

## INTRODUCTION

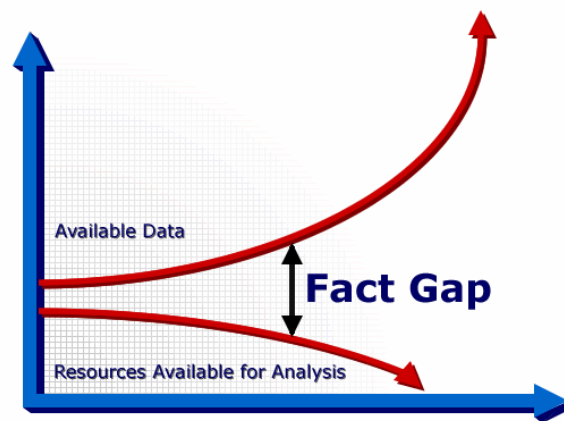
The volume of data available for analysis is increasing exponentially, but the resources available to turn the data into useful information are becoming scarce, giving rise to what has become known as the Fact Gap. However, with the right technology and the right approach to analysis, this gap can be filled, and it is the companies which exploit the available technology that will leap ahead of their competitors.

### Recognizing the Problem

In the course of making decisions business users are required to find, gather, and consume vast amounts of data. Through this process the data is transformed into information which they are then able to use to make decisions. This data transformation process requires specific skills and tools. Unfortunately, the volume of data available is growing much faster than the resources available to transform the data into information. Compounding the problem is the presence of what research specialist Neil Raden calls "Shadow IT." Shadow IT is the use of Excel by business users to do their best to manage the fact gap.

## The Fact Gap

*"A flood of corporate data...threatens to overwhelm business managers."*  
- John Goff, CFO Magazine 11/4/03



### Key Signs the Fact Gap is Present

- Business users are heavily reliant on Excel for analysis and decision making
- The backlog of reports requested is increasing over time
- Information necessary to make critical decisions is often produced after the deadline
- Data is not formatted for quick, actionable decision making.

### **Actual Case Study**

The Rainmaker Group recently worked with an organization which had so many corporate reports they had written a custom software program to allow users to search the report directory by key word, file type, or date. There were nearly 3,000 reports saved into the accepted corporate report library which were updated and maintained on a daily and weekly basis. Many of these reports had not been accessed by an end user in months but they were still being updated by the IT department. Incredibly, there was a backlog of new report requests submitted by business users which the IT department estimated would take 6 months to complete. In our interviews with the business users they were still heavily dependent on Excel to gather, analyze, and report data. Even though it was manual and time intensive it was easier than searching for the right report, or requesting a new report from IT.

### **Closing the Fact Gap - Creating Competitive Advantage**

Leading organizations across all types of industries are successfully closing the fact gap by democratizing information across the organization and providing users with tools to manage data analysis. Business users will always find a way to get to source data so they can do their job effectively, and accurately. In fact, research studies show they will spend extra time, even time outside normal working hours, to create personal reporting systems. Smart organizations are working with business users to create more efficient and flexible self-service mechanisms so business users can shift the time necessary to gather data to the more valuable analysis tasks. In other words they are closing the fact gap. Smart organizations are also rolling out reporting and analysis tools that provide instant exception monitoring of key business indicators. This allows business users to re-focus valuable time away from pouring over reports to quick visual scans to identify exceptions. This can amount to hours of new productive time each week for a typical business user. And it does not stop there. Smart organizations are providing business users with sophisticated analysis tools which allow on-demand drill-down, charting, and root cause analysis.

Business users who previously spent up to 10 hours per week finding, gathering, updating, and formatting data, now have instant access to information. The result can be as much as an entire working day each week available for more productive work.