



# INSPIRE BEYOND TODAY'S TECHNOLOGY

**Smarter Analytics**  
*On a Smarter Planet,  
those with the best analytics win*

# Cloud analytics lets small and medium-sized companies think smarter

The convenience and lower cost of IBM Cognos in the IBM SmartCloud is allowing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to replace spreadsheets and business information silos with powerful business analytics – putting them on the same knowledge footing as larger organizations for the first time.

No organization would disagree that in the data-driven world, business intelligence is key. The trouble is that the barriers to entry can appear high – and so can the cost and commitment levels seemingly required.

It is for these reasons that business analytics, or business intelligence, has traditionally been the preserve of forward-thinking large enterprises. While they have been able to take data out of silos – and interrogate it to get a clearer view of the entire organization and the markets it operates in – SMEs have looked up from piles of

spreadsheets with envy as they struggle to get the most out of inferior reporting systems.

However, the IBM SmartCloud is changing this and empowering SMEs to think and act like larger enterprises, according to Stijn Vermeulen, Managing Director of the leading Business Intelligence consultancy company, element61. The company specializes in setting up business intelligence systems for organizations keen to get better insights and make shrewder, evidence-based decisions. According to Vermeulen the combination of the powerful and

comprehensive business intelligence tools within the latest release of IBM Cognos, and the model of delivering them ‘as a service’ through the public IBM SmartCloud, is truly revolutionary.

For the first time, he says, SME can now receive an affordable, scalable and flexible business intelligence service without having to lift a finger internally to set up or maintain it.

## More than cost savings

The associated cost and convenience benefits of providing business intelligence through the cloud are major

advantages, but Vermeulen insists this is only half the story.

“There are major savings involved in using the IBM Smart Cloud to deliver a service to our clients but you really need to look at the bigger picture to see the entire set of benefits,” he says.

“The major reason why organizations of all sizes, but particularly SMEs, do not use business intelligence applications is that the investment levels seem too high. That’s not just about investing in the tools and setting up and maintaining the hardware – it’s also the cost of training up staff internally both to understand business intelligence and data warehousing concepts, and then to run everything.

Companies can do this – at an important cost – but then if the person leaves, the skills go with them. That has always been a huge concern in our experience: Often, SMEs are simply too small and understaffed to invest in building up the required skillset. A lot of SMEs also operate internationally, across multiple times zones, making it very hard to

support users who might be accessing the results of business analytics at any time of day or night.

“That’s where the ‘as a service’ adds real value. It’s not just the ability to rent for a monthly fee. It’s that, instead of putting up all the money in advance, you can just switch on the computer and have the service appear for you. There’s no need to train people, no need to invest in new equipment and no need for systems to be turned off so they can be maintained; everything just runs for you every time you open up the web browser. So it allows SMEs to benefit from the advantages of IBM Cognos Business Analytics, in the same way large companies do.”

## New tools on a smart cloud

Vermeulen has been in business analytics for 18 years and worked for the past two years with his team at element61 (a team that has more than 250 combined years’ worth of business intelligence expertise) to develop a solution based around IBM’s Cognos business analytics suite, operating on the IBM SmartCloud. He was convinced it would revolutionize business intelligence – and early

## Challenge

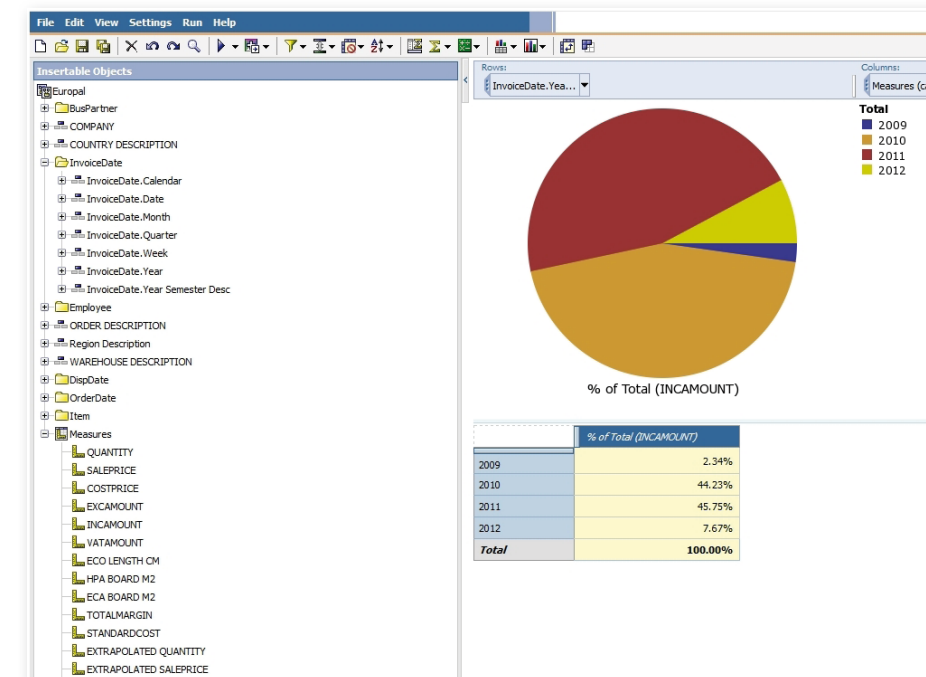
To provide effective, powerful easy-to-use business intelligence with no upfront software, hardware or training costs.

## Solution

IBM Cognos running on the IBM SmartCloud provides Business Intelligence ‘as a service’ through employees’ web browsers.

## Benefits

Companies of any size can think big and take data out of silos to get a complete picture of the organization and its markets without large upfront investment in hardware, software, training or maintenance.





Stijn Vermeulen  
Managing Director element61

indications are that he was right. His company is currently working on projects to roll out the solution to many clients, and has already turned around the way one packaging and logistics company, Europal, runs its business. While IT commentators talk about the ‘hidden gems’ that surprise a business once they start to look at the data they hold and learn to process it better, Vermeulen believes most companies’ experience is a little more down to earth. They do not expect to mine data for a massive diamond they never knew existed, he believes, they just want to climb above their information silos to get a better overall view.

“The problem with nearly all companies who aren’t switched on to business analytics is that they end up using an ERP system that holds data in a series of unrelated silos,” he says. “It makes it very difficult for the company, as a whole, to get answers to what may appear

relatively straightforward questions. They just want to know things like: how many products they sold, who sold them, where and to whom and what margin was made on them. From that, they want to find out which are their most profitable products and services, who are their best customers, and who is performing well within the organisation.

“Companies of all sizes, and especially SMEs, are buried in individual, manually-generated Excel spreadsheets – they spend more time gathering data than analysing it. This often leads to mistakes in reports or discussions over who has ‘the right’ and ‘the latest’ set of figures, with no ‘single version of the truth’ in terms of management information.

“This is what we’ve helped Europal with. Like many companies, their ERP couldn’t build up relationships between different sets of data, so they did not have a complete picture. And if a salesperson moved from one region to another, for example, their data didn’t go with them. ERP systems just do not provide historical views on data. Business intelligence, therefore, can act as a sort of ‘corporate memory’.”

The combination of Cognos, operating through the IBM SmartCloud, has empowered the SME for the first time to compile separate reports on sales of products, where they have come from, to which clients and with what margins.

This can be done at the touch of a button rather than through compiling disparate sets of Excel spreadsheets, and the process has also provided an opportunity for them to improve and unify data entry standards so that every department can make sense of one another’s figures.

**Easy-to-use tools are the key**  
The project has been greatly helped by the latest release, Cognos, which

Vermeulen believes offers the most flexible, yet still comprehensive, suite of tools available to companies. “Of all the analytics tools available in the latest release, Cognos is the most suited to operating over the internet, which makes it ideal for a cloud-based ‘as a service’ package, even including mobile Business Intelligence” he says. “It also has very broad modules, whereby it can look for information to compile reports – and then it’s very good at displaying these concisely as a scorecard or a dashboard. It’s very good at hiding all the clever, hard work it does and giving businesspeople a very simple interface.”

Vermeulen predicts these attributes are going to become increasingly sought after by organizations of all sizes, but particularly SMEs, as they discover the power of an external partner setting up, hosting and maintaining powerful suites of tools. With the complications and much of the cost taken away from them, organizations are left to simply log in and start making better informed decisions based on clearly displayed evidence rather than gut feeling and a pile of spreadsheets. ■

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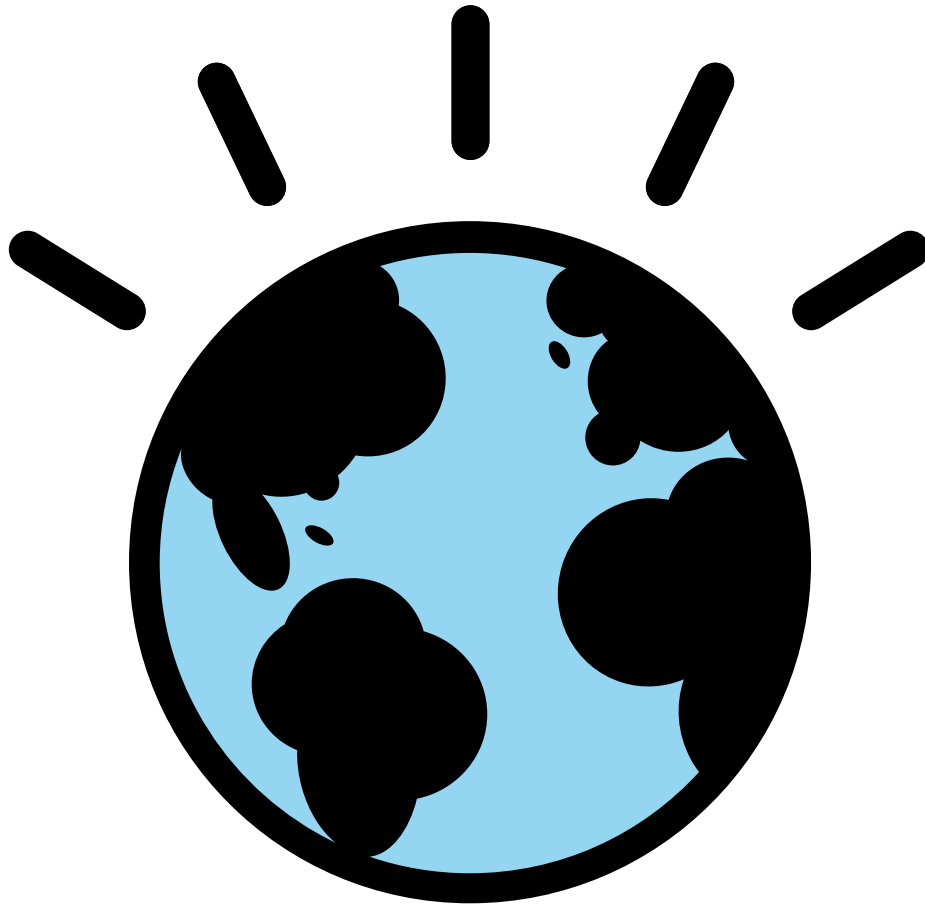
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