



hubble®
HOW TO
DRIVE YOUR
DASHBOARDS
LIKE A BOSS

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Dashboards: Simple is More

We live in a harsh reality of information overload. Data is being thrown at us through the internet, social networks, television, radio, advertising, you name it. Sometimes it's great – but sometimes it's not. Too much information can overwhelm us, and actually slow down decision-making.

Think about it in terms of vehicles. Way back in 1908, the Ford Model T was made with one lever and one gauge in its dashboard. Sure, that vehicle had much less technology under the hood than we have in the turbo-charged, horsepower-blasted cars we drive today, but we think Henry was actually up to something brilliant with his simple dashboard.

Today, we have the technology to measure RPMs, battery level, engine temperature, and even how economical your driving is. But, with all these features crowding your dashboard, it can be difficult to see what you really need to know in the blink of an eye – like fuel gauge or speed.

Just like your car's dashboard, sometimes simple can be more when it comes to critical decision-making for your business. Your need-to-know information front and center helps you drive the car (and your business) more reliably and powerfully. Business dashboards are the most powerful tools that have come into the enterprise world since we began capturing data. Despite their efforts to provide valuable insight, some companies are still struggling to reap all the benefits. Where is the line between creating a useful business tool versus a beautiful, but lacking, chart?

This ebook is a deep dive into the world of business dashboards. Read on to learn about what to look for, and what to avoid, in a dashboard to ensure you drive business performance at all levels of the enterprise - not just at the top.

So, buckle up and shift into drive.

What's Driving the Need for Dashboards?

In our modern business world where data volumes are increasing exponentially, it's more important than ever to be able to consume information quickly and easily. Gone are the days of depending on 20-page reports to find answers.

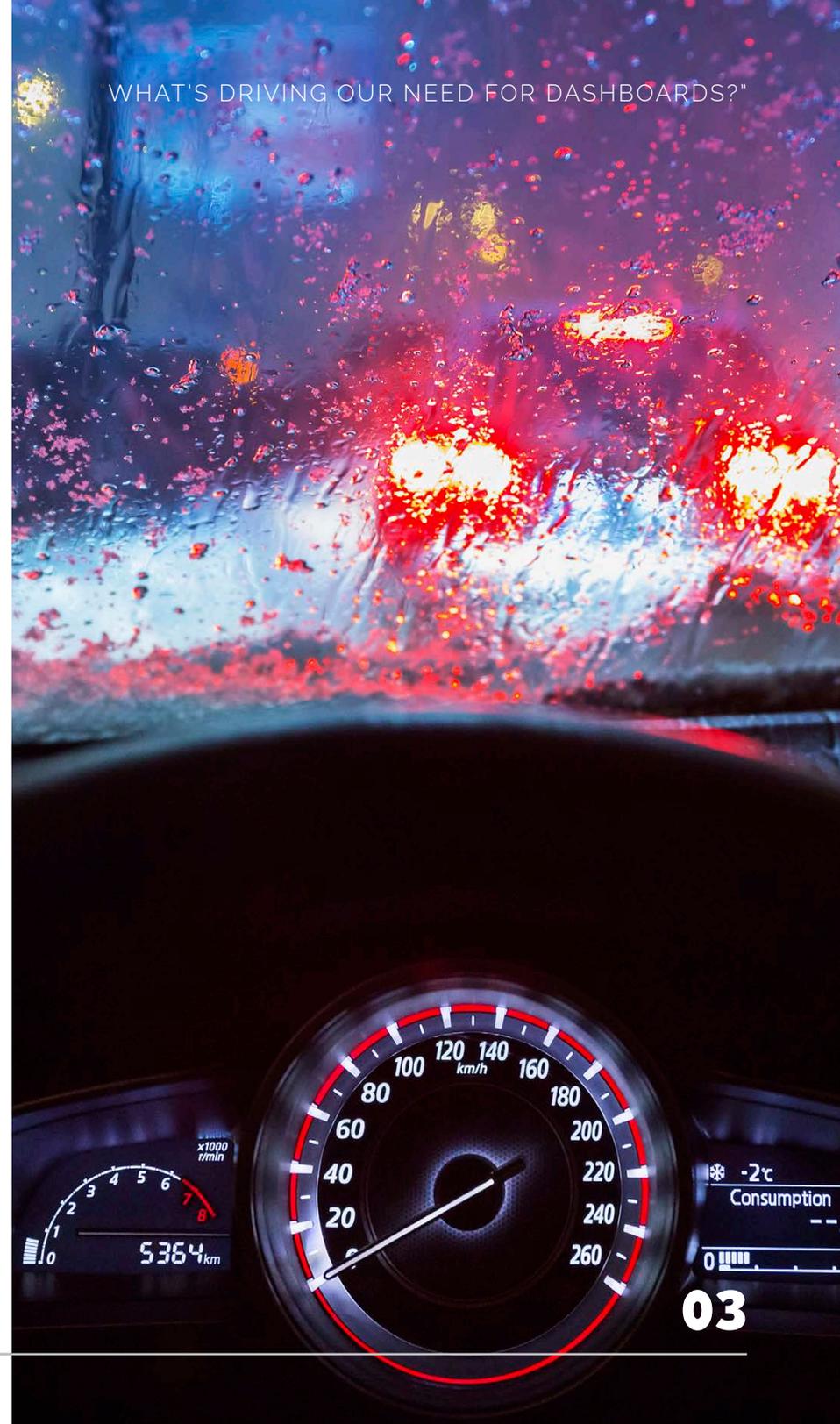
A dashboard turns business information into actionable insights with KPIs, metrics, and other key data points. Simply put, dashboards put all your critical information at eye level. The result? The ability to make business decisions at the actual speed of business.

But why? What's driving our need for dashboards when we did without them for so long?

1. We Need Better Visibility

It's simple -- you need to know what's happening in your business right now. You need visibility. When you're driving your car (or your business) with poor visibility, a few things could happen:

- You may slow down and move at a much slower pace. Though cautious and safe, it's not exactly efficient.
- You may rely on what you can remember about the road from the past. This is dangerous, and often it won't work the way you hoped.
- At worse, you may have a collision.



2. We Need to Go From 0 to 60 mph in 3.5 seconds

If you rely on lengthy reports in your business, you're no stranger to a process that can make you feel like you're watching paint dry. Endless back and forths between IT and Finance, multiple revisions, data dumps, pivot tables. All of that and sometimes you only really needed one number.

We obviously work in a dynamic environment. Needs are evolving, changing, and twisting by the second. That time-consuming reporting process simply can't survive in this new business. There is a need for more efficient consumption of information. Dashboards provide users a way to see, understand, and take action on information right when it's needed.

3. We Need to Be Agile

Agility is about reaction time - how quickly you can move your focus and direction. If you take a wrong turn, your GPS can course correct and get you back on your way to your destination. It's instantaneous, and it's smart.

In the business world, you need that type of agility too. If you veer off track, but then have to search through pages and pages of numbers in static reports to figure out how to correct your course, you've wasted precious time going down the wrong path.



4. We Need to Stand Out

Competitive advantage is key, especially when more companies are investing in modern technology to drive their business performance. Companies need to be able to share information between departments--from the sales department to accounts receivables--in the blink of an eye. Dashboards make this possible. Sales can use a customer's payment history to negotiate their next deal; AR can save time following up on invoices. That change in speed translates to greater revenue and productivity for your business.

In addition, businesses are now realizing that they can share that dashboard information securely with customers. Customers can view real-time order status and receipt information. As we all know, the smallest features can be game changers for customers. When it comes to competition, who would have thought automatic seat adjusters and light-up cup holders would make or break a sale? Business dashboards are those extra features that make you stand out to your potential customers.

5. We Need Swagger

A CFO recently noted, "If I had confidence in my data, I could be more decisive and push the company in the right direction faster." This one statement is so telling.

Lack of confidence impacts everything.

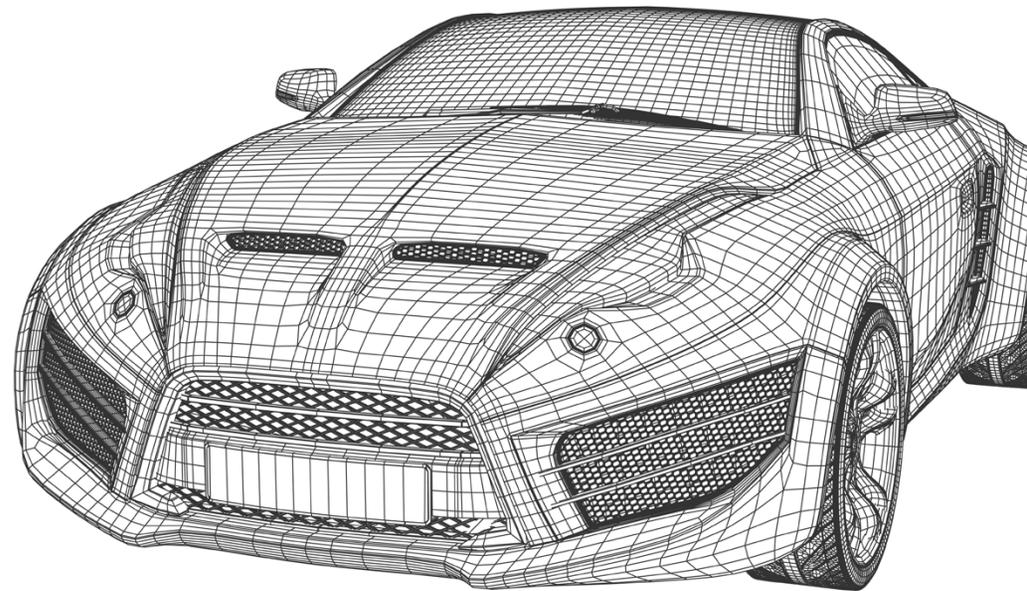
Dashboards bring everyone together on the same page for the same result - increasing confidence in the data and each other.

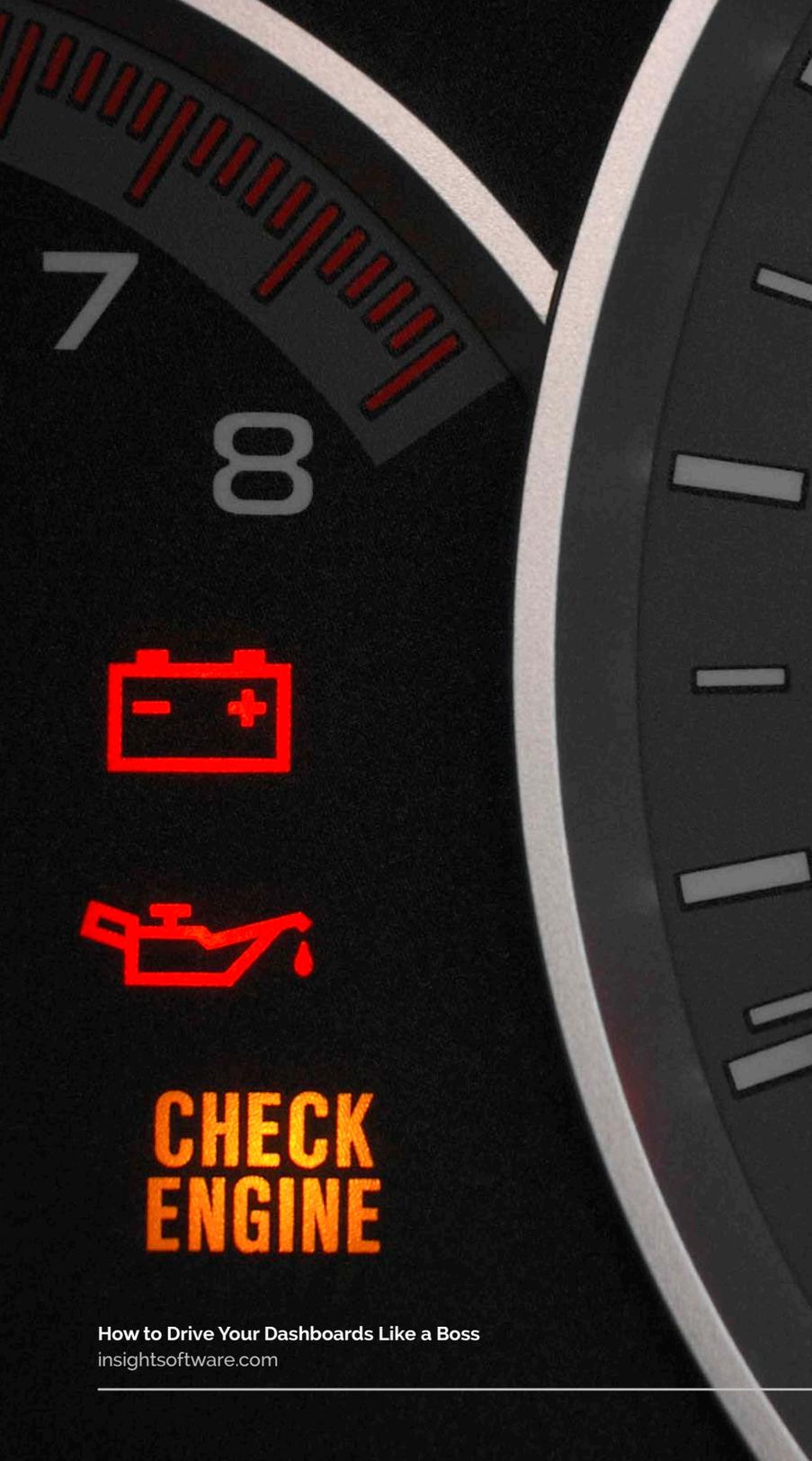
Now that you know why you need the dashboard, what does a good one look like?

DASHBOARDS: LET'S GET UNDER THE HOOD

When it comes to dashboards, it's true that pretty visualizations matter, but you need to work on the nut behind the wheel before you start fixing bolts. In other words, the basics must be covered before the aesthetics can be truly valuable. All too often, customers are intrigued by glammed-up dashboards only to find out that they aren't capable of delivering the data they need in the way they need it.

Let's break it down. What separates a badass dashboard from one that is just simply, bad?





1. A Good Dashboard Is Answer-Driven

People often make the mistake of thinking they need more data. The truth is what you need is an answer to your question - not just more data. Great dashboards focus on the question you're asking.

The best way to describe this is by thinking of your gas gauge. When you are driving you don't actually care how much gas you have left. The question you're really asking is, "how long until I run out of gas?"

In response to this, car companies have created metrics on dashboards like "Miles to Empty." Some cars are even smart enough to interpret your speed and other affecting items to answer your actual question.

When it comes to business dashboards, it's the same thing. Good dashboards won't waste your time with a piece of information that still leaves you guessing. Instead, they focus on answering the exact question you need to keep your motor running.

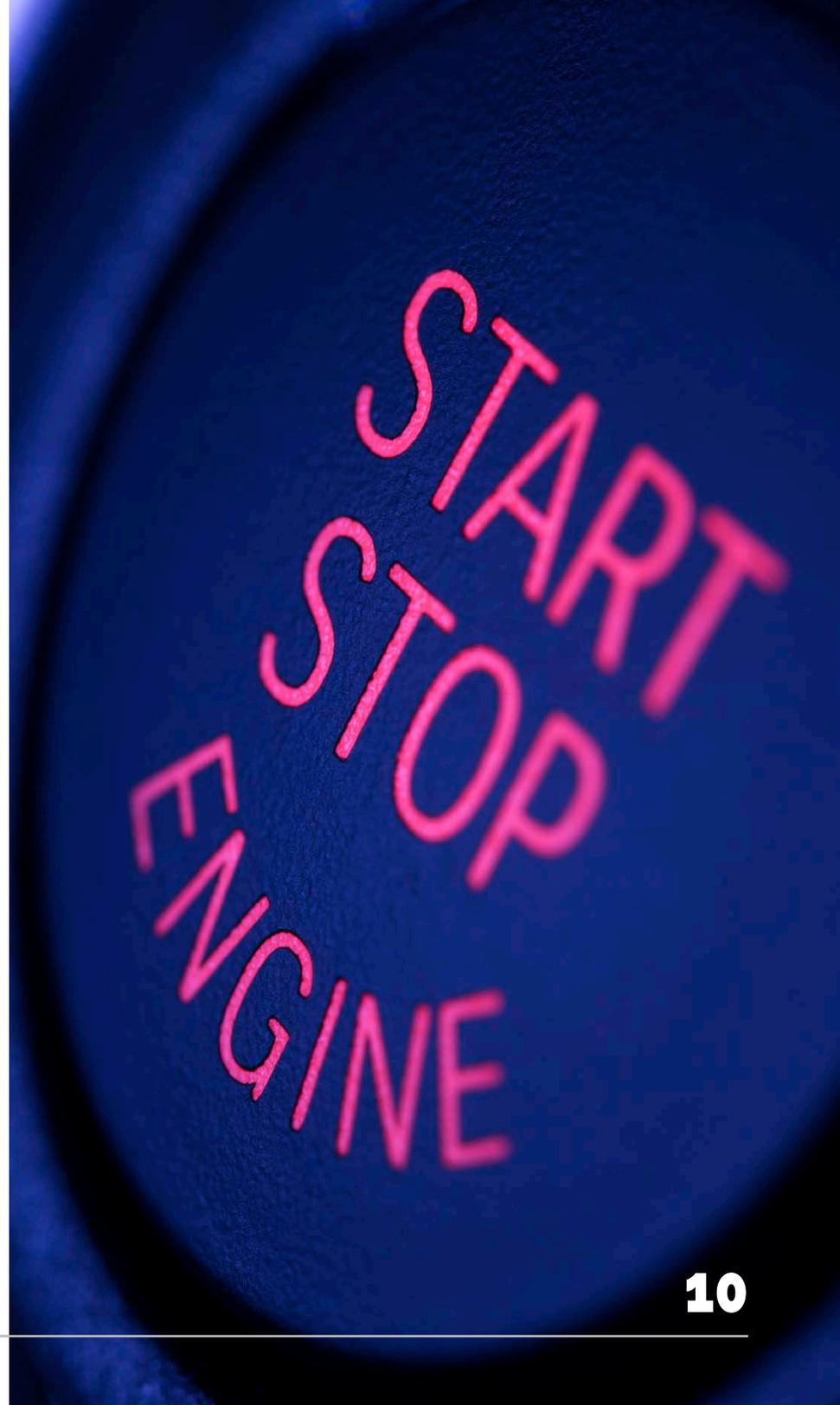
2. A Good Dashboard Is Simple

It's been a long ride since the simplicity of Henry Ford's Model T's dashboard a century ago. We've gone from simple car dashboards, to complex, to very complex. How did all this complexity start?

One clear influence came in the 1930s with the airplane. Airplane pilots have complex cockpit dashboards out of necessity. They rely on multiples gauges and controls to navigate safely with a dedicated button for every single function they perform. Car designers followed suit, and soon dashboard complexity equated to more features, which, at the time, equated to luxury.

But now we are at a cusp of change in dashboards in both vehicles and in business. Complexity is distracting. It's dangerous. And it actually gets in the way of our mission.

A good business dashboard is designed to keep critical pieces of information front and center. You can see what's happening at just a glance so you can keep your eyes where they need to be - on the road ahead. Simplify, then add lightness.



3. A Good Dashboard Is Visual

Being visual is not about using pretty dials and gauges but about making sure information is consumed quickly and easily. Sometimes that means having just a single number displayed. Sometimes it means a metric or a chart. Too much complexity can turn a great-looking dashboard into a dud when it comes to usability. Sometimes dashboards can be vibrant and colorful to look at, but they aren't answer-driven or easy to consume.

Check out the speedometer in your car. Many speedometers have a "red zone" -- typically when your foot pushes that pedal past 65 MPH. It's great. You get a quick visual indicator that you might be speeding. Whether or not you do something about it, is up to you.

A good business dashboard will not be visual for the sake of being visual. It will be designed to help you make split-second decisions with ease. Sometimes this is done through vivid, lively infographics, sometimes it's done through multiple panels, and sometimes it's just one alert.





4. A Good Dashboard Is Personal

Having the ability to configure a dashboard to your own personal preferences and needs increases usability, satisfaction, and ultimately enables faster decision-making. Even though it's widely popular to push dashboards out to every user to force them to see information, it isn't very effective. Mostly users will either resent it or ignore it completely.

A good business dashboard will give every business user the flexibility to open it and adjust it on the spot.



5. A Good Dashboard Is Organized

Your dashboard tells a story and sometimes that story benefits from multiple inputs. Multiple, well-organized dashboards can create a better picture of where you're headed.

Think of your GPS. You start with a zoomed-out map when you're planning your trip. Once you're in the driver's seat, it switches to a turn-by-turn view, zooming in as you approach an exit or turn. That "speed to read" helps you look at your destination from different angles for a complete view.

A business dashboard that can do the same allows you to run your business from a global perspective, while also allowing you to make the most impactful day-to-day decisions.

QUALITY IS REMEMBERED LONG AFTER THE PRICE IS FORGOTTEN

You know what a good dashboarding tool can do now. But, how do you find the right tool for your business? We've spoken to many businesses and we've heard the same gripe over and over again: a shiny new dashboard that's a complete flop when employees actually use it.

After you've put all that time into implementation and training, you want a dashboard that actually works, right? No. You want a dashboard that works great. Seamlessly. Intuitively. Efficiently. Here's what we've found that works.



1. Bumper To Bumper Traffic

It's easy to think you'll want to see everything on a dashboard. That seeing more will equate to more answers. The reality is quite the opposite. The harder you have to look to find an answer on a dashboard, the greater the chance that you won't find it - or worse, just give up in frustration.

When dashboards are too noisy with traffic, like too many colors, disjointed layouts, lots of unnecessary movement, flashing lights, or too much data, it can create visual overload. Too much is too much.

Even if it is relevant information, it can be overwhelming and cause people to shut down, creating blocks in training and user adoption. Your information should be the centerpiece of your display, and visuals should only be helping you find answers more quickly. If your dashboard isn't doing that, it's making your life harder. Turn it off.

2. A Stuck Engine

Dashboards that are randomly displayed together make it harder to pull out meaningful information. To illustrate this, imagine if your speedometer, gas gauge, warning lights, radio stations, window controls, and seat adjustments were all on your central control panel. But when Nickelback comes on the radio, the only thing you care about is changing the station. In this scenario, your mind has to visually and mentally skip over a lot to be able to take action - fast.

Dashboards that aren't organized can waste time, which can be costly to a business. It is worth it to find a dashboard solution that enables users to divide, group, and organize based on their own needs.

3. Horse and Buggy-Style

You can't effectively drive decisions with outdated information. It seems obvious, but how often have you done just that?

Dashboards that don't give you real-time information are like trying to drive while looking through the rear-view mirror. Static, stale data won't give you the confidence you need to make smart decisions for your business. You can't get out of a speeding ticket by assuring the police officer that you weren't speeding... yesterday.

If we've left the horse and buggy behind, what does the future of business dashboards look like?



TECHNOLOGY REVS UP THE ENGINE

Technology changes things. Companies actually used to print out their KPIs each day put them on a whiteboard for the whole company to see. The truth is, technology advancements have enabled dashboard solutions to create more value for companies. And the evolution is just beginning.

1. New database technologies, like in-memory and columnar databases, allow billions of records to be organized, aggregated, and presented in seconds. This eliminates the need for old school cubes and makes it possible to use the original, detailed source records to craft your dashboard. The result? More confidence in your dashboard.
2. Hardware, like Hadoop, makes big-engine technology possible for companies. Hadoop allows a lot of smaller, average servers to connect and work together to function on par with Exadata systems. The benefits are obvious. Components are less expensive (even in multiples) and have built-in redundancy. The cloud can take this all a step further by moving hardware, and hardware management, out of the local server room and into shared data centers. The result? It frees up resources, like people and space, and can scale on demand.



3. Accessibility to when and how we can see our information is another key technological advancement. Technology has enabled us to personally and professionally connect to what matters whenever and wherever we want. Thanks to the great coding options for web applications, you can enjoy the same dashboard experience in your office, on a plane, on your tablet, or on your phone.
4. As these tools and technologies become more mainstream, the cost and bar for entry gets lower. The result is a massive improvement in things like total cost of ownership, time to benefit, and risk management. Robust and beautiful dashboard solutions should be plug-and-play so that benefits can be enjoyed in days, not months. Cloud capabilities mean there is no hardware to order and wait for, and no need to

find the one person who can plug it in. Subscription models typically associated with new dashboard technologies put the customer in the driver's seat.

Long gone are the days of massive capital expenditures for that new Business Intelligence solution that you felt obligated to make work for the next seven years to justify its cost. Nowadays, if you aren't happy, you get to stop the car and get out. Vendors know this, and they work harder to keep you happy and excited about their products.

What Lies Ahead?

Technology is changing the game for dashboards, but it's also leading us towards the next evolution in business information. Already, companies are looking at how technology can help us jump beyond the dashboard. Here's what to watch for.

1. **Alerts.** You're not watching the dashboard for the sake of something to look at. You're watching it for alerts. What if the system could focus on only the alerts you wanted to know, when you needed to know them? Action items like customers past due, sales outstanding above a certain threshold, and sales targets reached could trigger the alert and bring you back to the dashboard only when you actually have to look at it. It's funny, huh? One of the coolest developments upcoming for dashboards might be the one that will actually help people spend less time looking at them.
2. **Predict and move.** Forget about old-school budgets on your dashboard. With predictive and rolling forecasting capabilities, you can constantly set new stopping points on your way to success. This keeps your business honest about its successes and challenges. It might even motivate employees to work just a little bit harder. Win, win right?

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- 3. Personalization.** Imagine a twitter-like feed full of just those KPIs that you care about. If you see one that's interesting, or just needs further analysis, you can connect right back to your dashboard or data discovery tool. You could even share it directly with your colleagues so that you can discuss and analyze in real time.
 - 4. Collaboration.** Data only tells part of a story. The expertise and intuition that exists in you and your colleagues has yet to be captured and codified. With the collaboration revolution, you'll be able to associate discussions with what's happening in the business in a searchable, sharable way. You'll get notifications of relevant conversations and the company can easily take lessons learned from one area of the business and benefit from them across the board - how's that for teamwork?!

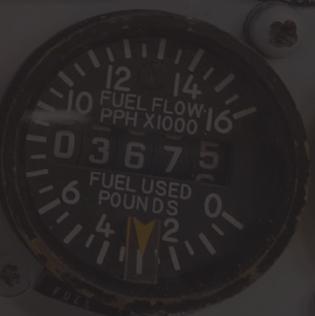
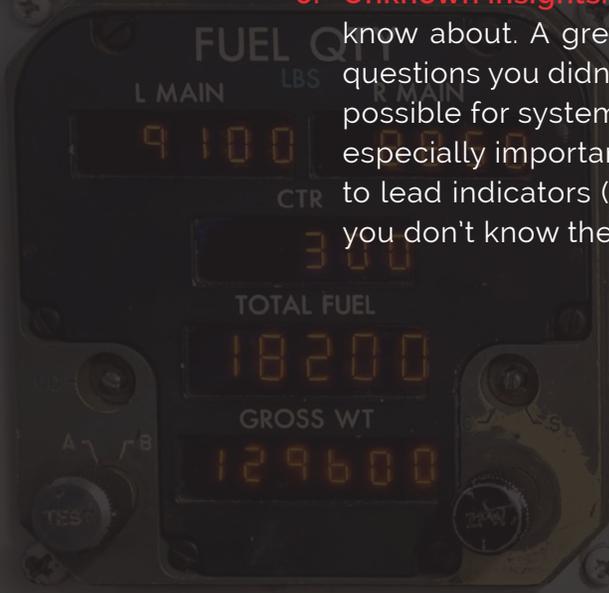
ENGINE INTERMIX TAKEOFF
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• ADD .05 EPR TO BOTH ENGINES
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5. **Data discovery.** Dashboards in the past were more about seeing the business from certain, preset angles. As users get more tech and data savvy, these little windows are beginning to hide more than they show. The trend in data discovery starts with dashboards and KPIs but really focuses on what happens after you see something of interest. Rather than stopping at the dashboard, data discovery enables you to delve deep into the information, slicing and dicing so that you can better understand the why and how.

6. **Unknown insights.** Up until now, dashboards have been set up to answer questions that you already know about. A great beginning for sure, but what if it could do more? What if they could answer questions you didn't even know you had? With current technology advancements, it's now becoming possible for systems to assess and analyze data FOR you to spot correlations and causations. This is especially important as businesses try to move away from lag indicators (think gas used in your car) to lead indicators (like speed that will put your car in optimal fuel consumption mode). Let's face it, you don't know the questions you don't know to ask -- soon technology can help with that!



The Last Lap

Business dashboards have come a long way. As more functionality is trackable, the best answer is not always to show everything at once. As dashboards become more functional, it's increasingly obvious that simple and intuitive systems are better. Dashboards that help you efficiently display information can help your business make better and faster decisions.

**Want to see how easy it can be to create the dashboards your whole business needs?
Request a demo now.**



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