Your request is pending

Increasing business efficiency through self-service

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Methodology

Experian has once again conducted a survey to look at global trends in data quality. This study looks at how data practitioners are leveraging and managing their data to generate actionable insight and how data management practices are changing over time.

Produced by Loudhouse for Experian in November 2016, the study polled more than 1,400 people across eight countries around the globe. A variety of roles from all areas of the organization were surveyed, including information technology, data management, marketing, customer service, sales, operations, and more.

Respondents were chosen based on their visibility into their organization's customer or prospect data management practices. Organizations that were surveyed came from a variety of industries including IT, telecommunications, manufacturing, retail, business services, financial services, healthcare, public sector, education, utilities, and more.

Introduction

In the current business landscape, data helps to power decisions, refine strategies, and drive revenue. Professionals across industries and organizations rely on data to effectively perform their jobs. And when you need data to gain insight or make a decision, the sooner you can access the data, the better. In many organizations, however, the business users that need the information are not the ones who have easy access to it, and they therefore need to request access from those who do. The challenge with that model, though, is that oftentimes business users must wait while their requests are processed, and that is typically handled by IT. In Experian's 2017 global data management benchmark report, we found that less than a quarter of organizations say that their data requests to IT are resolved in a few hours. In fact, the majority said it takes days or longer to resolve data requests. And that translates to potential missed opportunities, frustration, and a hindrance to making the most of your organization's data.

To improve speed and agility, many organizations have started to adopt more self-service practices, removing the barriers that formerly prevented their employees from accessing the information they need in their roles. The danger there, of course, is that the greater access and the greater number of people you have pulling data, the more risk you introduce into your data governance strategy. When more individuals can access data reports and manipulate the information to suit their needs, monitoring and maintaining data quality can become a bigger challenge. The goal of increasing the speed at which you can make business decisions must be balanced with prioritizing the quality of your data to ensure you can trust the information you're relying on.

Who manages your data?

In our 2017 global data management benchmark report, we found that IT has the greatest influence on data handling for the majority of organizations. When the same group of individuals was asked, however, who *should* handle data quality, 70 percent agreed that responsibility for data quality should lie within the business with only occasional help from IT. There are obviously advantages to having IT own and manage your organization's data—it keeps your data centralized, makes it easier to govern, and keeps your information in the hands of staff with technical expertise. The issue, however, comes from the fact that while IT controls the data and the technology that collects and manages it, the primary users of the data tend to sit outside of IT. The decision makers, the collectors of data, and many of the individuals who understand the data are located across the business.

Key data roles

A better model for managing your data is to have a mix of technical staff and business users owning various responsibilities. Whether organized under a Chief Data Officer, Chief Information Officer, or Director of IT, it takes a team of professionals to effectively manage your data and maintain your data quality. In sophisticated data management programs, individuals will understand their data roles and what they entail, such as:

• **Data owners:** The individuals held accountable for data quality. Data owners tend to hold positions of authority and are closely aligned to the business.

• **Data stewards:** Manage data elements, including metadata, to help operations team members ensure they follow guidelines when entering data into a system.

• **Data consumers:** The employees who will use data on a day-to-day basis and define what data standards must be upheld. They are also typically the first to encounter data issues.

• **Data producers:** The folks capturing data and making sure it complies with data standards as outlined by the consumers.

• **Data analysts:** The experts who can translate data into actionable insight to inform decision-making, using modelling and reporting tools.

• **Data custodians:** The go-between for the data team and IT team, responsible for maintaining data on various systems throughout the organization.

Based on the size of the company and its specific business needs, you will often see a mix of these roles and sometimes an individual will hold multiple data roles. Regardless of which positions you have or need, the most important thing to emphasize is that your organization's data is everyone's responsibility. Anyone who collects data should ensure that they collect quality and complete information, in the appropriate formats required by business use. Anyone who regularly uses data to make decisions or measure performance should immediately flag any issues to the data owners. Anyone who has the technical expertise to work with the data should be mindful of how it will be used by the business and ensure that data adheres to all standards and requirements. The various data roles must work collaboratively to make sure that the data works for everyone.

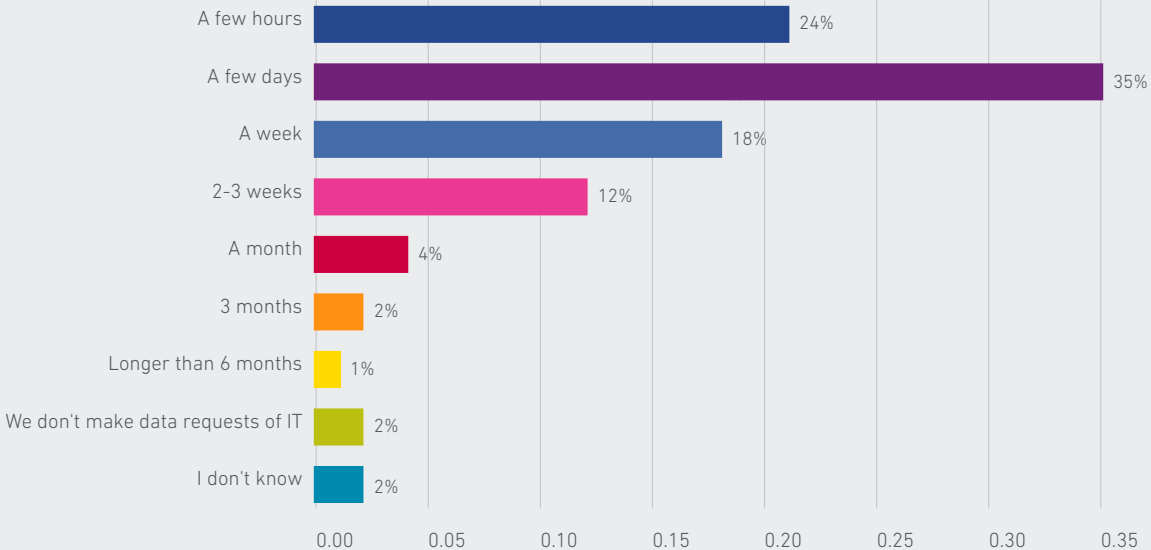### IT's responsibility in data management

While data management is ultimately everyone's responsibility, IT plays a large role in managing technology and solutions, as well as controlling the data and outlining data management processes. In the 2017 global data management benchmark report, we found that IT is primarily responsible for investing in data technology for more than half of the organizations surveyed (53%). While many other departments hold some responsibility for investing in data technology and data management platforms, it comes as no surprise that IT is typically in charge of the process. The finance group or sales and marketing departments may invest in the solutions they need to improve their individual processes, but IT will largely handle any business- or enterprise-wide data technology investment. IT is responsible for operating and supporting the organization's information infrastructure, which normally includes all systems that hold business data.

Managing investment in data technology on a company-wide scale is just one of the crucial roles the IT department plays in your organization's data management program. For 62 percent of organizations, IT also has the greatest influence on data handling. Data handling involves how an organization stores and archives their information, including the procedures that ensure security. Since IT is typically in charge of data handling—including where and how information is stored—it makes sense why other departments have to rely on the department to process data requests, typically leveraging SQL queries to retrieve information, and generate reports. With new approaches to IT and emerging technologies that enable greater self-service for users across the business, IT could be relieved of some of their responsibility when it comes to processing simple data requests.

Enabling access while keeping data secure

When IT is responsible for handling and processing all (or a majority of) data requests, along with all the typical functions the department manages, it can only be expected that your employees won't always get an immediate response to their inquiries. As the IT team is pulled in multiple different directions, the most pressing tasks will naturally take priority, and that means that data requests from business users can fall closer to the bottom of a long to-do list. Since IT provides support for the systems and oftentimes an organization's hardware (including computers and mobile devices), there will frequently be requests that require immediate attention, like outages or computer meltdowns. That means that while pulling a report for a business analyst is still very important, it has to wait until after the fires have been put out. According to our 2017 global data management benchmark report, typical wait times for data requests from IT reflect the fact that professionals within the department are generally unable to turn around requests same-day, as seen in Chart 1.

Chart 1
IT response times

Response time	Percent
A few hours	24%
A few days	35%
A week	18%
2-3 weeks	12%
A month	4%
3 months	2%
Longer than 6 months	1%
We don't make data requests of IT	2%
I don't know	2%

0.00   0.05   0.10   0.15   0.20   0.25   0.30   0.35

Global data management benchmark report 2017

The typical wait times for IT to answer data requests varies from organization to organization. For some, requests can be turned around within a few hours (24%), but for the vast majority, requests take at least a few days before IT responds. When you consider how much IT controls, it is not hard to understand why it often takes them at least a few days to reply to requests, but for a business user waiting on insights from that information, those few days can feel too long, and it can end up costing the business money on lost opportunities, or poorly informed decisions if someone decides they cannot wait any longer to receive the data they requested. Not to mention that in many cases, even when the business users finally receive the data they have requested, the information they receive isn't exactly what they were looking for. This means that IT will have to go back and re-pull the information with more specific criteria. With this kind of back-and-forth, the process is even more complex and drawn out. Luckily, many IT departments are updating existing processes and technologies to keep up with the ever-increasing pace of business and growing demand for data to drive decisions.

Increasing speed and agility

Many IT departments are looking for innovative ways to address the multiple competing priorities they face. There are several approaches to handling the many priorities, including the bimodal IT model. Bimodal IT allows the department to keep up with its essential functions, while also keeping pace with technological advancements by taking on more innovative projects. Many organizations accomplish this two-speed IT function by creating two subteams: a traditional IT team that handles the typical support and operational tasks, and an agile IT team that looks to improve products and services, using business data to uncover growth opportunities. With an agile IT team, organizations are able to respond more quickly to the needs of the business by proactively leveraging data.

The bimodal IT model typically works better for mid-sized to large businesses that have enough IT staff resources to divide the team and allow some of the employees to focus on forward-looking projects and anticipate some needs before they arise or become pressing.

If you're interested in learning more about bimodal IT, check out our white paper "Putting the two-speed IT paradigm to work: An innovative approach to data management."

Download

Self-service model

While a two-speed IT model works well for some organizations, another way to alleviate an overburdened IT department (or even to complement the bimodal approach) is by enabling business users to have self-service access to data. By introducing self-service models and technology that enables business users to access the information they need on demand, organizations can reduce the wait times for business users, while freeing up technical staff from the repetitive reporting duties that can bog them down. Allowing your business users to access the data they need to do their jobs is a win-win. Having the right technology underpins the self-service model. A tool designed with business users in mind ensures ease-of-use and empowers non-technical staff to analyze data and gather important business intelligence.

Typically, preparing data for analysis or reporting had to be left to professionals with technical expertise to write the code and extract information from the database. The emergence of the self-service model helps to increase business agility by allowing users to readily evaluate information and identify relationships among data. This allows your organization to be truly data-driven, with a greater ability to fully leverage data from across sources and systems. Increased business user access to data is, of course, not without its risks. Without the proper data governance and procedures, there is the possibility that users will manipulate data and alter the source information, or duplicate it, creating errors or multiple versions of the truth.[1]

Keeping your data safe

The many advantages of adopting self-service models to gain greater business intelligence are hard to ignore. The risks, however, are also something to pay attention to. One of the greatest precautions an organization must take before introducing such a model is ensuring they have appropriate data governance procedures or a tool in place that will safeguard their valuable information to maintain the consistency and integrity of the source data. Such a tool might grant users access based on varying levels of permissions, and protects source data by allowing more inexperienced users to combine and transform the information in an environment that does not affect the systems from which it originates.

A data monitoring solution is another way to be sure you maintain secure and accurate information. Monitoring allows your organization to establish data quality standards for information stored within all systems and proactively check data against those standards, triggering an alert anytime an issue arises. As new information enters the system, your monitoring solution will automatically run in the background and detect any defects in the new data so that you can maintain consistent data quality on an ongoing basis. With customizable workflow management, you can understand where data issues arise and resolve issues with ease.

When it comes to data governance processes, the goal is always to maintain the integrity of the information and prevent any inconsistencies before they impact the ability to trust your data. In some cases, the standards will be more stringent, such as regulation and compliance, while others may have more lenient policies, such as marketing applications where speed is most important.[2] Generally speaking, however, consistency plays a key role in establishing a data governance program. In our global data management benchmark report, we found that for 41 percent of organizations, the biggest challenge to implementing a data governance program was having consistency across the business. While business user analytics empowered by the self-service model should help take some of the reliance off of IT, the department will obviously play an instrumental role in defining and enforcing consistent governance rules to keep data secure.

41% of organizations say the biggest challenge to implementing a data governance program was having consistency across the business.

Using Experian to power business intelligence

Our sophisticated data quality management solution as designed with both technical and business users in mind. For more technical users, the platform provides unparalleled speed for analyzing data. It also empowers less technical business users to perform complex data processing tasks, including profiling and relationship discovery, quickly and without coding and scripting knowledge. The tool accepts data from a variety of different sources and supports data quality from end to end.

By supporting a variety of data management projects and programs, Experian allows users from across your organization to better understand their data and gain greater insight. The tool enables technical and non-technical staff to profile data, improve its quality through cleansing, standardization, and enrichment, and control it through monitoring and reporting.

Putting the power to manipulate data as needed into the hands of those who will put the information to use underpins your business' ability to make data-driven decisions. Experian facilitates self-service and streamlines the processes for accessing information within your organization. The self-service business intelligence model also cuts down the volume of requests IT receives and the wait times for employees to receive the information they need. Reducing the volume of requests IT receives frees them up to focus on other projects to advance the business, and allows them to spend their time focusing on requests for data that actually require more technical expertise. Granting business users access to the information they need through helps further unlock the potential of your organization's information. It's a win-win.
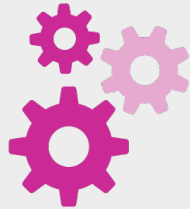
Features of Experian's data quality management platform

Our robust data management platform empowers users from across your organization with features such as:

User-friendly
An intuitive platform built for both technical and non-technical users, it requires minimal training to get up to speed and access the data needed to power business decisions.

Tailored to your needs
From the permissions users are granted based on their role, to the dashboards and reports that the platform will generate, you can customize and automate the tool based on your organization's specific needs.
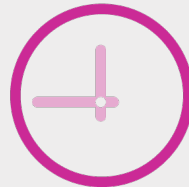
Quick time-to-value
With easy installation and the ability to browse full volumes of records in seconds, the tool quickly provides value to your organization.

Remove the guesswork
Once you set data quality thresholds, Experian automatically monitors and reports on your data, sending alerts when a data quality issue arises so that you can maintain consistent, high-quality information.

Could Experian have the solution to your data quality challenges? Simplify complex data management processes and focus on what really matters to your business.

Learn more

Conclusion

Not too long ago, it was accepted as the status quo that business users had to wait on IT to process their data requests and provide them with the information they need to do their jobs. Luckily, with new approaches to organizational structure, and with the advent of technologies that enable self-service models, that no longer must be the case. Don't risk the opportunities and revenue you may be missing out on because of delays in response time to data requests. With a solution from Experian, what used to take hours or days of manual effort by IT can be accomplished in minutes by business users. By empowering teams across your organization to slice and dice their data as they please—without ever risking the information's consistency or integrity—these data management tools create the foundation for improved business intelligence and increased operational efficiency through a more self-sufficient, data-driven workforce.

See how Experian can help your organization achieve better business intelligence.

Get started

Sources:

1. https://www.gartner.com/doc/3007717/embrace-selfservice-data-preparation-tools

2. Van der Meulen, Rob. "Managing the Data Chaos of Self-Service Analytics." Gartner. Dec. 17, 2015. July 2017.
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