

Practical uses for a Data Warehouse: Part Five

Sign Posts for Success

Hopefully, by this time you are interested in using DW concepts and ideas to integrate your 'silos of information' into an Enterprise Data Warehouse with associated Data Marts for subject area reporting (finance, operations, marketing, etc). You are convinced of the benefits of integration and you are willing to open your checkbook and your calendar. What are the key performance indicators of a successful strategy? What are the common pitfalls? Where should you compromise? Where should you hang tight? The balance of this article will offer the 'best practices' for a successful long-term integration strategy.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

- A realistic project plan
 - a) A good rule of thumb to take the concept to completion is 1,000 man-hours per entity. Maintenance is not included.
- Business deliverables are on time and understandable (girth \neq worth).
- The business view of the data model (logical) makes sense to you and your subject matter experts (SME)
- The definitions and descriptions reflect your common understanding and reality
 - a) What is a product, a customer, a sale, etc?
- You see a progression from a high level understanding to increasing detail.
- Delays are understandable and realistic
- The recommendations match your technology
 - a) 'bleeding edge/vapor-ware' vs. mature/existing

NOTE: By definition, every technology is obsolete the day it is installed

Common Pitfalls

- A narrow or vague understanding of data integration
- Non-strategic focus
 - a) Wal-Mart vs. Kmart
- Lack of C-Level support
 - a) Sponsorship
 - b) Budget Line Item status

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When to find a towel to throw in

- A vendor promises their solution is complete and will solve all your problems
- The data model and supporting documentation requires a lift truck to move and a Ph.D. to understand.
- The data modeling rules are extensively and routinely violated
- No one can agree on what a customer, a product, or a sale represents.
- Project estimates freeze at '95% complete'
- The number of 'software interfaces' increases rather than decreases

When to hang tight

- The politics begin to get rough
- Anyone suggests that more 'software interfaces' will reduce complexity
- Project meetings get loud and ruckus
- Accepting then selling the initial project delay/extension request
- Your internal IT staff recommends they build a 'custom solution'

In summary, DW concepts and methods for enterprise integration projects are mature and continuing to get better. However we must remember that a DW is architecture and not a particular technology and/or vendor specific. The data model is the key. If you need to migrate to other supporting technologies (for example, UNIX to Windows), it is the data model you will reuse. The code may change, but you are still selling the same products to the same customers.