

Analytics Partners

Delivering Faster and More Strategic BI

By Al Perlman

When Lisa Davis founded Analytics Partners in 2002, she had one clear mission: To use technology to help business users make the right decisions at the right time. Before starting Analytics Partners, Davis led a team doing business intelligence at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida and she became an early believer in the power of BI to transform business decision-making.

Six years later, her vision is paying off. Analytics Partners, based in Jacksonville, Fla., is one of the leading BI consultants and solutions providers in the Southeast, with more than 20 full-time consultants and approximately \$5 million in total revenue. In the past year, the company has grown by 120%, on top of 200% growth the year before.

Davis attributes her company's recent success to several key factors:

- The experience and expertise of her team in providing custom business intelligence and data warehousing solutions to a wide range of customers in a variety of businesses.
- The focus of the company on solving the problems of business users: "We're more of a business and end-user advocate than an IT advocate," she says.
- A rapidly growing demand for business intelligence solutions among mid-market companies in the range of \$50 million to \$500 million in sales. "We're seeing a big wave in the emerging and mid market areas of companies needing business intelligence capabilities," Davis says.
- The breadth, strength, stability and scalability of the software products Analytics Partners offers to its customers – all of which are from Oracle. "Oracle has really positioned themselves to help mid- and emerging companies with a great solution at a very affordable price," Davis says.

It was at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida that Davis

first recognized the vast potential that BI solutions could bring to businesses of all sizes. Davis was spearheading a major restructuring of the organization's IT infrastructure and evaluated all of the new technologies in the market. She chose nQuire and realized that the benefits she was seeing at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida were transferable.

"I would talk to people and they would say, 'Yes we get reports, but John gets one number and Lisa gets another,'" she recalls. "They would say, 'No one knows our profitability or whether we're hitting our sales goals.' And I would tell them, 'You don't have to operate like that.'"

"With some of the purchases Oracle has made the past few years, they are now offering a scalable infrastructure that is beyond any that was in the market."

What businesses wanted and needed – back in 2002 and even more so today – was an integrated system that provided one source of the truth and delivered information in a timely, clear, accessible, accurate and user-friendly format.

"We tell our customers that they need to analyze information as the economy or the industry or the business changes and they shouldn't have to wait for reports from IT," Davis says. "We can put the technology in place for them to get information quickly and drill down for the details."

Right around the time Davis launched Analytics Partners, nQuire was acquired by Siebel, which was subsequently acquired by Oracle. Today, Analytics Partners offers the full

range of Oracle Data Warehousing and Oracle Business Intelligence solutions, including Standard Edition, aimed at small and medium-sized businesses, as well as Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition, aimed at larger companies with a minimum of 50 users.

Oracle has dramatically expanded its offerings to mid-sized and emerging businesses in the past few years, and now offers a full range of database, business intelligence, CRM, EPM, middleware and business applications for businesses of all sizes.

“Oracle always had this reputation as a big monster that only served the huge enterprise-wide accounts,” Davis says. “That’s not the case anymore. Oracle has really responded well to the price point dynamics of the mid-market.”

BI For the Mid-Market: Faster and More Strategic

Davis has seen BI solutions evolve to the point where they are now accessible to more than just the large enterprises and where they can be deployed much more quickly and at much lower costs.

“At the beginning we’d see a push for big data warehouse projects, something that might cost \$3-4 million and take three to four years to implement,” Davis recalls. “Companies today can’t wait that long. They come to us and say, ‘Finance needs this, they need to be evaluating historical trends, they need to have a single source of the truth on all income statements. And we can’t wait two or three years for a data warehouse, we’ve got to manage our

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Getting Value From The Oracle Partner Network

At the outset, Analytics Partners did not anticipate becoming an Oracle partner and value-added reseller. Back in 2002, when Analytics Partners began, Oracle wasn’t known as a company that was particularly welcoming to the channel.

But a lot has changed since then and now Oracle offers a partner program that is regarded as one of the industry’s most innovative. For Lisa Davis at Analytics Partners, the opportunity to be part of the Oracle Partner Network has been an added bonus to selling Oracle’s Business Intelligence and Data Warehousing solutions.

“I think of our Oracle channel managers as our sports agents – that’s how we talk about them internally,” Davis says. “They market our capabilities to ensure that we’re known. And it’s not just new sales. Sometimes they have a client trying to do something on its own and they will call on us to go in and help them out. Often these will become customers for us.”

Davis cites three main benefits to being part of the Oracle Partner Network:

- 1. Sales Leads.** “They are a pipeline to new accounts and new customers,” Davis says. “We work with their sales folks so they understand the types of customers we work with, and they will often bring us in to a customer that’s been pre-qualified.”
- 2. Training.** “As Oracle acquires and develops new capabilities, it’s important to have training and boot camps to keep up with all of the products,” Davis says.
- 3. Community.** “Just being able to connect with other partners is important,” Davis says. “In some ways they’re competitors, but we also can supplement them. We can connect to companies that specialize in financial applications, but don’t know BI. If I have a partner I can trust, then the customer is getting the best of both worlds.” — *Al Perlman*

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business while you build this out.”

In particular, Davis has seen a much more proactive approach to business intelligence during the past quarter, with the economy experiencing so much turbulence.

“Companies are seeing the failures in the financial industry and they’re saying they don’t want it to happen to them,” Davis says. “They’re saying, ‘I need to know what’s going on NOW – why did this happen, how did it happen, why did we not know.’ For mid-market and emerging companies it’s critical to get this information out to the business decision-makers, or the company won’t be around.”

It is really only in the past few years, however, that emerging and mid-market companies could install a BI solution that is as stable, scalable and flexible as those available to larger enterprises. And, Davis believes, Oracle is playing the leading role in driving the market in this direction.

The fact that Analytics Partners has chosen to work exclusively with Oracle is testament to Davis’ belief in the strength and superiority of Oracle’s product line, as well as to her confidence in Oracle’s commitment to the emerging and mid-market as well as to its channel partners.

“With some of the purchases Oracle has made the past few years, they are now offering a scalable infrastructure that is beyond any that was in the market,” Davis says. “We are only now starting to find out how scalable it really is. One of the great things about Oracle’s approach – it doesn’t care what the back-end is. You can use Oracle BI to hit three different systems and get a single point of truth and you can get to that single point of the truth very quickly.

“Analysts can be analysts and not IT report writers,” Davis adds. “The solutions are user friendly for business users. They can do a lot of what-if scenarios and they can do it over the Web. We’ve seen the technology go from report-driven and static and one-dimensional. Now Oracle BI can drill down into details. So if I’m an insurance company and all of a sudden I’m getting a lot of claims in Miami I can see why that is. Perhaps it’s a hurricane and then I can tie all the data within all of my databases to make the right decisions at the right time.”

Getting BI At An Affordable Price

In addition to the functionality now available to mid-market and emerging companies, the price point from Oracle has become extremely attractive, Davis says, particularly when customers recognize they are getting a scalable system that will grow with them as their businesses grow.

Oracle Business Intelligence Standard Edition, which is

targeted for small and mid-sized businesses, has a starting price point of \$1,200 per user, with a minimum of five users. It is fully compatible with Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition, which is targeted at larger enterprises, and it offers virtually all of the same features as OBIEE.

“For the emerging and mid-market, and even the smaller businesses, from a price point you can’t beat it,” Davis says. “The system allows you to grow. You can add additional modules as you get larger and it’s a seamless upgrade – with the same functionality – to the Enterprise Edition.

“We tell customers, ‘You have to get BI capability into your company. You can start with the core and add functionality as you need it without a huge migration,’” Davis adds. “After all, what’s the cost of a bad decision versus the cost of the investment you’re going to make?”

Beyond costs, mid-market and emerging companies are also looking at other critical issues, such as the time it takes to deploy the system, as well as the ongoing costs of manpower to manage it once it is installed.

“Time required to deploy is one of the most significant factors for companies in the range of 100-999 employees,” says Kathleen Wilhide, Research Director of GRC and PBM Solutions at IDC. “The biggest issue is budget constraints: ‘Can I afford this?’ The next biggest issues are the time required to implement the system and the usability and training of end users.”

Davis says Oracle is delivering what the mid-market is seeking in all of these areas. “A lot of these companies are saying, ‘I need something supportable and stable and, by the way, I have one IT person.’ One of the reasons we can get businesses to support the Oracle solution is because it is so user-friendly.”

Advice to Mid-Market and Emerging Companies

Having seen BI solutions become more affordable and user friendly and less time-consuming to install, what advice does Davis offer to today’s mid-sized and emerging companies who might still be on the fence?

“We ask: ‘Can you afford not to do this?’” Davis says. “If you’re not getting the right information at the right time, it could be very critical and costly. The slightest competitive disadvantage could put you under tomorrow. You’ve got to stay on top of things and stay competitive. You’ve got to look at information over time and learn from it.

“There are only two reasons to capture data. One is to run the business. The other is to analyze the business so you can learn from past history,” Davis adds. “You can learn from your ups and downs, from your historical trends and you can make more sound decisions – and have the data that

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backs up those decisions. Now you can base your decisions based on historical information.”

Davis’s final piece of advice: “Get over the hurdle of Oracle as an 800-pound gorilla,” she says. “They’ve really positioned themselves to help mid and emerging companies.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Al Perlman is co-founder and partner of New Reality Media. He is an award-winning journalist and publishing executive who has launched more than a dozen successful high tech media products, including *Interactive Week*, *CRN*, *VARBusiness*, *Baseline*, *CIO Insight*, *CommunicationsWeek*, *Information Week* and others.

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Working With Ingram Micro

One of the competitive advantages for Analytics Partners in participating in the Oracle Partner Network has been the opportunity to work with Ingram Micro as its value-added distributor. Analytics Partners began working with Ingram in February 2008 and the benefits were immediate, says founder and CEO Lisa Davis.

“If the Oracle channel managers are our sports agents, then Ingram is our super sports agent,” Davis says. “They are very connected into Oracle and they help us navigate Oracle and get to the right people. We might have a customer that’s doing a BI solution from us, but might be using seven other capabilities from Oracle. Ingram helps us to get to a single point of contact.”

Ingram has also been valuable to Analytics Partners in marketing and sales training. “They’ve been our marketing arm,” Davis says. “We’ve outsourced our marketing to them. They do webinars and podcasts and boot camps – how would we do that?”

“They give us marketing dollars and have basically kick-started us into marketing ourselves,” Davis adds. “As we’re growing we know we’ve got to start marketing ourselves in order to keep our growth rate up. They’re very reputable, and that has helped us to market ourselves.”

Ingram has also been helpful in a couple of other key areas, Davis says. One is in training and in being knowledgeable about all of the various Oracle products, particularly as Oracle has acquired different companies. Another has been in connecting Analytics Partners to other partners.

“I’m an emerging company,” Davis points out. “They’ve connected us with other partners to outsource our infrastructure. They’ve helped us to reach out and grow our capabilities faster, cheaper and more effectively.”

Finally, Ingram has helped Analytics Partners manage relationships within Oracle. “Previously, we had all the personal contacts ourselves,” Davis says. “But as Oracle has gotten bigger and acquired more companies – how do we cover that gap? Ingram allows us to get involved the right way through the right channels.” – *Al Perlman*

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