Business Intelligence (BI) applications are decision support tools that enable real-time, interactive access, analysis and manipulation of mission-critical corporate information.

The cornerstone of a business intelligence solution is the data warehouse. Surrounding the data warehouse are components that assist in the feeding, analyzing, and reporting on the data in the warehouse. Let's take a look at these components:

Data sources – The data warehouse ecosystem begins with operational systems and operational databases that run the enterprise.

Extract, transformation, and load (ETL)

Staging tables – These serve as intermediate tables between the operational environment and the data warehouse.

Data warehouse – The business data warehouse (BDW) is the central repository of historical information. It is the complete historical record of the business operations.

Materialized query tables – The data in the data warehouse is atomic and too low level for human interpretation.

Multi-dimensional cube – Business analysts have always had a thirst for knowledge.

Online Analytical Processing (OLAP) – The reporting environment on top of the multi-dimensional cube is done through a standard reporting interface.