



Unleash your army of analysts

Imagine a world where your organisation becomes an army of analysts, where they capitalise the work of a small number of data janitors, scaling this across your entire organisation. **Paul Van Siclen** Director of Market Development, Financial Services at Qlik explains

FINANCE ORGANISATIONS TYPICALLY have numerous “spreadsheet ninjas” who have put all of the necessary pieces together to bring insight to management. The reason your ninja has been successful and becomes an invaluable source of information is because no one else has been able to properly combine data from disparate data sources, transform the information into meaningful analysis with complex calculations and deliver you actionable insights.

We see it played out across every industry, the dream of a CFO becoming a true business partner is rudely awakened by the reality that Finance and Accounting teams are struggling to simply close the books. Here are three important roadblocks that are stopping the organisation from achieving breakthrough results by scaling your ninja’s valuable work and transforming your ability to lead and partner with the business:

■ Governance & Change Management

Over time, the process has become more complicated as your ninja has incorporated more data and analytics. With constant change that the organisation experiences, the ninja has built in his/her own rules, added macros or tweaked query pulls that have a tendency to become buried in the process.

The flexibility that spreadsheets provide ultimately become a curse when it comes to the “golden source” or “one version of the truth” for any organisation that values accuracy and reliability (which should be everyone). For every spreadsheet replaced by modern analytics platforms, there are numerous queries, pivot tables, databases and static reports that should be found and put away. It is just not worth the risk considering technology is now capable of solving the problem.

If there is one thing that always stays constant, it is that the business question is different every day. Modern analytics platforms are now capable of co-existing in a dynamic world and it is time for Finance teams to take a hard look at themselves.

■ Distribution & Adoption

Your ninja’s primary tool is spreadsheets and the file size of the spreadsheet has become too large. In turn, s/he spends a tremendous amount of time and effort figuring out ways to print their pivot table and spreadsheets, either to store on a website or send via email in a static delivery system.



“Can I drill into the detail?” is a question that everyone on the other side of a General Ledger report or Expense Analysis asks because traditionally no one could, and your poor ninja has to figure out a way to distribute these ungoverned and hard to change reports.

This is another example of how modern analytics platforms transform the relationship organisations have with their data. Firstly, by providing access to all of the data (from disparate data sources) and secondly placing apps in a web based portal provides the appropriate security capabilities, and overcomes the spreadsheet hell scenario. Users also experience an exponential increase in the usability of the application. Finally, “drilling into the detail” is solved and actually eliminates two spreadsheets for every app built (one for the summary analysis and one with the details).

■ Time

The process of pulling customer and transactional data from multiple systems and business units can take days, weeks or even months. This is a result of combining the data pulled with other models to support budgeting and forecasting, currency conversion, risk allocation, unit cost analysis or resource allocation, to get the information to the people who need it.

Streamlining workflows related to getting data out of systems, and into the hands of business users who need that data to make informed decisions, is not a new concept for the Finance and Accounting teams. The primary purpose of building a better mousetrap was to save time, but the irony is that there is a trade off between the time saved by the ninja developing his/her VBA macro and the flexibility provided to your business partners.

The pivot table was our one great hope. The flexibility of the pivot table started to solve the issue but this solution was quickly bogged down with large data sets and complicated formulas.



Unfortunately, the business users found pivot tables cumbersome and difficult to understand. Or worse, easy to select the wrong results.

Imagine a world where the three barriers described above are removed and employees use their knowledge of the business to help people make better decisions. Imagine a world where all of the energy trying to determine “Whose numbers are right?” is re-directed and solely focused on the proper question “What do we do about the numbers?” Imagine a world where your entire finance organisation becomes an army of analysts and no longer relies on a small group of data crunchers engaging in janitorial work.

Bottom line is your spreadsheet ninja has created a valuable view of your data but it is built with data queries, spreadsheet macros, vlookups and rubber bands. Unlocking this treasure chest of analysis supports your strategy of increasing profits while controlling risks by allowing everyone the same visibility (and accountability) to the results. The modern analytics platform has solved these concerns and the time is now to begin using them. 🌐

Author information

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Paul has worked for Vendor Finance US, CIT Group, Bank of America and Bombardier, and he has led a successful implementation of a BI solution, introduced price optimisation and business intelligence methodology.

Paul holds a Masters of Business Administration from University of Florida, a Bachelor Science degree in Accounting from Jacksonville University and is a Certified Public Accountant (inactive).