Better planning, better reporting, better analytics for better decisions

Christian Kiock | Managing Partner

About the Tool

BOARD is a unified corporate performance management and business intelligence toolkit for all analysis, reporting and planning tasks within the company. One of its core advantages is a very strong self-service capability for the users - whether for planning and forecasting, analytics and reporting within individual business functions, such as finance, sales or buying/procurement, or across functions for enterprise-wide planning and reporting. On top of industry-leading dashboarding, performance analysis and planning functionalities, the tool also contains modules for predictive analytics and advanced forecasting. BOARD can be deployed on-premise or in the cloud.

About bdg: better planning, better reporting, better analytics for better decisions

bdg is an international business consultancy for corporate performance management and business intelligence solutions based in Germany and the UK. Founded in 2004 as 2K Business Intelligence Solutions, we are now a long-standing partner of various providers of BI & CPM software. Medium-sized companies, large corporations and public organisations are among our satisfied customers. It is our mission to provide up-to-date and relevant data for analysis and reporting purposes to enable better decision-making. That is why we implement flexible planning and reporting solutions in the areas of finance & controlling, marketing & sales, as well as procurement/buying and HR management to support you in the optimisation of your business processes.

We can support you both from the technical as well as the business concept side, starting with the requirement definition, the evaluation of a suitable BI & CPM technology all the way through to the software implementation, training and managing the change management process.

Fully integrated Merchandise Planning and BI at N Brown

bdg and BOARD implement an agile merchandise, assortment, item planning and BI solution
About N Brown

N Brown Group is a leading digital fashion and general merchandise retail group with 140 years of trading history. N Brown offer their customers an extensive range of products, principally clothing, footwear and homewares, through a number of power brands including Simply Be, Jacamo and JD Williams. In apparel, they are size inclusive, from 10-32 in Women’s and S to 5XL in Menswear. This means they target and meet the needs of two significant but under-served customer groups – size 20-plus and age 50-plus. Traditionally a mail order catalogue business, N Brown now see over 60% of demand coming from online, which comes with entirely new reporting, planning and analysis requirements. In order to drive both sales and brand awareness, they also operate a small store estate in the UK, focused on key shopping areas.

Starting Point

Good planning is crucial to the company’s success, especially in the fashion apparel sector, as the reaction speed and the ability to adapt quickly to changing consumer trends is now essential. Their shift from catalogue retailing to an integrated omni-channel model has also placed new planning imperatives on the Buying and Merchandising function. The existing Excel-based legacy planning capability consequently needed to be replaced with a fast, agile, fully integrated solution. In particular, the planning process was cumbersome and labour-intensive and could not be accurately and easily rolled up to company level. Nor did it adequately provide both top down and bottom up planning capability.

Reporting and analysis were provided by a combination of Business Objects and Excel, requiring excessive reliance on technical and business analysts resulting in bottle necks and delays.

Project Goals

N Brown had managed to plan complex merchandise requirements in a spreadsheet environment with the attendant issues of delay, low productivity, poor visibility, poor accuracy and inability to roll up plans to company level. The goal was to deliver an agile, integrated merchandise planning, analytics and reporting suite to support optimised omni-channel operation across both fashion and general merchandise divisions.

The solution also needed to enable self-service so that the user population could themselves identify and respond to changes in consumer trends without waiting for additional expert input.

Brief Profile of the Customer

| Customer: | N Brown plc |
| Region: | Manchester, United Kingdom |
| Industry: | Retail |
| Division: | Buying and Merchandising |
| Number of users: | 250+ Planners and Buyers |
| Application: | Merchandise Planning system including BI, analytics and reporting |
| System environment: | Various, including Excel, Teradata |

Executive Summary

- Tailor-made BOARD solution for N Brown
- Planning cycles, visibility and decision-making at all product levels shortened and simplified
- Workflow ensures an appropriate level of decision making control
- The user-friendly GUI ensures that the user population readily adopt the solution

Approach

In order to provide usable functionality quickly, design and development were sub-divided into logical modules which could be introduced to the user population progressively, but ultimately benefit from a fully integrated solution.

The modules included Merchandise Financial Planning, Assortment Framework, Master Assortment, Assortment Selection, pre-season planning and in-season management, WSSI, and Item Planning, together with a drill anywhere reporting and analytics dashboard. It is important to note that the reference to modular structure in no way implies a lack of full unification of the planning cascade (top down and bottom up) and associated workflow.

Results

Progressive and fast adoption of a fully integrated planning, reporting and analytics system replacing the inaccuracies and limitations of the existing Excel and Business Objects environment. The BOARD solution has enabled a step change in planner productivity. In addition, the support for speed and agility facilitates the emerging move to looser, less prescriptive pre-season planning and a fluid re-planning process in-season to meet increasingly frequent shifts in demand especially in fashion apparel. Buyer access to the Item Plan enables more effective control of inventory volumes and investment in line with forecasts and budgets. A single data structure from multiple data sources ensures system and data integrity and control throughout.

The analytics capability is provided in a self-service form, which means that decision-makers can move seamlessly from planning, to reports, to analytics and back again within a single environment and familiar user interface.

Within a short time bdg delivered a practical merchandise financial planning module that allowed planners to start the journey of integrated planning, leaving spreadsheets behind.

Key Functionality

The 250+ planner and buyer community now have access to a fully specified merchandise and assortment planning system via a clean, simple user interface. Commencing the planning process with an example plan seeded from previous season data, they have freedom to make commercial and unit recommendations and decisions safely within a logical flow. The solution provides access to all required planning attributes. Each user benefits from their own ‘what if’ environment which they use before presenting plans for approval. All calculations are system powered including normal algorithmic requirements such as lock and spread and breakback.
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Success Story | Retail

N Brown Group

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