the craft of technology leadership

The Changing Role of the Business Analyst

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Introduction

It's an exciting time to be a business analyst. Companies gather more data and more data types than ever before—data that can be used to answer critical questions and alter the course of business. Today's analysts have the power to lead their companies down the paths of innovation and even transformation, if they have the right tools.

The truth is, analysts sit on top of a veritable iceberg of data, an iceberg that grows deeper and deeper as organizations collect more and more unstructured data. But the analyst's reach into this data—the waterline—never moves. To get beneath the waterline, the analyst has to work with IT and a data architect, adding weeks to months to the task at hand. Unsurprisingly, companies analyze only 12% of the data they have, leaving the remaining 88% unused.¹

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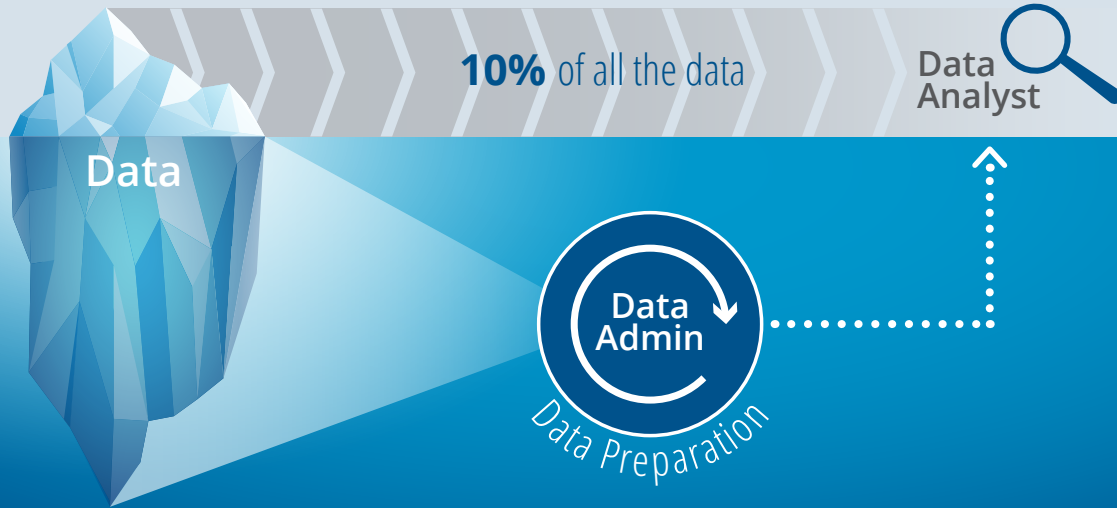
Meanwhile, the C-suite is anxious to get answers that only big data can provide. But as things stand, they'll have to wait. In a recent survey, two-thirds of influencers and decision-makers for big data analytics tools and solution purchases recognized that data cleansing and preparation are time consuming steps.² The longer it takes to prepare data, the longer the time to insight. The C-suite needs insights yesterday.

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As an analyst, you know the answers are there, but how can you get to them more directly? If only you weren't hamstrung by legacy tools and time-consuming workflows. If only you had a team of data administrators to prepare your data exactly as you need it for your next question. If only your friend the data scientist wasn't the busiest person in the company. And if only you didn't have to wait so long for other people to help you get at the data to begin with.

¹The Forrester Wave™: Big Data Hadoop Solutions, Q1 2014 February 27, 2014

²Big Data Analytics Status, Opportunities & Pain Points, Luth Research



Analysts only access 10% of all the data and wait days for data admins to prepare data

But there is good news. Your current workflow is not the end game. The role of the analyst is changing. In this paper, CITO Research looks at how having the right tool can revolutionize your current workflow and lower the waterline on the data iceberg, enabling you to uncover the critical answers the business needs on your own.

Challenges in the Big Data Era

Our relationship with data is undergoing a transformation. Not long ago, organizations had a lot of different, small data icebergs maintained by database administrators who decided what data was worth keeping. “Digital lint”—data that wasn’t cost effective to store—was thrown out. Today, Hadoop makes it cost-effective to keep all the data the organization wants, from as many sources as desired. As a result, the challenge of deciding what data to keep has virtually been eliminated. Organizations now face a new challenge: getting data out of one very large, very deep iceberg.

While it’s easy to store multi-structured data in Hadoop, it’s difficult to get any insights and data out of Hadoop. Therein lies the problem: Big data is only transformational if companies have the tools to extract actionable intelligence from it. In short, big data requires new tools. As an analyst, you need tools that can store, analyze, and operationalize more data and more data sources at faster speeds than ever before. You need a centralized canonical repository for data that enables you to analyze and share data from the full iceberg. And the new tools must enable you to interface with data scientists for specialized analytics such as predictive models without slowing you down.



It's Time to Liberate Analysts

A tool such as this can, by its very nature, liberate analysts. Such a tool can do away with the traditional model of business analytics predicated on the idea of a canonical model in the data warehouse. The tool can lower the waterline on the iceberg, enabling you to examine, at will, the full amount of big data your organization has at its disposal. That's right. You no longer have to reinvent the wheel each time you request data from an overworked architect,

then wait and wait for the data to become available. But it's not about replacing your existing toolset. A big data analytics tool can enable you to do something entirely different.

A big data analytics tool can enable you to access and examine all available data, including various data that you previously couldn't access in tandem. For example, in the past, it would have been difficult to tie weblogs to sales data. New analytics tools enable you to easily combine these types of data, allowing you to answer new questions.

These tools also enable analysts to share data sets, eliminating the need to recreate your own analytics-centric objects. And when more specialized analysis is required, a data scientist can easily interface into the workflow without disrupting your work. All of this means that you can get more data, faster, to make better, more informed business decisions.

A big data analytics tool can enable you to access and examine all available data

Expanding the Power of Analysts

Today's analytics tools enable companies to effectively give analysts the keys to the data, using the skills they already have. This is essential in the era of big data, when companies have at their disposal more data than ever before. Otherwise, the vast majority of big data remains locked away and useless.

With new tools for data exploration, you no longer need to make one-off requests and wait for answers. A data architect only has to pull the data once, creating a canonical schema, and you can change the view and scope of the data at will. The multi-step process that required the intervention of four different experts is whittled down to a single-step that you can do yourself. You can set the data to refresh on-demand, based on a trigger (such as when new data is dumped into Hadoop) or at specific time intervals to ensure that you have the most current and complete set of data available.



While model-driven, like most BI environments, big data analytics tools are much simpler and easier to use. Say good-bye to complex desktop GUIs to build data models. These have been replaced with web-based wizards. You can operate on the data directly using simple drag-and-drop tools that do not require extensive training or experience to use, and you can see into the data to make smart decisions about which columns to pull and which to leave out.

A big data analytics tool can catalog data so that you can use and build on the data that other business analysts have requested. A user-friendly graphical interface makes cataloging data so easy that you may choose to use the tool to interface with all of your big data assets. Look for a provider that is focusing its development efforts on this important area.

A Model for Managing Shared Objects Is Needed

As previously mentioned, a big data analytics tool can enable you to share data assets with other analysts. This is not a nice-to-have capability. It is a requirement for your new way of working. Where it makes sense from a permission standpoint, you must be able to build upon and interact with the work of your colleagues to further data exploration and truly capitalize on the information locked in big data repositories. Data scientists must also be able to share the work they do as data sets that you can access. Analysts can collaborate with integrated commenting, for example, to make sure the data scientist's work is correct and comprehensible.

This is all made possible via a shared analytics repository. However, there are different ways to manage the sharing, and one size does not fit all. It is important to choose a provider that will work closely with you

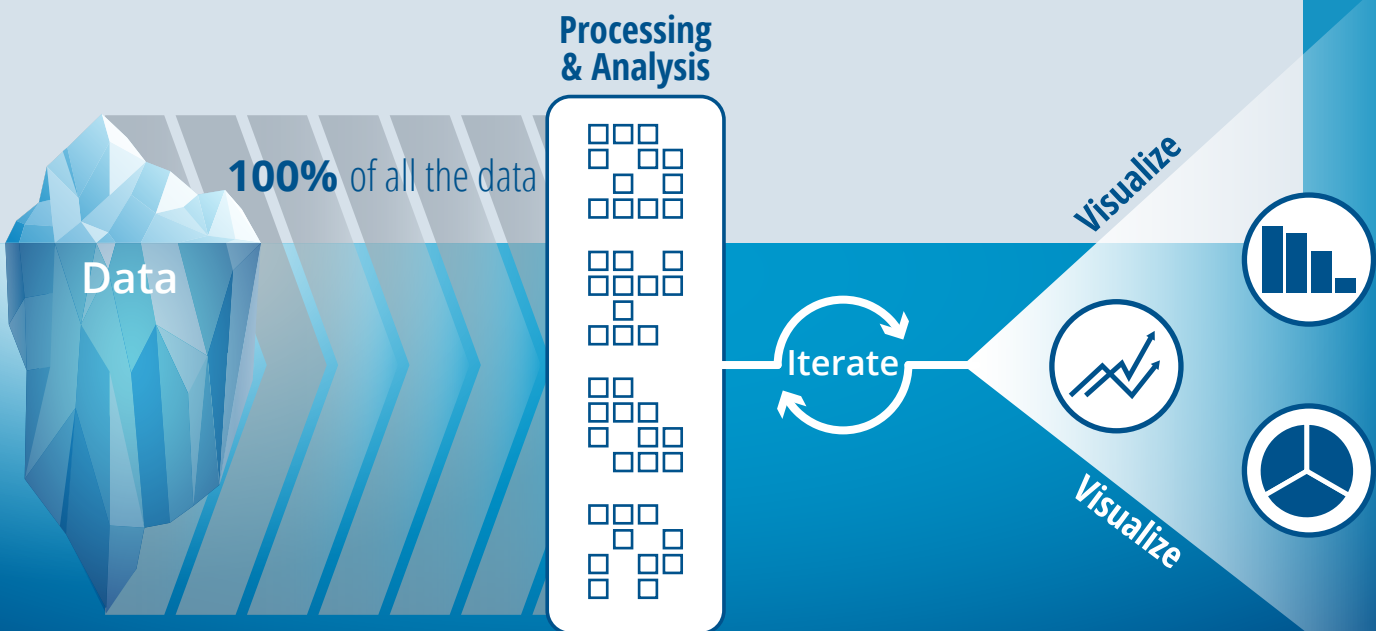
during the pilot to help you see how you can easily combine data from different sources and ensure your success. That said, the best big data analytics tools provide a framework that supports multiple ways of securing the environment. For example, at the base layer, the tool should allow data architects to granularly secure canonical data schemas by configuring permissions. It should also allow your data architect to connect to and establish permissions via enterprise LDAP or Active Directory. Some tools also support single sign-on via SAML and even allow the organization to add its own layer of authorization on top of that. Having multiple options gives the organization flexibility.

A big data analytics tool can catalog data so that you can use and build on the data



Platfora Empowers Analysts

Big data analytics requires a tool that is radically different from the data analytics tools of yesterday. However, only one tool can change the analyst workflow as you know it. Platfora gives you access to 100% of the raw data in Hadoop, enabling you to iterate on questions and uncover answers easier and faster than ever before. Think of it as self-service at the speed of thought.



With Platfora, analysts have access to all the data and can iterate without help from IT

Platfora runs on top of Hadoop, so your company can finally capitalize on all of its big data—wherever the data resides. There are no volume limitations. Platfora registers the data in a catalog that is shareable across the entire organization, providing an entry point into all of your company's big data assets. You can create “lenses” (canonical data schemas) that can be reused and modified and home pages for your data. The home pages can be searched and shared with other analysts.

You can think of the lenses as a high-powered microscope that enables you to get as granular with the data as necessary. They are malleable and can be easily changed to support a highly iterative process. Presented on a highly interactive, easy-to-use dashboard that's visually rewarding, lenses can also be laid on top of each other to extract more specific data.



The lenses also support data governance. They come with controls that limit who has access to them and who can change them. The customization factor extends to how they read data. They can be programmed as either static or dynamic, allowing them to refresh with current data automatically or only when manually prodded by the analyst.

Conclusion

As exciting as it is to be an analyst sitting on a wealth of valuable data, it can be just as frustrating to know that critical insights are out of your reach. Changing the way you work and obtaining data is key not only to improving your workflow but also to ensuring that your organization can fully capitalize on its big data assets. CITO Research believes that the old ways of working—requesting and waiting for data, analyzing data in a silo, relying on multiple parties—do not work in today's big data world. This way of working does not allow you to capture the whole of the data, nor does it allow for timely analysis—two prerequisites for tapping big data insights.

CITO Research believes that the role of the analyst has to change in this new big data world. You must be able to get all the data you need, when you need it, regardless of where it resides. You must be able to share your insights and build on the insights of others. CITO Research believes that Platfora empowers analysts and their companies by exposing the entire big data iceberg. It gives you the visibility and collaborative capabilities you need to work smarter and get answers faster. Gone are the days of frustration. Platfora makes working with data exciting again.

[Learn more about Platfora ▶](#)

This paper was created by CITO Research and sponsored by Platfora

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