

# How to Tell If You Need Automated Reporting or Business Intelligence

## The Difference: Reporting vs Analysis

For starters, let's take a moment to distinguish between two crucial components of the broader field of data analytics: reporting and business intelligence & analytics. Some people have a tendency to use these terms interchangeably - which isn't just confusing, it's wrong. Why? Because they play very different roles: reporting shows you your KPIs, while business intelligence reveals insights. In a way, reporting takes you halfway there and BI delivers the full value. Most people in today's modern business world need [business intelligence](#) even when they just think they need automated reporting. Here's why:

**Reporting** is about the bare facts. It's the process of consolidating, organizing, formatting and summarizing key data, the headline numbers that tell you how your business is performing overall.

**Analysis** is what you do with that information. It's the process of questioning and interpreting what you're looking at to figure out why and how the numbers in your report came to be. It's the place you get insights that will influence your real life business decisions. If the reports you get are not easy to analyze, drill down, zoom out - you will not get the business value you need.

## What Exactly Is Automated Reporting

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The beauty of automated reports is that you get the important numbers fast, without involving IT.

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The trouble with tools that automate reports in isolation is that they limit you to just that: reporting. While you get the initial answers fast, it's tricky and complicated to move on to the second part of the journey: analysis. Let's say you want to drill into a stat to figure out why or what if, and ask an additional question to the data? Not possible, and that's where businesses get stuck and have a hard time getting true value from just automated reports.

And here's where a lot of confusion lies with people requesting automated reporting, but really needing BI: Yes, you can see at a glance whether you're hitting your KPIs with automated reports, but if there's no way to look under the hood and examine how you got there, or [why a KPI is a certain way](#), you certainly can't reliably replicate your success or correct where you're going wrong.

## How Business Intelligence Is Different

Solid business intelligence (BI) platforms [combine reporting and analysis](#) features. You can amalgamate data from all areas of your business to produce reports and dashboards, but you can also query and manipulate the data to ask more complex questions, clearing up the mystery of how you got there and how you can keep getting better and better results.

Being able to easily and quickly understand your data and gleams insights on who, what, how, is the true value of business intelligence. Think of it this way: you don't want to look at a report in order to only create several pertinent questions that then either go unanswered or leave you with more work to do to find the answers. Business intelligence takes you the full circle, in one place.

## Using BI for Your Automated Reports

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**A-ha! Now we come to the Holy Grail:  
automated reporting within your BI solution.**

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If your BI platform is [sufficiently powerful - and genuinely self-service](#) - you'll be able to produce regular and ad hoc reports, and build interactive dashboards, which not only tell you what you need to know about your business, but also give you live access to the underlying data.

Unlike static reports, you can switch to deep-level analysis immediately, drilling down to the details and examining underlying data on a precise, granular level.

That's why businesses are flocking to BI for an easy, comprehensive automated reporting process. They get the time savings, without sacrificing on scope for analysis.

## A Real Life Example

Here's an example. Simplee is an online healthcare payment platform that encourages patients to move towards online bill payments. [Before switching to Sisense BI](#), they generated Excel reports to tell them how many patients had been successfully ushered towards that goal in any given month.

The trouble was twofold. Simplee was dealing with 50 million rows of data per month - way too much for a simple automated reporting tool to deal with - and while they could see how transactions were processed, it was far too tough and time-consuming to delve any deeper.

By embracing BI, they not only produced reports that were much more accurate, six times faster, they could also investigate and query these vast datasets in near-to-real-time, figuring out exactly which factors influenced a customer's decision to pay electronically.

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**In other words, rather than dry facts that tell them how they did yesterday, they have strategic insights that tell them what to do tomorrow.**

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Simplee are far from the only ones: companies that were creating reports painstakingly by hand have seen even better results by switching to BI. [Take Casumo, another Sisense client](#), which now produces reports 23 times faster than before - while getting all the benefits of deep-level analysis that come with a full BI solution.

## The Bottom Line

The choice between automated reporting and BI is a no-brainer. Provided your BI vendor offers automated reports as part of the package - which they absolutely should - there's no need to limit yourself to generating basic reports.

By using BI for your automated reports, you get unfettered access to your full range of data and sources. You can build your own dashboards at ease, adapting queries on an ad hoc basis as reporting requirements evolve. Most importantly, you can dip beyond the basic numbers to interrogate what's working in your business - and what's not.

Done right, BI is simply more efficient, comprehensive and scalable than automated reporting can ever hope to be.

**Want to see for yourself how fast Sisense can produce automated reports?**

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