We asked: What's Your BW Strategy? The Answers Surprised Us

Recently, as part of Protiviti's Data Management & Advanced Analytics practice's popular Expert Webinar Series, my colleague Vinay Suneja and I reviewed the various options available to BW customers to migrate to HANA. Our discussion included overviews of SAP HANA Enterprise, SAP BW on HANA and SAP BW/4HANA, clearly differentiating the business value each of these technologies bring to an organization's landscape. Several hundred people attended and many of those guests asked questions, both throughout and after the presentation. What we learned from those questions confirms much of what I see in my day-to-day work with current clients: there is still a great deal of confusion in the marketplace about how organizations can optimize their investment in data tools to deliver the best return in terms of simplicity to the architecture, and provide best value to business for overall organizational growth.

During the webinar, we took a look at what we believe are the top three options for companies looking to refine, or define, a holistic Business Warehouse (BW) strategy using the SAP solutions that are best for their needs. Every day, we see that organizations are investing in increasingly complex architecture with many building blocks, resulting in complex data lineage causing reconciliation issues, longer nightly batch data management and lack of real-time data due to inflexible data loads in the resident BW system, among other issues.

Option 1

SAP HANA Enterprise (side car)

- An independent system, which can extract data directly from ECC and other source systems
- Provide multitude of analytical capabilities with text, spatial, big data, and predictive algorithms

Option 2

SAP BW on HANA (Migration)

- Migrate BW system to BW on HANA, bringing agility and versatility to data models
- LSA++ HANA optimization of BW models brings design simplicity and speed of deployment

Option 3

SAP BW/4HANA (New Release)

- Upgrade and migrate to new BW/4HANA, converting all BW models to HANA models
- Redesigned modeling, enterprise-wide data warehouse capabilities integrating data from operational and digital businesses

The first, SAP HANA Enterprise with a side car, is an independent system which can extract data directly from ECC and other source systems, providing a multitude of analytical capabilities with text, spatial, big data, and predictive algorithms. The second would be a migration to SAP BW on HANA, bringing agility and versatility to data models. Finally, we covered the new release of SAP BW/4HANA, a migration and upgrade that brings redesigned modeling and enterprise-wide data warehouse capabilities integrating data from operational and digital businesses.

Following the session, I spent some time doing a deeper dive into the questions raised and categorized the top concerns. The result? As we had anticipated, businesses are spending considerable time and resources trying to find the right BW balance. But what surprised us was how extensive the lack of a clear BW strategy is in most companies who are coming to terms (dare we say 'struggling'?) with the best ways to keep data systems nimble in the face of increasing demands for data availability from across the organization. And yes, keeping that data secure is a critical concern as well.

Here's a sampling:

- *Why do we need HANA Enterprise when we already have BW on HANA? Can we bring all the flat file data to BW on HANA?*
- *If my company has already invested in SAP BW on HANA and we have converted all BW artifacts to HANA Models, what is the use case for moving to SAP BW/4HANA? Is BPC 11 available on BW/4HANA? If BPC 11 is not supported, then what is the planning tool?*
- *Can HANA Enterprise include an ECC on HANA Model that can be integrated with BW/4HANA?*
- *With S4/HANA, do we still look forward to BW/4HANA, or is Embedded BW going to be updated and merged together in an upcoming version? With S4/HANA, is there still a need to keep analytics separate from transactional? Wouldn't the Embedded BW come with a B4 version?*

Clearly, every organization has its own unique requirements and as a result, there will be no "one size fits all" solution. It can be overwhelming to try to go it alone when developing a BW strategy. And, it can be equally challenging to stay abreast of the latest products and solutions that will enhance your existing strategic plan. Moving to BW on HANA is much more than a technical database migration from any database to HANA; it involves significant changes in modeling, data storage, and performance optimization. BW/4HANA, an enterprise-wide data warehousing system capable of integrating SAP and non-SAP data, including big data, with predictive analytics and high performance on large datasets, is a completely new product and very different from BW on HANA. In addition, newer architecture opens up significant opportunities to enhance visualization capabilities using non-SAP platforms such as Microsoft Power BI, Qlic and Tableau.

Don't let the proliferation of options overwhelm you. Whether you are an experienced SAP HANA customer or perhaps you're new to the HANA experience, there are many opportunities to learn which capabilities might be right for your next investment. Webinars like the one I held recently are offered regularly by a variety of organizations. SAP offers tutorials, both online and at in-person training sessions. White papers and books detailing HANA features are easily downloaded online. Blogs like this one are popular educational tools, and of course, attending SAP-focused conferences throughout the year is also a good way to get to know more about HANA and interact with advisers who can walk you through product details. What's most important is that you, whether a current or future SAP HANA customer, have a solid BW strategy and make the most of your HANA solutions.

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