

New Technologies

Old-School Systems vs. New-School Systems

Traditional data systems are, for the most part, incapable of handling the complex processes of today's fashion environment. Providing an excellent customer experience now requires companies to move beyond ensuring a particular item is in stock, to actually being one step ahead of the customer's desire and demands.

Old-school systems give companies data that they use to pivot. New-school systems are more predictive, with prebuilt analytics that can tell a company where to send merchandise and when. Today's systems are less about reporting and more about business intelligence and artificial intelligence.

Old school reporting is still used and has several purposes. However, it is tabular in nature and contains general static information that doesn't tell much beyond the state of that element at a particular time. Users can take that information and combine it over time periods, locations or other data points to see trends, by looking at the numbers. Reporting tools then allow slice-and-dice analytics, which is helpful for a company to understand the status of the elements of its business.

As a company grows, the data it collects can tell it much more than simply how much it sells per square foot. To understand what the data is telling the company, many companies have hired data scientists. These individuals can look at data and help collect, clean and interpret it, using analytics tools. These data scientists are critical in helping companies build the models that will help them make intelligent decisions, based on the data.

The next generation of tools, after traditional reporting systems, include key performance indicators, available as a “dashboard” program showing a collection of graphs and KPIs tailored to the business. Users no longer need to interpret data from static paginated row/column reports. These tools are more visual and present data in real-time that companies can use to make operational decisions at a more granular and timely basis. They can take the data further in order to be predictive such as: What would happen if?... From that information, companies can discover the impact of changes in advance. The data will show things numerically or graphically, based on what it is fed or what it acquires. This generation of reporting systems can tell what KPIs are likely to change over time, adding another layer to the evolution of the information presentation.

The next logical progression is learning, predicting and making specific suggestions. The systems collect data, analyze the outcomes of potential scenarios and learn from the actual outcomes. Over time, the systems have learned what users do, based on the predictions, recommendations and human-induced outcome over the history and later can take action. They will have moved through the business intelligence cycle beyond reporting, to actually conducting a transaction from an informational setting, or at least recommending an action, if not actually doing it.

This is where systems are moving toward. Data collection can be a massive undertaking, yet that is how business intelligence turns into artificial intelligence to go beyond predictive analytics and well beyond filling inventory, to sending a manufacturer a purchase order for creating new products. Business systems are evolving. They are moving from reporting to understanding, analyzing, predicting, suggesting and intelligently transacting. If it's within the realm of the predictability model, it just happens.



For the system to be effective, however, it must have access to and visibility into as much data as possible. Without the right—and right amount of—visibility, the output generally can't be broader than the input. The scope of data is extremely important, as is its breadth. This will enable companies to make better recommendations and actionable items. That feeds into the entire life cycle. If data exists in siloes and is not structured or configured to the business, the company won't get the intelligence.

A new breed of tools is on the horizon that can help companies get the right information to the right data systems for true, actionable intelligence. PANDESCO's DoorSharp Channel Management System, highlighted earlier, focuses on the data that companies need to be able to curate exceptional customer experiences. DoorSharp provides an independent method for the collection of data, related to the point of inflection with the consumer. It collects data from inside and outside a company. It provides insight and enables better decision-making. It also enables critical operation steps that were previously siloed in other systems, or no system at all, to be included in the data sets being used to drive decision making.

Within a company, each platform usually has multiple pieces of information. For retail stores, there is point-of-sale information at the customer level (such as inventory, cost and units); traffic counters that tell how many people visit the location and store information, such as square footage, number of registers, landlord, physical location, style and building type. Each type of data is located in a different system or program. DoorSharp takes all of this seemingly separate data and normalizes it into visualizations that intersect with a company's business processes.

Companies also want to understand how their retail stores are doing. By loading all of its store information (including sales, square footage, traffic, etc.) into DoorSharp, a company can view the data from an operations perspective to see that traffic is up in a particular region but sales are down.



DoorSharp also mines information from the internet at large, to help companies better recognize trends that would impact their business. It's helpful to know that a particular item, such as a hobo-style bag, is trending upward in Florida. This enables the company to shift stock from other regions to meet demand in Florida. However, DoorSharp goes beyond that, to help explain why a trend is occurring. In this example, hobo bags are trending upward, because Beyoncé tweeted about hobo bags, or because someone took a picture of her using a hobo bag. Therefore, it's trending or people are searching online for hobo bags at a higher-than-normal rate.

DoorSharp looks at the world for information related to external factors that companies should be interested in. That advanced information includes social media and even weather—if a snowstorm is coming to New York and hobo bags are trending in Florida, companies can extrapolate that they should send stock to Florida, so they don't lose sales from the snowstorm.

Having a level of intelligence beyond charts and graphs, is the future in creating customer-first experiences that ultimately drive success. Nowhere is that more important than in fashion.

