Graduate Career in Business Intelligence: Have You Got What It Takes?

Getting started in a Business Intelligence career may be the easiest way for a graduate to break into the IT industry, but it is no free lunch and a level of competency must be reached.

Getting a job is only the first step, being well prepared to build a successful career is something else.

Here are the five main areas a Business Intelligence specialist needs to be proficient in.

All of them are important, but none are deal breakers. Even if you only have one or two of the items on this list, the rest can be learnt.

1. Relational Databases

Understanding how relational databases work is one of the most important things in Business Intelligence. Working blindly to the table schema provided by the database developer will drastically limit what you can do.

2. SQL

SQL, Structured Query Language is the programming language used exclusively for extracting information from databases.

SQL does not change much between different databases, so learning one version is enough to apply to all databases.

It is possible to have a successful Business Intelligence career and never be able to write a line of SQL, but it can certainly make it easier when trying to solve more complex problems.

3. Basic Programming Skills

Most reporting software has an underlying scripting language similar to how Excel has macros. All these languages have their own quirks and take some effort to learn, especially as many do not have many resources to refer to.

But once learned, it is usual for reporting programmes to only ever be a few lines long and not the hundreds that application software needs to function.

4. Reporting Software

Just like the programming languages, it does not really matter which reporting software you learn, it is more about understanding the theory.

That said, it makes sense to learn the most popular and that, by far and away, is Crystal Reports.

It is my software of choice, but more importantly, it is used by virtually everyone everywhere and has huge support in the form of both documentation and user base.

5. Analysis Skills

This is the trickiest of the five to define as Business Intelligence analysis is different to what is usually considered to be analysis in the IT industry.

The other problem is that no materials exist to learn this specific skill set. It is one of the problems of Business Intelligence for the beginner: it is such a new discipline that the books and courses have not been written yet!

Summary

None of the above are essential prerequisites to starting a Business Intelligence career, but the more you know, the easier it will be.

Every single one of these skills can be learnt in a reasonable time frame, and I would advise learning them all to a comfortable level before going after any Business Intelligence position.

With the exception of number four, most of these subjects are covered as part of any computer/IT relate degree, and if you have had the advantage of this level of training it is usually enough to get you a solid start as a Business Intelligence analyst.

About the Author

Jason Dove is the author of 'Crystal Reports Formulas Explained' and a Business Intelligence expert who has worked as a consultant for over a decade providing top notch assistance for the world's leading companies.

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