

Yellowfin 7.2 in Context of the Broader BI Market

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What You Need To Know

On March 16th, Business Intelligence provider Yellowfin announced the release of Yellowfin 7.2. The release focuses on core improvements around considerations for business workflows, data connectors, and forecasting capabilities. Blue Hill Research readers should be aware of this announcement for its validation of trends around the evolving expectations and needs of enterprise BI.

In recent years, business intelligence vendors have placed significant resources to emphasize data discovery and self-service capabilities. Readers should note that while self-service autonomy is an essential component to developing an agile and dynamic analytics culture, self-service access and business user autonomy alone is inadequate in building enterprise-wide distribution of analytic insights. In order to achieve the full potential of enterprise BI, solutions must give consideration to a broader picture. Such a consideration must also account for differences in workflows between end-user personas whether they are content consumers, creators, or IT stewards of the underlying data.

Yellowfin's 7.2 announcements underscore a continued emphasis on the workflow, governance, and agility needs of both technical and non-technical users. This focus extends Yellowfin's leadership in this area, and presents a compelling framework which Blue Hill's audience should consider as they look to make enterprise-wide business intelligence investments.

What Was Announced

Yellowfin 7.2 primarily addresses new features in three areas: business workflow considerations, data connectors, and forecasting capabilities. Blue Hill Research examines salient product announcements below:

Business Workflow: Yellowfin has introduced "Yellowfin Business Workflow," which addresses workflow considerations that appeal to non-technical business users as well as dedicated data analysts. The Yellowfin 7.2 release includes a new task management system, discussion boards, task review cycle, and "smart tasks." The task management system is designed to enable business users to raise questions while viewing analytic reports by assigning tasks requesting further analysis. Users can request for new content to be created or existing content to

AT A GLANCE

The Announcement

On March 16th, Yellowfin announced the release of its newest version, 7.2. The release focuses on new features within:

- Business Workflows
- Data Connectors
- Forecasting Capabilities

Blue Hill Research observes that the release affirms broader market trends of meeting demand for business intelligence solutions that support both the individual autonomy of business analysts while still providing the governance, security, and collaboration that enterprises need.

be updated. Readers should consider this within the line-of-business user's workflow, as it presents an opportunity for them to flag questions and receive additional context without requiring them to perform the analysis themselves. This is significant because the barrier to line-of-business users performing analysis is often just as much a lack of willingness as it is about technical barriers.

In a similar vein, Yellowfin 7.2's discussion boards are aimed at facilitating brainstorming between analysts and providing guidance for future analytics endeavors. The integration of visual displays into task progression and completion should function as an agent to increase transparency into workflows across business users and their data analyst counterparts. The introduction of task review cycles furthers this goal by allowing business users to triage outstanding tasks and ensure that only pertinent and relevant tasks are receiving attention. A dynamic representation of work that needs to be done helps alleviate unnecessary redundancy of effort, and allows data analysts to avoid working on tasks that no longer add value because of changing external business conditions.

Finally, the addition of smart tasks in Yellowfin 7.2 allows for tasks to be created based on predefined thresholds such as profit margins or inventory levels. Such automation enables businesses to further streamline their workflows by abstracting programmatic tasks and letting them address a broader array of value-adding initiatives.

Data Connectors: Yellowfin has announced a number of predefined connectors that allow users to access data directly from Salesforce, Xero, Google Analytics, Google Sheets, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, and other common data sources. Doing so meets a market-standard need for organizations to be able to integrate data from external sources in order to augment the data available to them from internal data sources. For instance, a marketing analyst may be able to better understand the impact of a marketing campaign by tying together website traffic numbers from Google Analytics, sales activity tracked in Salesforce, and internal metrics. Readers should note that connectors also come with out-of-the-box content in accordance to best practices that Yellowfin has suggested for users. Users connecting to a data source via a connector will have access to prebuilt dashboards and reports specific to high-value uses associated with that data source. The impact is increased accessibility to a broader range of data sources. Yellowfin 7.2 also makes APIs available so that users can build custom connectors to other data sources that they use. Prospective users of Yellowfin should also be aware that the company has committed to publishing new data connectors and making them available through the Yellowfin marketplace.

Forecasting Capabilities: In version 7.2, Yellowfin has introduced functionality for forecasting, calculating averages, and identifying trends. Blue Hill Research notes that while these functions are not designed to create advanced statistical models in the same way a user might leverage SAS, SPSS, or R, Yellowfin does provide an intuitive code-free interface for performing the functions. Yellowfin's new features allow users to visually build out functions through clicking and dragging; this brings a new level of accessibility to performing staple operations for business users.

Why It Matters

Business intelligence decision-makers should take note of the approach and direction of Yellowfin's release as it presents a necessary third way in constructing a much-needed middle ground within enterprise BI. The BI

industry has seen a shift as the pendulum has swung from monolithic centralized deployments to a fragmented market of best-of-breed analyst-centric discovery tools. However, this enthusiasm has been tempered given that data discovery alone fails to address central tenets of security, governance, and collaboration. Yellowfin’s release shows important consideration for the various persona-based needs of different BI stakeholders throughout an organization. In this way, Yellowfin’s announcement carries merit because it represents an extension of the company’s continued leadership in regards to evolving enterprise BI needs. Moreover, the announcement is consistent with a broader trend in enterprise BI. Blue Hill Research observes that a new hybrid paradigm has emerged to address the needs resulting from previous approaches that are either too centralized or too decentralized. Figure 1 details the changing paradigms within the broader BI marketplace.

Figure 1: The Evolution of a New Enterprise Analytics Paradigm

Dimension	Centralized IT Paradigm	Self-Service Paradigm	Hybrid Paradigm: Self-Service at Enterprise Scale
Governance	Locked down and monolithic	Decentralized and inconsistent across user population	Bi-directional governance
Data Modeling	IT-driven models and data structures	Analyst-built models	Support for analyst-built and IT-built models
Data Enrichment	IT-developed and reactive to business needs	One-off introduction of relevant data sources	IT and line-of-business collaboration to fluidly introduce IT-sanctioned data sources
Analysis	Model-based analysis	Freeform and natural language	Guided experience to leverage existing workflows and analysis
User Experience	Requires significant customization	Module-based experience dependent on solution partner relationship	Consolidated user interface across multiple functionalities

Source: Blue Hill Research, March 2016

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

In order for BI initiatives to be successful on an enterprise level, solutions must bring the same thoughtful consideration and enthusiasm for core BI functions such as reporting and building dashboards as they do with self-service discovery capabilities. In this light, Blue Hill’s audience should be aware of the larger macro shifts in

the enterprise BI marketplace, and take inventory of the unique challenges of scale and complexity that their organization has. Ultimately, decision-makers should recognize if pain points in their analytic process have developed as a result of either siloed self-service undertakings amongst analysts, or slow-moving and inflexible knowledge transfers from monolithic BI systems. Such pain points create disconnects in an organization's ability to turn data into digestible insights that can be disseminated without friction to key stakeholders. Such barriers inevitably create lower adoption and utilization rates among prospective BI users. Decision-makers should view Yellowfin 7.2 as a solution that takes into consideration workflow barriers uniquely for different user personas and presents a middle ground for enterprise-wide deployments. Blue Hill Research identifies the approach that Yellowfin 7.2 offers as one which can have a meaningful impact on creating a BI culture where persistent user adoption creates long-term value.

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James Haight is a research analyst at Blue Hill Research, focusing on analytics and emerging enterprise technologies. His primary research includes exploring the business case development and solution assessment for data warehousing, data integration, advanced analytics, and business intelligence applications. He also hosts Blue Hill's Emerging Tech Roundup Podcast, which features interviews with industry leaders and CEOs on the forefront of a variety of emerging technologies. Prior to Blue Hill Research, James worked in Radford Consulting's Executive and Board of Director Compensation practice, specializing in the high tech and life sciences industries. Currently, he serves on the strategic advisory board of the Bentley Microfinance Group, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to community development through funding and consulting entrepreneurs in the Greater Boston area.

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