



Myths and Misperceptions of Professional Open Source Business Intelligence

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Professional open source BI creates a new and very different model for the selection of BI technology, with much greater customer access and control. From the perspective of competitive strategy for proprietary BI vendors, the best strategy is to discourage prospects from even considering evaluating open source BI.

Below is a list of common claims and objections that proprietary BI vendors will often raise relative to open source BI. It's worth noting that many of these same objections were initially raised relative to Linux when customers in the operating system market sought out an alternative that could provide similar (if not superior) technology at a much lower TCO.

“Open source business intelligence isn't 'ready for prime time', and doesn't have all of the features of proprietary BI.”

While open source BI achieved initial awareness in the embedded reporting market, many open source BI projects have been in development for many years, through many versions of the software. Professional open source BI now offers:

- Operational, analytical, ad hoc and financial reporting
- Interactive OLAP analysis
- Data integration / ETL (Extract, Transform, Load)
- Enterprise dashboards
- Data mining and advanced statistics

Prospects are invited and encouraged to go to [Pentaho's website](#) to evaluate Pentaho's capabilities relative to their requirements. Public customer examples are also available online.

“Open source BI is about marketing hype and downloads. No one's really using it.”

While it is true that the average 100,000 downloads per month of Pentaho's open source BI projects represents a total potential user count that is larger than the installed bases of Business Objects, Cognos, and Hyperion combined, the real proof about open source BI adoption lies in the customer examples themselves, and significant third-party research.

Ventana Research published a research survey in 2006 showing that among more than 300 surveyed organizations, *all of whom were already using proprietary BI*, 40% were deployed or in deployment with open source BI, with an additional 43% considering open source BI. This study from Ventana Research, with significant additional information on open source BI adoption, is [available here](#).

Below is a small sample of the many organizations around the world that use Pentaho's professional open source BI to address their BI needs, from reporting and OLAP to dashboards, data integration, and more.

[DivX Corp.](#) (NASD: DIVX)

[Unionfidi S.C.](#)

[Terra Industries](#) (NYSE: TRA)

[MySQL](#)

[ZipRealty](#) (NASD: ZIPR)

[iStockphoto](#)

"Proprietary BI has been proven in thousands of customer implementations. You don't want to risk failure by using open source BI."

Much has been written on the subject of why BI projects fail. Experienced consultants, industry analysts, and even BI users have shared opinions and advice on the subject of avoiding business intelligence failures. A [Google search on "business intelligence failures"](#) turns up a number of resources. Common themes include lack of investment in training, lack of executive sponsorship, inadequate partnership between business users and the IT department, poor communication to consultants, and more. What you *won't* find is any experienced, non-vendor-employed BI professional who would cite *lack of non-critical features*, or *the fact that the BI technology used was open source* as reasons for BI failure. The key takeaway is that while there are many critical drivers of success or failure with business intelligence, none have any specific correlation to whether the BI technology used is proprietary or open source.

Recommended article: ["Business Intelligence Project Pitfalls"](#), Claudia Imhoff, Ph. D, The B Eye Network

"Open source software isn't secure. You don't want to expose your critical internal information by using a non-secure open source BI suite."

This claim has been used to disparage open source software for years, and has been repeatedly disproved and debunked. This article references [numerous studies and research](#) that have proven repeatedly that open source software is generally *more secure* than proprietary software.

This article, [covering Gartner Group's Open Source Summit](#) also highlights proprietary vendor FUD (fear, uncertainty, and doubt) tactics, and the many false claims made about open source software by proprietary software vendors.

"Open source BI relies on a community to develop and support the code in their 'spare time.' "

This is a misrepresentation of professional open source. This is one of the key services Pentaho provides as part of a Pentaho Subscription. Pentaho employs professional support technicians and software engineers, and provides service level agreements (SLAs) to customers. While Pentaho has a large and actively-contributing community, reported customer issues are addressed by Pentaho's paid professional staff. Beyond that, Pentaho employs professional product managers to define product roadmaps and to ensure continuing alignment of Pentaho's products to customer and market needs.

“You get what you pay for.”

No one has *ever* shown a positive correlation between the amount of money spent on BI software licenses, and the ultimate benefits delivered by BI. In fact, in instances of BI failure, the magnitude of the failure is in many cases measured most directly by the amount of money spend (in the case of failure, wasted) on expensive software licenses, leaving a limited budget for added value-added services from experts such as consulting, training, and developer enablement technical support. Please also see the prior question on the risks of business intelligence failure.

“There’s no such thing as a free lunch.”

This is absolutely true. Even without expensive proprietary license fees, business intelligence is not free. Maximizing the value of BI in your organization requires an investment of time, and almost always money (integration, training, design, hardware, maintenance, consulting). Offering enterprise-class BI technology without huge up-front license fees should not be mistaken for an offer of a “free lunch.”

“Open source licenses are legally risky. You’re safer just using proprietary BI.”

This is provably false, and ignores the fact that *every major proprietary BI vendor includes open source software* in their offering. As an example, [public SEC filings by Business Objects](#) cite their inclusion of open source software in their products and distributions. From the public filing:

“We use selected open source software in our products and may use more open source software in the future..... We may also be subject to claims that we have failed to comply with all the requirements of the open source licenses.”

As mentioned, every major proprietary BI vendor distributes or includes open source technology as part of their distributions. This can take the form of included application or web servers like Apache Tomcat, embedded databases like MySQL, or embedded libraries that provide functionality within the proprietary executables. The key takeaway is that whether you choose proprietary BI software or professional open source BI from Pentaho, you will be using open source technology, and no license that a proprietary vendor can provide you will eliminate any perceived risks associated with the use of open source software.

“Open source will cost more in the long-run, given training, implementation, and customization costs.”

There is no data to support this. Making this case typically involves a spreadsheet concocted by a proprietary BI vendor that either makes “estimates” around increased training or consulting costs associated with open source software, or attempts to equate a lack of certain vendor-specific features with fictitious increases in required IT headcount, longer deployments, and more. There is no actual research to support any of this. Note again that all of the leading proprietary vendors include proprietary software, and most heavily promote their support for third-party open source offerings like the Linux operating system, the MySQL database, the FireFox web browser, the Eclipse integrated development environment (IDE), and more.

A recent study by Forrester, ["Open Source Software's Expanding Role in The Enterprise"](#) (provided from the Unisys website), shows that open source software use for mission-critical applications is expanding, and highlights some of the benefits users are seeing from open source software.

"Using open source BI means that customers and IT organizations will have to deal with software source code."

This is not true, although the assumption is somewhat understandable given that the core of the definition of "open source" software relates to the availability of software source code.

In reality, most organizations who are users of the software do not want to see or touch Pentaho's source code, and there is no reason for them to do so. Pentaho provides compiled, packaged, certified, installable versions of its software. Source code is publicly available as an optional download, but the source code is generally only accessed by members of the Pentaho Community who are interested in working with it to potentially enhance future versions of Pentaho.

Although most users/customers don't ever see the source code, they still benefit from the fact that it is publicly available. The availability of source code creates an "insurance policy", and reduces long-term customer risk. As proof of this, many mainstream IT organizations ask for "source code escrow" agreements with their proprietary software vendors. These agreements require that if the proprietary software vendor is acquired or becomes insolvent, that the customer has the right to obtain the source code so that they can avoid disruption of their IT environment. The Professional Open Source model provides this benefit as part of the standard offering, rather than as a negotiated add-on.