Research Brief

QlikView Customers Outperform the Best-in-Class with Dashboards

Dashboards help companies improve efficiency by allowing managers and personnel to evaluate their own performance at a glance. To achieve these benefits, though, dashboard users must ensure that their dashboards reflect the needs of the organization. Some dashboard solution providers offer dashboard solutions that can be developed and deployed rapidly and cheaply, to meet an organization's changing needs. Between May and June 2010, Aberdeen Group surveyed 400 end-user organizations about their implementation costs, use, derived value and future plans related to dashboard technology. Findings indicate that users of QlikView are able to deliver dashboards to end-users at a cost-per-user that is roughly three quarters that of the top performers, known as the Best-in-Class, benchmarked in Aberdeen's study. However, no organization can improve based on technology alone; organizations that use QlikView have achieved their success due to a combination of technological and organizational development.

Dashboard Accuracy and Affordability

Aberdeen evaluated the 400 respondents to its dashboards survey based on their financial performance and on the accuracy of their budgets and forecasts. Organizations which have good financial performance but cannot predict their results accurately are not succeeding; meanwhile, a dashboard (or any other form of business intelligence) that provides accurate information but does not help the organization improve is either failing to track the right metrics, or has not been incorporated into organizational culture.

Aberdeen identified the top 20% of performers according to these performance metrics as the "Best-in-Class," while the remaining 80% of respondents were classified as "all others." Table 1 summarizes the forecast accuracy of the Best-in-Class, of all others, and of respondents that identified QlikView as their primary dashboards solution provider.

Table 1: QlikView Users Approach Best-in-Class Accuracy

	Best-in-Class	All Others	QlikView Users
Accuracy of Revenue to Budget	100.5%	96.1%	100.9%
Accuracy of Bottom-Line Budget	99.9%	95.1%	100.3%

Source: Aberdeen Group, July 2010

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The Best-in-Class were nearly 100% accurate in their forecasts, while the remaining 80% of respondents averaged five percentage points lower for key forecast metrics. QlikView users, however, displayed forecast accuracy nearing that of the Best-in-Class, attaining100.9% accuracy of revenue to budget as opposed to 100.5% for the Best-in-Class, and 100.3% accuracy of bottom-line budget compared to the 99.9% accuracy of the Best-in-Class. Moreover, while the Best-in-Class achieved these performance results while keeping their per-user costs at around 80% of those reported by All Others, QlikView users did them one better, reporting per-user costs of dashboards roughly three-quarters of those reported by the Best-in-Class.

Figure 1: Per-User Cost of Dashboards
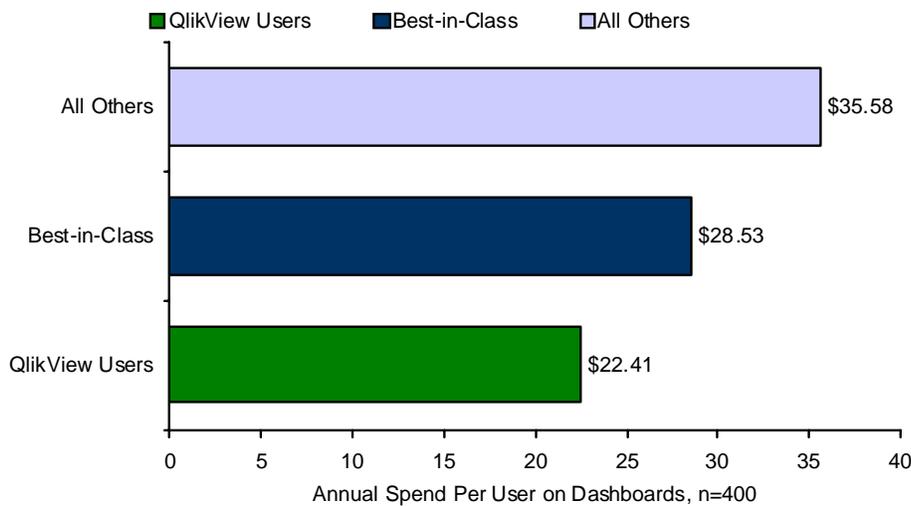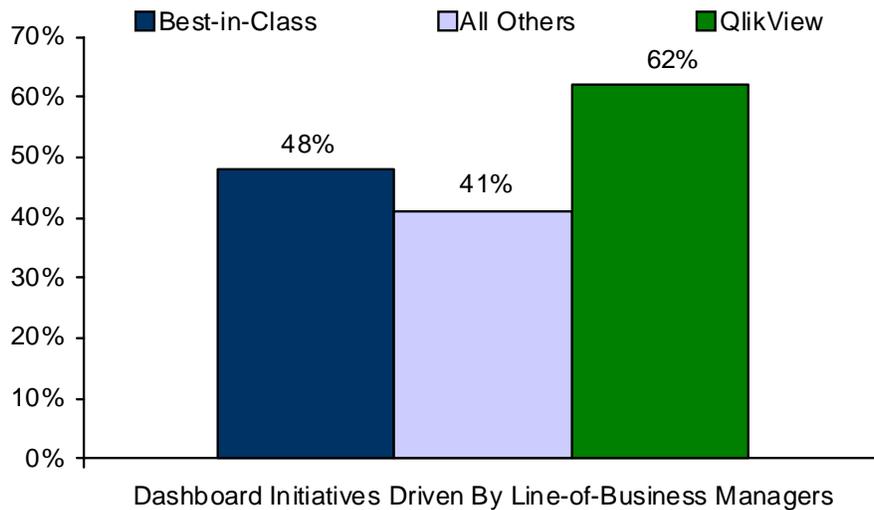

Source: Aberdeen Group, July 2010

QlikView prides itself on the ease with which its dashboards can be configured, but its users are not successful solely due to the technology they have put into place. As with athletes, who may benefit from advanced equipment but cannot achieve peak performance without training and years of hard work, companies which expect software alone to improve their forecasting ability will lag behind those who approach the same goals by developing their organization in tandem with their technology.

Dashboards Must Be Adaptable

Dashboards used for operational performance management must change with the market. Logistical issues may grow over a span of weeks into problems that require constant attention from Line-of-Business (LoB) management. To respond to these crises sensibly, managers need information, and by extension need their dashboards to incorporate this information. QlikView users are far more likely to drive their dashboard initiatives based on the needs of LoB Managers than are all other respondents, and as such their dashboards are more likely to report metrics

that are relevant to the decisions these managers need to make every day (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Who Drives the Dashboards?

Source: Aberdeen Group, July 2010

However, a risk of delay arises when dashboards are driven by LoB Managers rather than by the IT department: managers must describe their requirements to IT personnel, who then create iterative versions of a dashboard until it receives approval. If dashboard creation requires a great deal of hacking and slashing through large volumes of organizational data, such multiple iterations can take more time than they save. QlikView users seem to have sidestepped this problem, though - the average QlikView user can drive a revision to dashboards from conception to completion in a single day, as opposed to the average of 3.5 days for all respondents. This may be due, in part, to the unique "in-memory" approach that QlikView enables for on-the-fly data access, loading and manipulation/modeling.

QlikView users have achieved such a swift turnaround time in part due to QlikView's support for rapid dashboard prototyping: one IT worker seated beside a LoB manager can create multiple drafts of a single dashboard in a few hours. However, dashboards display data; they don't create it. No matter how rapidly customizable a dashboard solution may be, it cannot be useful to end users before the data that dashboard is to display has been assembled. QlikView users deploy dashboards more rapidly by starting their BI process with source data rather than with its display themselves. QlikView users are even more likely than the Best-in-Class to prioritize source data for end user access (Figure 2).

Figure 2: First Data, Then Dashboards
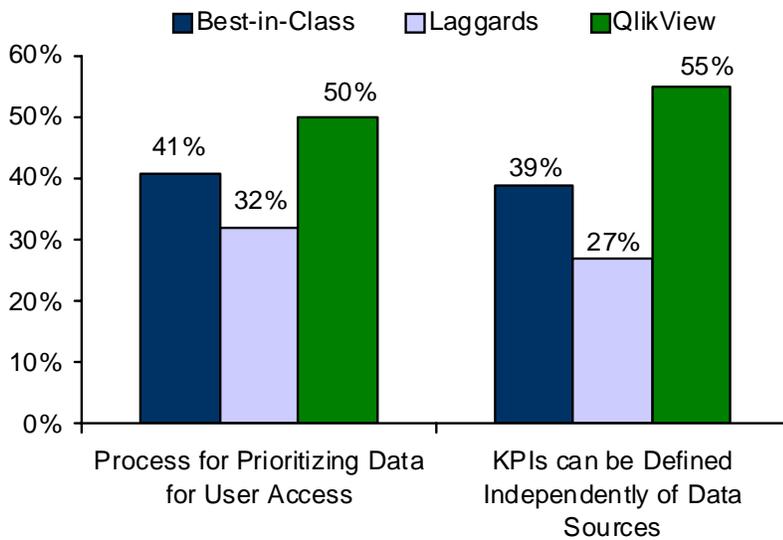
Source: Aberdeen Group, July 2010

The Best-in-Class are around 20% more likely than all other users to prioritize data for user access, and QlikView users are 20% more likely even than the Best-in-Class to do this. By creating a regular process for identifying and prioritizing data sources, successful dashboard users reduce the amount of time managers spend counting passing cars while IT personnel struggle to assemble the relevant data.

The dashboard revision process is further accelerated when dashboard KPI and features can be first created, then tied to data sources. If KPI cannot be inserted into dashboards before data sources are identified, LoB Managers will be less free to experiment with nontraditional modifications to dashboards, because every such modification must be preceded by working with IT staff to identify relevant data. Organizations that have this feature (more than half of all QlikView users, as compared with 39% of the Best-in-Class) can create dashboards quickly, while delegating the identification of data sources for particular dashboards to IT personnel who can work without consuming managers' time.

Recommended Actions

Dashboards are more likely to reflect the moment-to-moment needs of the business if they are driven LoB Managers. However, managers often lack the technical capacity or the time required to roll their own business intelligence solutions. QlikView users, along with the Best-in-Class, have developed processes that allow data to be prepared for a dashboard solution independently of the creation of the dashboard itself, which allows for swift customization.

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However, QlikView users, and those looking to emulate them, would do well to adopt a number of additional capabilities:

- Establish a process for defining KPIs for individual business units. Only 15% of QlikView users currently do this, and the lack of standard KPIs for business units provides a significant roadblock to organizations attempting to use business intelligence to make better short-term decisions.

- Integrate dashboards with other applications and portals. By themselves, dashboards are a powerful tool for improving manager's understanding of the business. However, their power increases as they become a more integral part of the company's IT infrastructure.

- Educate all employees on executing against corporate strategy. Only 20% of QlikView users indicated that they currently educate all employees on their overall corporate strategy. Employees who are not educated about strategy are incapable of making strategic decisions based on business intelligence, regardless of the amount of data at their fingertips.

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