How to Hire the Right Head of BI

AN INTERVIEW WITH MATT MUELLER

PRESIDENT CBIG RECRUITING & STAFFING

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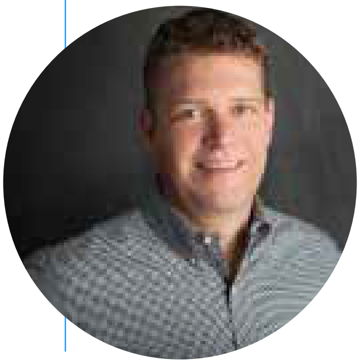

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Why would a company need a 'Head of BI'? Business intelligence empowers executives, managers, and business end users to make more data-driven business decisions. Through technological processes, tools, and methodologies, business intelligence (BI) collects data and allows its users to create actionable insights. BI leads to the identification of unseen opportunities and problems, equipping businesses with the information to implement new, effective business strategies and improvements.

According to Matt Mueller, President of the BI andanalytics recruitment firm CBIG, business intelligence is really all about "giving businesses a competitive advantage, allowing them to better understand clients and consumer processes, and enabling them to look into unexplored areas in order to generate greater revenues or reduce costs."

But to run these BI technologies, you'll need some expertise and dedicated people to perform them. Whether it's a 'one-man team' or a federation of 20+ BI veterans, your BI unit will be responsible for supplying you with the right data, crunching the numbers, and creating figures and reports to help executives make better decisions.

Every team needs a leader. A business intelligence manager or director is responsible for governing the information technology team, serving as the chief force in ensuring that the BI unit is delivering the means for optimal insights. Your BI director is the one who will guarantee your data is forged into accessible, real-time data that can be used for novel operational, tactical, technical, marketing, human resources, financial, and strategic decision making. (S)he's a pretty big deal.

But when should I hire a head of business intelligence?

Executives often use an array of analytic tools to help them understand complex subjects like customer behavior, lead acquisition funnels, operational statistics and much more. The market today offers a wide variety of analytic tools that are focused on specific areas of a business. Some of the most common tools used are Google Analytics, Mixpanel, Kissmetrics, Flurry, Localytics, and Segment. At first, these tools often provide a sufficient way to produce analyses. But once a company wants to start querying information that is more specific to their own business, the ability to customize 'off-the-shelf' tools is usually limited. Additionally, once you want to analyze correlations between data that resides on separate systems, it becomes highly recommended to build your own consumer BI solution. This is usually a good time to start looking for a head of BI.

What skills does an effective BI director need?

A successful BI director has a diverse set of skills within both business and IT. He must have strategic ability, enabling him to construct a compelling vision for the BI unit and to execute it in a well laid-out strategy. On the technical side, the head of your BI department needs to be up-to-date with the latest business intelligence technologies so that he or she can set the standard for the best practices, tools, and processes that are to be used. He or she needs extensive expertise in specific BI platforms, data modeling, multidimensional and relational databases, a multitude of analytical processes, and an understanding of prominent business intelligence trends.

On the business side, your BI director will most likely be reporting to C-level executives, so it is imperative that he or she has strong communication and interpersonal skills so that he or she can explain the strategies, needs, and limitations of your IT operatives; the head of business intelligence will need to translate technical jargon to a non-technical audience. Additionally, the BI director will have to manage large and long-term BI projects and teams, proving his or her ability to develop and execute business strategies with superior management capabilities.

While your head of BI needs to have a comprehensive understanding of all things BI, they don't need to be experts in all of its technical aspects. Mueller explains that while a BI director can be a whiz in playing around with data, engineering a bunch of cool BI tools, and developing a great BI architecture, he will not be "adding value to the company" if he isn't "pulling in the right data that the business needs in order to make data-based decisions." With typical base salaries being around $175,000 for smaller-to-medium sized firms and $400,000 for larger organizations, heads of BI are not cheap. But they are an investment, and like any other investment, you need to dedicate time and resources to making the right choice.

How do I find candidates who suit my needs for my head of BI?

"Firms make the hiring process of BI professionals more difficult than it needs to be, because they are focused on the wrong stuff," says Matt Mueller. Companies get caught up in the minute technical qualifications such as whether or not a candidate is experienced with a certain tool, process, or platform. What they forget, according to Mueller, is that "these technologies change over the years, and, in some cases, they can change rapidly." Things change. Tools can be learned, and skills can be cultivated. Instead of concentrating on the amount of checks a candidate has on your technical checklist, you should work toward attracting a person who can lead, who has the right vision, and who understands something about your business.

With today's prevalent disparity between the supply and demand of business intelligence professionals, BI professionals who are seeking jobs now have the freedom to choose what they want to do and where they want to work. So before the candidate markets him/herself to you, you need to market yourself to him/her. Break down why somebody would want to take a position at your organization and what benefits you can provide him or her. Pivot and leverage this information through various marketing strategies. Convince candidates that the position you are offering them is worthwhile.

But how can I guarantee a person is the 'right fit' for my BI director position?

Once you've accumulated interest from potential hires, then you can start the traditional recruitment process. While some folks say that data is data–regardless of industry, Mueller says that if you're investing in someone to head up your business intelligence, he or she "really needs to know about the industry in which your organization operates, especially when it comes to analytics." What are the trends? Who are the employees, clients, and partners in this field? If you have all of this data to manipulate, your BI director needs to have a strong understanding of your specific industry so that he or she can use the right data to formulate data-driven decisions.

Mueller has two pieces of advice to help you optimize your choice for head of BI. The first relates to company size and style: "It is difficult for somebody who has worked for a Fortune 500 all of his life to then go to a ten-person start-up." Focus on finding folks who have experience with comparable types of companies so that he or she can more easily adapt to your organization's cultural ecosystem and functions of business.

Next, Mueller suggests to have candidates perform a tailored presentation in an MBA-esque case study "based on what your organization is looking to do." Have him or her tell you how long his or her plan will take, what kind of resources will be needed, and how much the budget will be. Not only does this make the interviewing process more interactive, but it enables executives to see if their potential head of BI possesses the same goals and ideas as themselves.

I've successfully wrangled in a wild BI director! But how many people do I need for my BI team?

This is a question that can really only be answered on a case-by-case basis. Depending on the size of your company, you may only want to hire one person for business intelligence; conversely, you may want to hire many people so as to assure as smooth of a BI process as possible. What it really comes down to is your purchasing model and infrastructure.

If you're a large enterprise, you may want to use an on-premise data center for storage, processing, and analytics. This is the more expensive and personnel-heavy approach as it requires a lot of physical and human capital in terms of technical infrastructure, maintenance, and manual data migration and processing. But there's a plus side: an in-house data solution allows complete ownership and control of your data. However, most companies these days are opting for cloud-based solutions or for a hybrid approach in which they use on-premise databases for storage and a public cloud for data processing and analytics.

As Matt Mueller puts it, "moving to the cloud isn't all that difficult. What's difficult is getting management to buy into the cloud." While executives are becoming less scared of possible security issues involved with data warehousing and analytics in the cloud, the sentiment is certainly still there. Yet, the cloud has become safer than ever before as big names like Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and IBM have provided secure and stable cloud-based solutions.

The bottom line is that using software-as-a-service (SaaS) or cloud services allows you to have a BI team that's more focused around the analytics and less focused on handling infrastructure. An Integrate.io survey of 200 BI professionals revealed that over 30% claim that between 50%-90% of their time is spent just cleaning raw data, impeding valuable time that could be devoted to actual analytics. SaaS or cloud services ensure less time is wasted on the cleaning–the dirty work of data–and more time can be spent on generating insights.

To learn more about how to integrate your data with Integrate.io click here.