

Business intelligence trends to watch in 2018



By [Yolanda Smit](#)

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The move towards digital has become a prominent feature on the corporate agenda. And while it will assist in ensuring future competitiveness, it will not be achieved overnight. A critical success factor will be the ability of the company to embrace several data management and new analytic capabilities in the near future.



Yolanda Smit, regional director (Gauteng) FBT Group

Much of the corporate success will be dependent on how effective the digital business will be in leveraging accurate and timely data. Just consider how the number of data channels has grown thanks to the increasing connectedness and mobility of customers.

Companies are already starting to reconsider how they address the fundamentals of data management, especially given the changing regulatory environment.



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With the likes of King IV and the Protection of Personal Information Act (PoPI), concerted efforts will be made to formalise and streamline data governance. This will also see renewed interest in enabling data management practices like data quality, master data management, and data architecture disciplines.

Driving artificial intelligence (AI)

Transforming into a data-rich business will be a priority because of the competitive benefits this will bring. But to really evolve the processes and systems capable of analysis, the digital organisation will need to move analytics to its core.

The tools required to do so will revolve around robust and fast-paced data acquisition capabilities and then advanced analysis capabilities such as machine learning. Companies must be analytics-driven to make sense of the data at their disposal. This has already benefited information-rich industries like financial services, but these industries will have to start to focus on migrating analysis from quantitative pockets like actuarial teams through to all levels of decision-makers in the organisation.

In more industrial pockets in the economy (mining, engineering, and even retail), the internet of things is the main catalyst for driving analytics investments, as the volumes and richness of data originating from sensors and devices open significant new opportunities for insights.



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And by embedding machine learning insights in all operational processes through the likes of cognitive computing models, the business will have the foundation required to be a truly data-driven environment.

Augmenting workforces

Building from this environment, organisations will position themselves to capitalise on the growth of augmented technology. Essentially, this enables 'smart' operations through cognitive computing embedded in operational workflow and devices.

And while the thought of working alongside bots and robots within the next few years might sound like *Back to the Future* science fiction, we are already seeing how chatbots are growing in popularity with many being indistinguishable from 'real' people.

This is inevitably raising more questions about how reliant we have become on personal data, how it is used, and the ethics of relying on these augmented workforces.

Cloud growth

In the rush to embrace new technologies, care should be taken to not overlook the role of cloud computing and big data in the digital revolution. With the spotlight falling firmly on advanced analytics and getting valuable insight from the available data, organisations will require a more considered approach to virtualisation solutions.



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With the influx of more cloud providers investing in local data centres, barriers to adoption are falling away so the expectation is that 2018 will see a significant increase in cloud and big data transformation.

These are exciting times for South African businesses. So many opportunities are being presented to capitalise on digital transformation. There just needs to be a willingness to adapt and adopt a new way of thinking.

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ABOUT YOLANDA SMIT

Yolanda Smit is the regional (Gauteng) director at PBT Group. Smit started her career as a junior business intelligence (BI) extract, transform, load (ETL) and front-end developer at Harvey Jones Systems, and in a period of five years, established herself as an all-rounder with business and technical insight. She completed her MBA with a specialisation in management consulting in 2008 at the University of Stellenbosch Business School.

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