IBM Planning Analytics with Watson
Plan for anything, be ready for everything

Highlights

- Automates manual planning, budgeting, forecasting, reporting and analysis

- Links operational tactics to financial plans

- Facilitates flexible profitability analysis and what-if scenario modeling

- Embedded predictive and artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities to augment human intelligence

- Lets users create compelling visualizations in a self-service Workspace

- Integrates with the familiar Microsoft Excel interface to speed adoption

- Managed and governed workflows

- Flexible deployment options

Overview

Volatility, uncertainty and risk have been with us for years – and they're not going away any time soon. But most planning teams, whether in Finance, Operations, HR, Sales or elsewhere in the organization, still spend an inordinate amount of time on manual, spreadsheet-based processes – collecting, consolidating and validating data before they can even begin to analyze it.

In response, leading organizations are seeking faster, more flexible solutions to deliver deeper insights into both financial and operational performance. Too often, however, they believe they have to choose between the ease of use and fast deployment of a cloud solution or the powerful analytics capabilities traditionally available only in on-premises solutions. But now they don't have to choose. Now they can have it all with IBM® Planning Analytics with Watson. One solution – multiple deployment options.

Accelerated planning and forecasting cycles, collaboration across the organization and agile planning – all in one Extended Planning & Analysis (xP&A) solution

IBM Planning Analytics with Watson is a fast, flexible and AI-powered Extended Planning and Analysis (xP&A) solution. It can be deployed on-cloud, on-premises, on IBM Cloud Pak® for Data, or as a hybrid option, and it helps organizations large and small drive greater process efficiency and deliver the foresight they need to steer business performance effectively. It has been praised for its ease of use by customers and analysts alike. This solution not only automates manual tasks to accelerate planning and forecasting cycles, but goes beyond automation to help you uncover new insights directly from your data.

IBM Planning Analytics with Watson breaks down the traditional silos between business unit planning. It unifies data into a central repository and integrates data from diverse data sources such as ERPs, CRMs, and HRMs, allowing all users to access one, governed database that acts as the single source of truth. It enables a cross-departmental framework that acts to streamline planning and create transparency, collaboration (high participation planning) and alignment across the organization. And it does more than just plan –it analyzes data, reveals trends, and allows real-time iteration for continuous planning. In IBM Planning Analytics with Watson, all of your plans, budgets and forecasts are created and stored in the same application, meaning, all users are working with the same data. Changes to one plan will automatically update and flow to other plans and centralized business rules can be applied to all plans, if required.

Fueled by AI, IBM Planning Analytics with Watson enables users to forecast outcomes based on evolving trends or predictive insights and perform in-depth, what-if scenario analysis to test alternative assumptions. It lets users create more timely, reliable, agile plans that can pivot in real time to address changing market demands. IBM Planning Analytics with Watson accelerates decision making and improves decision quality.

With a customizable planning and analytics Workspace, IBM Planning Analytics with Watson helps you synthesize information and infer trends. It facilitates best practices such as driver-based planning and rolling forecasts, and allows individuals, groups and enterprise leaders to break free of the constraints of previous generations of planning tools.

Interactive planning and analytics Workspace

IBM Planning Analytics with Watson features a customizable user interface that can be deployed to Finance, operational and departmental users across the organization. It provides a single, consistent view of KPIs and enables users to evaluate plans, identify performance gaps and diagnose the root causes of problems. Users can test business assumptions and model scenarios, then immediately see the impact of alternative courses of action on a range of business drivers.

Intelligent queries allow quick analysis and report creation based on common business terms. Powerful multidimensional expression-based (MDX) queries allow data analysis for any combination of hierarchies and dimensions. Power users can build sophisticated queries, such as those involving asymmetrical nested reports. But users don't need to be experts in order to deploy multidimensional analyses and reports quickly, to whoever needs them.

Guided planning

IBM Planning Analytics with Watson provides managed and governed workflows to ensure a smooth and streamlined planning process. Users can create customized applications to manage, facilitate, and increase participation in the planning, budgeting, forecasting and reporting processes. Budget and Planning Managers can create plans with multiple stages - and multiple steps within each stage. Once created, they can then invite participants, outline submission requirements, assign due dates and monitor the progress of plan activities. IBM Planning Analytics with Watson creates a guided planning experience that is transparent and easy to navigate and complete.
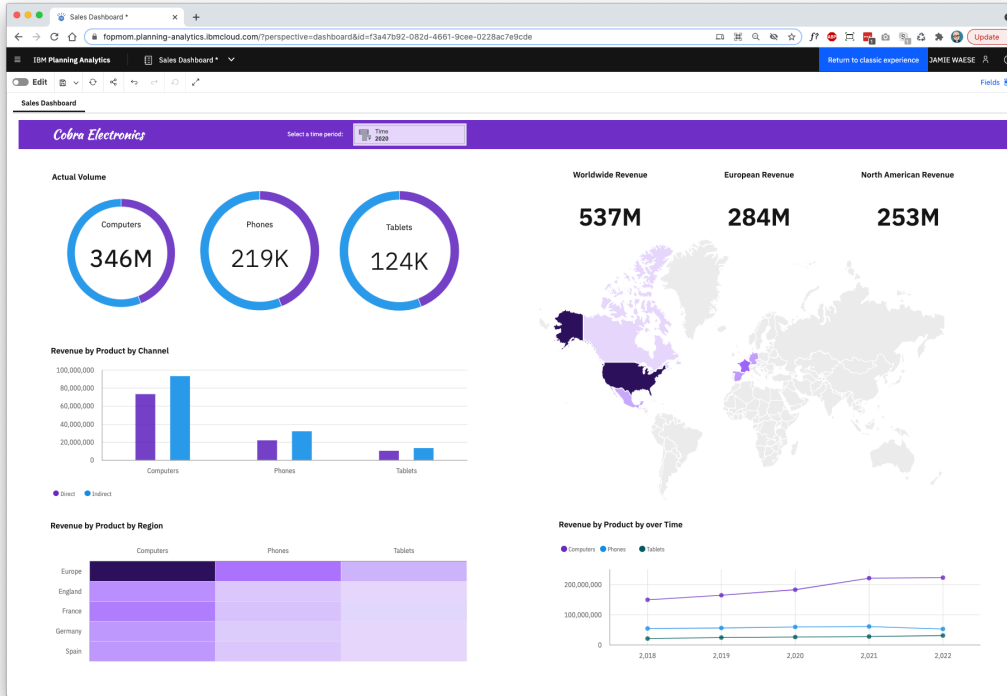
Figure 1:

IBM Planning Analytics with Watson provides an interactive, customizable Workspace.

Multidimensional analysis

Built on the powerful in-memory IBM TM1® calculation engine, IBM Planning Analytics with Watson enables multidimensional analysis of large, historical and future-oriented data sets. It integrates multiple data sources and enables comparative analysis of information from all relevant systems. Users can perform complex dimensional calculations and analysis of, for example, product and customer profitability, supply chain options, sales mix, and price/volume variance.

Complex hierarchies and dimensions can be handled easily to gain new insights into business performance – or business problems. The solution's ability to support enterprise-scale data volumes (thanks to its ability to manage data sparsity in multidimensional planning cubes) reduces the need to move or replicate data, and helps analysts deliver a "single version of the truth" to management.

The "hierarchies" capability in IBM Planning Analytics with Watson provides both technical advantages and business-user benefits. With hierarchies, you're not limited to the traditional definition of cubes. You can perform in depth, granular analysis using "attributes" to describe the characteristics of products, customers, regions, and more. Attribute data can be leveraged in the form of "virtual dimensions" using data that existed at the time the cube was created or introduced later on.

Distributed administration enables all geographies and departments to participate in a well-managed, collaborative process. The result is a more reliable, forward-looking view of business structures such as product families and sales territories. It also helps define targets for use in planning and forecasting as well as in profit and growth initiatives.

Visualizations, scorecards and dashboards

The IBM Planning Analytics Workspace features a highly visual, freeform design that offers a wide variety of graphics, including charts, maps, images and shapes, plus text and video. These automated visualizations help you create vivid, impactful reports to share insights with decision makers. Quick searching and Snap Commands give the interface a natural-language-like feel.

You can develop dashboards and scorecards linked to plans and budgets and then share them across the enterprise. Scorecards and dashboards help business users measure and monitor performance in the context of their specific roles and functions, which drives strategy management and execution by helping align initiatives, resources and actions with corporate objectives.

Advanced self-service modeling

Advanced sandboxing and modeling capabilities in IBM Planning Analytics with Watson enable everyday finance and business analysts to create and maintain sophisticated plans and forecasts with little to no IT support. Built on the mature, multidimensional technology of IBM TM1, IBM Planning Analytics with Watson enables analysis and calculations for even the most demanding profitability and scenario models.

Analysts can build models that integrate virtually any business driver into plans, budgets and forecasts. The models can reflect company structures, business rules and relationships, and then be revised as those structures, rules and relationships change. Users can define operational drivers and link them to financial and operational outcomes throughout the planning process to see how a change in one variable ripples through the organization. This improves visibility into leading performance indicators and shows the likely impact of different operational drivers on plans and forecasts, thus increasing the lead time available to assess alternatives.

IBM Planning Analytics with Watson also helps shorten planning cycles and reduce the errors common to manual, spreadsheet-based processes. The result is that analysts can spend more time on value-added analysis, and less time verifying data and maintaining spreadsheets.
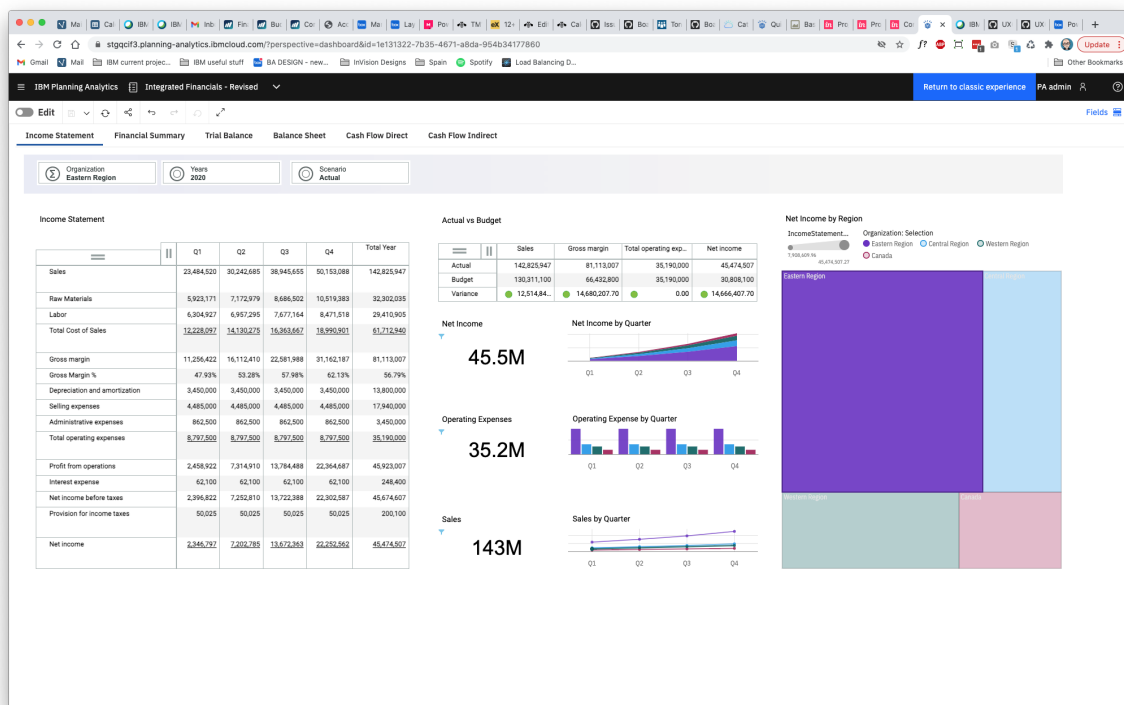

Figure 2:

Scorecards and dashboards offer fast, intuitive insight into the organization's progress toward its objectives.

IBM Planning Analytics for Excel

Spreadsheets are among the most popular software tools ever invented. But they do have their limitations. That's why IBM Planning Analytics with Watson enables users to continue working in the Microsoft Excel interface where needed, rather than replace their spreadsheets.

The IBM Planning Analytics for Excel interface retains full Excel functionality and formatting, including capabilities such as graphing and built-in functions. Finance and business professionals can work in the familiar Excel interface while enjoying all the capabilities of a modern planning and analytics solution.

Predictive Forecasting

IBM Planning Analytics with Watson puts the power of algorithmic forecasting in the hands of every day users — even those without data science skills — for more accurate, consistent, and timely forecasts.

Predictive forecasting augments human intelligence by using statistical and predictive analytics to identify and assess trends and seasonality patterns in historic values, greatly improving forecast accuracy. It also reduces the time required to produce an accurate forecast, allowing users to focus on process optimization, managing exceptions and making adjustments. IBM Planning Analytics with Watson embeds statistical algorithms directly into the solution so users don't have to export data to an external solution. The algorithms assess the historical values and applies the algorithm that yields the best accuracy and fewest errors, to predict a future value. Once a prediction has been generated, the statistical details page provides easy-to-understand facts about how it was generated - providing users with more granular information as well as increased explainability and accountability in their forecasts.
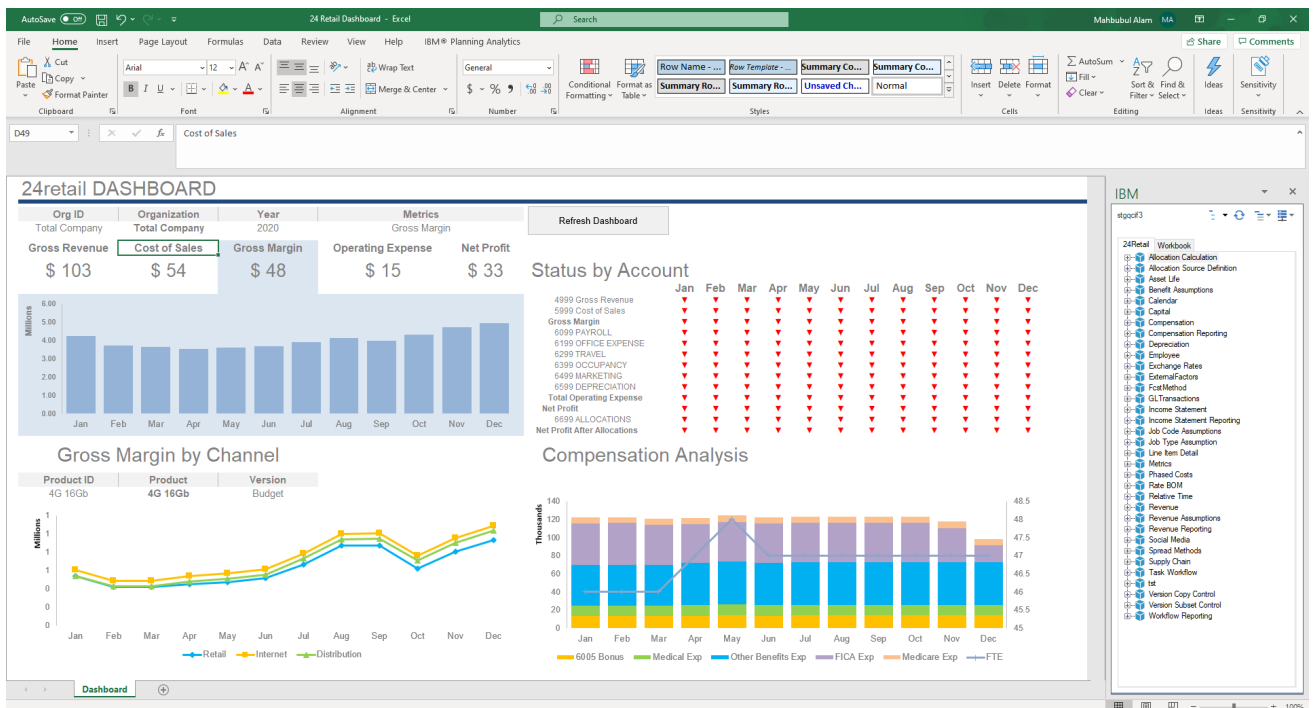

Figure 3:

IBM Planning Analytics with Watson allows users to retain the familiar Excel interface.

IBM Planning Analytics with Watson benefits

- Enables finance, operational and departmental business users to create timely, reliable, agile plans, budgets and forecasts in a customizable analytics Workspace.

- Automated workflow for process visibility and streamlined planning participation

- Allows users to analyze data from multidimensional planning models in the familiar Microsoft Excel interface.

- Supports fast, flexible, what-if scenario modeling.

- Manages enterprise-scale data volumes in multidimensional planning cubes.

- Leverages internal and external data, including data from enterprise resource planning (ERP) and customer relationship management (CRM) systems.

- Performs complex cost allocations and profitability analysis, letting users drill down for a granular view of profitability.by product, customer, region, sales channel and more.

- Facilitates best practices such as driver-based planning and rolling forecasts.

- Creates compelling visualizations automatically, with a wide variety of charts, tables, maps, images and shapes – plus text and video – to choose from.

- Incorporates scorecards and dashboards to monitor key performance indicators (KPIs).

- Enhances forecast accuracy with embedded predictive forecasting capabilities

- Provides a unified Web, Excel, and mobile experience for all user roles.

- Supports natural language searching and multidimensional expressions-based (MDX) queries for fast, powerful analysis.

- Provides role-based security to support multiple users and user types and ensure that users see only what they need to.

- Facilitates deployment on cloud, on premises, on IBM Cloud Pak for Data or hybrid options.

For further information please visit:

https://www.ibm.com/products/planning-analytics

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To request a call or to ask a question, go to:
www.ibm.com/contact/us/en/

An IBM representative will respond to your inquiry within two business days.

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1. NTT 2020 Global Customer Experience Benchmarking Report, https://www.dimensiondata.com/en-gb/expertise/intelligent-customerexperience/customer-experience-benchmark-report-2020

2. IBM Institute for Business Value, "The value of virtual agent technology", https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/report/virtual-agent-technology

3. MRS BPO, ibm.com/case-studies/mrsbpo-voice-gateway

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