

iDashboards in Insurance

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"Data must provide answers, not more data."
Randy Mott, Senior VP and CIO, Dell Computer



Figure 1: Dashboard – the new face of information

1. Overview

Everyone seems to be talking about dashboards of one kind or another. Most software vendors are clamoring to claim they have dashboards. Salesforce.com® touts its sales dashboards. Apple® computer provides its desktop users with cool dashboards.

American Express® provides me with a dashboard to manage my several Amex credit cards. Even my phone company provides a dashboard to help me monitor my bills, my cell phone's daytime, weekend and family-minutes, roaming minutes, etc.

So let us admit it – dashboards have become a craze as the preferred user interface for presenting aggregated data. However, unlike many other passing technology fads, the dashboards are here to stay. Dashboards can change the way we view, disperse and work with information.

By definition, a dashboard is a visual display of the most important information needed to achieve one or more objectives, consolidated and arranged on a single screen so the information can be monitored at a glance.

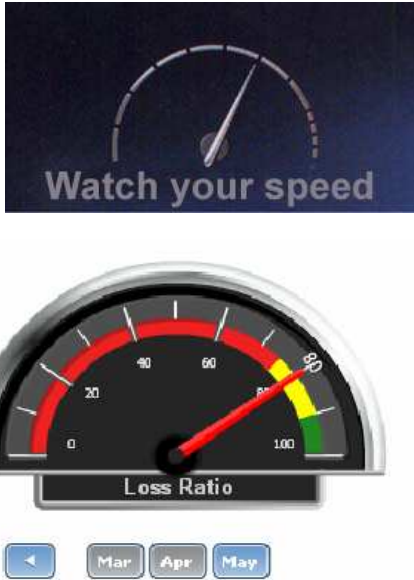


Figure 2: Data presentation through dashboards, a concept driven from automobile and aircraft to business

2. Insurance Dashboards

Business Intelligence has adopted the Dashboard concept of displaying data to the driver of an automobile through a collection of gauges and meters. With business dashboards, the data display can include tables, charts, maps and other innovative visual cues such as thermometers, traffic lights, analog speedometers, etc. Such a business dashboard may also contain links to other pertinent information, important summary and highlights, and personalized information.

Note that we have used 'insurance dashboard' in the most general sense of the term to represent all its variations such as Overall Policy Dashboards, Claims Scorecard Dashboards, Agent Dashboard, Executive Dashboard, etc.

3. Exponential Growth in Data

Following Moore's law, as computing power doubles every two years, so does the ability to collect and process greater amounts of data. This in turn has led to growth in the applications of the collected data in every field.

However, as decision makers are presented with such varied information, a key challenge remains in presenting the information. Software vendors have continually tried to improve their report formats, using charts and graphs to provide a user-friendly interface to data and information. One offshoot of such innovation is the dashboard.

4. Managing through Metrics

There are several areas that insurance organizations need to manage for continual improvement in productivity, some of them include Policy Count, Claim Count, Written Premium, Policy Incurred Loss, Mean Insurance Score, and Total Claim Count.

Effective management of these broad areas requires developing appropriate metrics to measure performance relative to objectives. It is well proven that effective management requires effective monitoring, which requires effective measurements. Therefore, creating metrics and

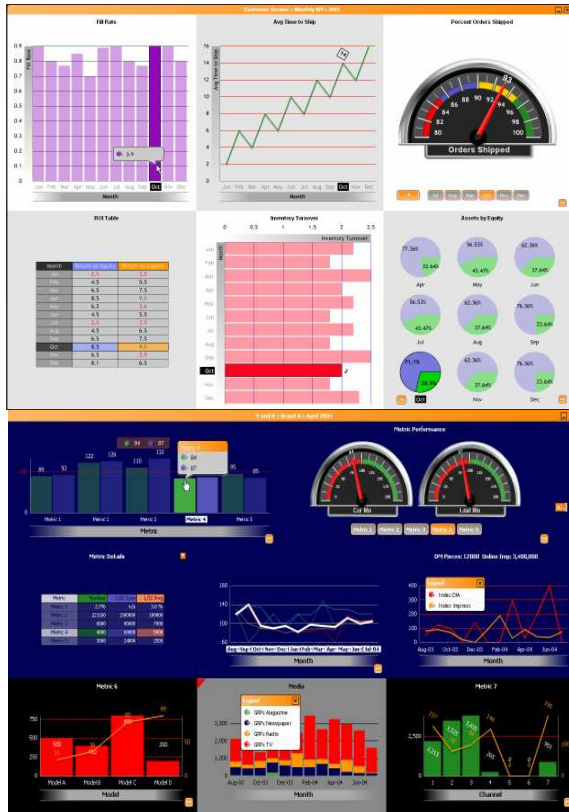


Figure 3: A collection of various chart types or innovative data displays to display performance metrics.



Figure 4: Business users are handicapped with limited access to timely information. A data overload generated through myriad applications is locked within the silos of disparate databases and data warehouse.

aligning them with organizational objectives is key in establishing an effective monitoring system. *Scorecard* is a popular term for describing such a monitoring system, and mapping it to individual responsibilities.

Dashboards are quite effective in delivering an Organizational Scorecard to a wide audience. Often, an individual responsible for a specific metric is referred to as the “owner” of that metric. So, it is not far fetched to find that almost every responsible employee within an organization has ownership of certain metrics. Creation of such an organization-wide accountability and measurement system is what makes dashboards an essential driver for change and positive transformation.

5. Dashboard Users

Dashboards are not ONLY for top-level executives; though it’s the traditional perception of dashboards. Dashboards are increasingly becoming a tool for Tactical and Operational levels within the organization besides the Strategic level.

Administrators, directors, managers, independent insurance agents, IT personnel, accounting and human resources will find dashboards helpful. However, each department must see the metrics relevant to itself, and individuals within the department get access to the metrics they own.

Dashboards must therefore be deployed within a framework of relevance, roles, privilege and privacy. Simply put, each user with a dashboard access must see metrics that s/he owns and must not be able to look up information that is unauthorized for that individual. For example, an insurance agent may be able to retrieve her/his performance scores, but not that of a peer.

6. Differences between Dashboards and Reports

There is a common notion that a dashboard is a collection of reports on a single screen. Put together a collection of spreadsheets with some charts in the mix, and it becomes a dashboard. Yes, such a presentation may meet a very basic definition of a dashboard, but still it fails in

8. Welcome to iDashboards

iDashboards is dashboard software that is utilized by insurance organizations to deliver a wealth of information to their business users, helping them transform how they leverage and look at their data. In addition to contributing a fundamental and long-lasting change towards improvement, productivity and accountability.

Pioneer State Mutual Insurance Company (Flint, MI) is one of these organizations that has implemented dashboards. The company specializes in property-casualty insurance. Now more than ever they are expected to provide the most accurate coverage possible, and with an Enterprise Performance Management dashboard they are able to do so.

Organizations in various industries have expressed similar sentiments of being able to leverage iDashboards to redefine their information systems into a powerful communication platform.



Figure 7: Real-time alerts can be forwarded to any email device to improve responsiveness and corrective action

"iDashboards is the right tool at the right time, now we can easily customize dashboards. The flexibility of the tool allows us to quickly and accurately portray key performance metrics in a visually rich and easily understandable context."

Tony Paris
VP of Information Systems
Pioneer State Mutual Insurance

9. Applications of iDashboards

Given the visual power of iDashboards to take raw data and convert it into user insight and knowledge, the applications are as diverse as an organization's needs. The following are some of the application areas:

- Policy Count
- Written Premium
- Policy Incurred Loss
- Earned Premium
- Direct Loss Ratio
- Claim Count
- Large Claim Count
- Mean Insurance Scores
- Balanced Scorecard
- Combined Ratio

iDashboards can easily communicate and extract data from any standard data storage including relational databases, flat data files, Microsoft Excel, reporting tools such as Crystal Reports, legacy data systems, etc. This provides iDashboards the ability to serve as the common user interface on a layer of diverse and disparate data sources.



Figure 8: iDashboards empowers organizations with real-time web-access to the KPIs needed to monitor operations and improve performance

Dashboards are interactive and use rich-media animation effects to make them more visual and informative

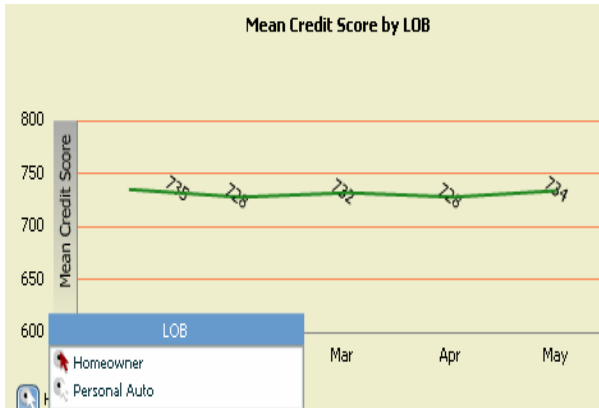


Figure 9: Example of a pivot as a data filter

10. Key Features

iDashboards supports a rich collection of data viewing capabilities using patented "Visual Intelligence" technology. Users may customize their views with its library of chart types, including tables, 3-D views, geographic maps, metric tickers, animated speedometers, and customized data displays. New enhancements are continually being made to the library of chart types, maps and innovative data display options.

Microsoft Excel Integration

iDashboards supports the import and export of data to and from Microsoft Excel. A user can import an Excel spreadsheet into any data window within iDashboards, and display that data using any of the different data visual formats. The imported data and its associated display preferences can then be saved within iDashboards for future reference and for sharing with other authorized users.

Data Drill-Down

iDashboards supports data drill-down through tables, charts and maps. Any data point displayed in a report or chart within the dashboard can be connected to a different chart or report. Similar to a hyperlink, when a user hovers his/her mouse over the linked data point, the cursor changes to indicate that further information can be viewed by clicking (drilling-down) on the data point. There could be multiple levels of drill-down (like a higher aggregated level to lower levels: yearly, quarterly, monthly, daily, etc.). The retrace path is intuitively presented to the user through each step of the drill-down.

Data Pivoting & Filtering

iDashboards provides the capability to create a "pivot" within the displayed charts and reports, which is effectively a data filter that is presented to users. By selecting any value displayed within a pivot drop-down, the chart or report is instantly refreshed with data applicable to the selected value. For example, the drop-down could display different medical specialties, and the chart could display physician metrics within a

iDashboards incorporates patented data visualization technology that was developed in the iDashboards R&D labs as a result of exhaustive research and development by a team of industry professionals.

iDashboards is not a charting or programming tool. It's a comprehensive dashboard software that can be deployed across the enterprise within a few weeks.

iDashboards has a diverse customer-base across all verticals. Some of these customers include NASA, ADP, Pioneer State Mutual Insurance and Unisys.

selected specialty. This feature could also be used to represent dynamic cross tabulations.

100% Browser-based

The iDashboards client application functions completely in a web-browser. It is developed using Macromedia's Flash technology. Over 98% of installed web-browsers already have the Macromedia Flash plug-in; for the other 2% it is a free download.

iDashboards can be deployed as an Intranet solution behind corporate firewalls, or as an Extranet solution with universal access subject to proper user authentication.

Role-based Security and Privileges

iDashboards requires user-authentication before allowing application access. Such authentication can be mapped to an existing user authentication mechanism, allowing iDashboards to seamlessly integrate within an existing portal or application framework. Therefore, once a user logs into an existing portal or application, they don't need to have another log-in for iDashboards when integrated within that framework.

iDashboards supports multiple level of user roles:

- **Users:** Ability to view charts and Dashboards in Categories authorized by Admin
- **Analyst:** All of the abilities of the User role, plus additional abilities to create drill-through paths and ad hoc data extraction
- **Admin:** All of the abilities of the Analyst role, plus additional abilities to create and manage users, assign privileges and control user access.

View vs. Save Privilege

Categories are like folders, with several dashboards contained within a Category. iDashboards administrators can assign a user to have View or Save privileges to a Category.



View implies that the user can simply view the dashboards and associated charts within that Category.

Save implies that the user can create new dashboards and charts, or modify existing dashboards and charts within that Category.

Ease of Use

iDashboards is extremely intuitive and user-friendly for all levels of users. It can be deployed to a large user base with very little formal training.



Scalable

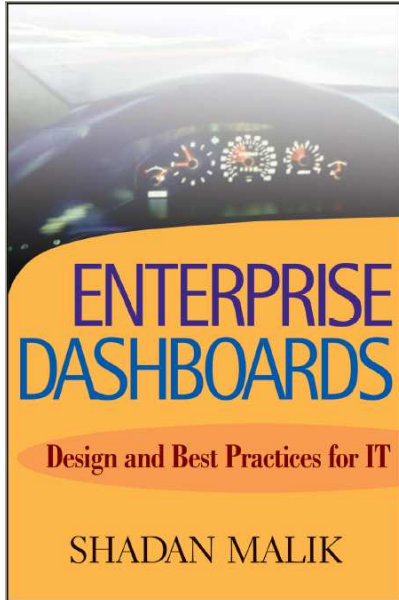
iDashboards can be deployed on a small scale for 10 users, or on a large scale serving thousands of users with a single iDashboards server. The plug-in based Flash Engine is designed to provide fast response with an interactive user experience for as low as 56Kbps access speed. The visual displays and graphics are generated locally by the iDashboards Flash Engine.

11. Software Requirements

There are 3 requirements to deploy iDashboards:

1. On Client side: a web-browser with the Macromedia Flash 7.0 or higher plug-in
2. A relational database, such as Microsoft SQL Server, Oracle, DB2, MySQL, etc.
3. A J2EE web application server such as IBM Websphere, BEA Weblogic, Sun ONE, ApacheTomcat, etc. The Apache Tomcat application server is bundled with iDashboards.

Because iDashboards complies with industry standards (J2EE, XML, JDBC, ODBC, LDAP, JSR168 Portlet), installation is simplified. Implementing iDashboards takes days instead of weeks or months. Even training on iDashboards is streamlined with an intuitive structure that shortens the learning curve for users.



Shadan Malik is the author of Enterprise Dashboards: Design & Best Practices by John Wiley & Sons, 2005

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Examples of Dashboards Displaying Insurance Key Performance Indicators

Claims Scorecard



Policy Scorecard



Note, the sample dashboards above are NOT pre-defined templates. iDashboards provides a very flexible dashboard framework to create dashboards with user-defined layout and chart preferences.