BI Platforms User Survey, 2011: Customers Rate Their BI Platform Vendors

Gartner RAS Core Research Note G00211769, Rita L. Sallam, 4 April 2011, RA1 07132011

Gartner recently surveyed business intelligence (BI) leaders to learn their experiences with BI platforms from 25 vendors. The results will provide insights for those selecting BI vendors and for customers wanting to benchmark suppliers.

Key Findings

- Enterprises with a traditional BI platform standard (see Appendix 1) also employ complementary products for advanced visualization, with interactive user interfaces and in-memory architectures. An increasing number of organizations, led by business users, are successfully deploying data discovery tools as the enterprise standard and alternative to traditional BI platforms, particularly when managed reporting is not a critical requirement.

- Our analysis based on the survey results leads us to believe that while the IT organization often focuses on software stacks, business units are either buying BI platforms on their own or push IT for easier-to-use alternatives, especially when the standard BI platform does not meet users' needs.

- Data discovery tool vendors and independent vendors provide a better overall customer experience and overall BI platform success than megavendors. Microsoft is the sole megavendor exception, scoring above average in most categories measured by the survey.

- As you would expect, customers with a positive overall BI platform experience viewed their vendor's future positively. Conversely, customers with a negative BI platform experience tended to be planning or considering discontinuing the platform's use. For the first time, this relationship now also holds true for megavendors. In the previous two years, megavendor customers buying into vendor road maps and vision viewed the megavendor's future more positively than their product and vendor experience.

Recommendations

- Use these survey results to compare your vendor experiences with those of your peers and when formulating your vendor negotiation strategies and engagement plans.

- Don't automatically assume that because you have other parts of the stack that are buying a BI platform from your megavendor it is the best or only choice. Also, evaluate independent BI suppliers and pick the vendor that best suits your needs for functionality, integration and BI platform ownership cost.

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- Even if you establish an enterprise BI standard, plan for an information management infrastructure and governance policies and processes that can support a portfolio of tools as business requirements evolve.

ANALYSIS

Gartner's survey of BI leaders found wide variations in their satisfaction with BI platform vendors (see Notes 1 and 2). Some megavendors scored better than average, some less. Vendors of data discovery tools and large independent vendors tended to do best in the survey, though a few small vendors also excelled. Enterprises that standardize on a BI platform supplement it with technology from small vendors just as often as small vendors are used by enterprises that don't standardize on a BI platform. Clients should not automatically buy their BI platform from a megavendor. Rather, they should consider their own particular needs and how well vendors satisfy their customers in key areas of buying and implementing a BI platform. Often a portfolio of tools is the best option to fully meet user and business requirements.

Since at least 2005, enterprises have tried to standardize their BI platform and applications to reduce the number of vendors they must manage, save money and improve the sharing of information. In a recent survey of 1,225 BI leaders from enterprises around the world, we found that 56% of enterprises now standardize, generally on the BI offerings of the megavendors IBM, Microsoft, Oracle and SAP, and of the large independent vendors, which have the most experience with large enterprise deployments. However, the market momentum has skewed over the past year in favor of data discovery tool vendors that are meeting business user requirements for fast, easy-to-use, interactive analysis unmet with existing BI platform standards. Moreover, enterprises that standardize continue to buy technologies from other vendors as business users demand ease of use and deployment from their BI tools. As a result, IT organizations are increasingly accepting and must manage a portfolio of tools.

BI leaders' satisfaction varies between megavendors, and between megavendors and independent vendors of different types (data discovery tools, traditional large independents, traditional small independents, open source, and SaaS) (see Appendix 1). BI leaders that need to deploy new BI technology, upgrade existing systems or select an enterprise should consider the experiences of their peers before making any purchase decisions.

Note 1. Survey Details

In November 2010, as part of its research for the Magic Quadrant on BI platforms, Gartner conducted an English-language Web survey of 1,225 BI professionals, of which 978 represented vendor references and 247 (20%) were non-references from Gartner's BI Summits and client inquiries. Gartner believes the inclusion of non-reference customers in the survey more closely mirrors the views of the general population using these products. The survey lasted about 15 minutes and covered respondents' use of their BI platform vendor. There was an average of 45 responses per vendor. Megavendors have the largest customer bases, so they also had the largest percentage of non-references. Pure-play vendors, which have fewer customers, had a lower percentage of non-references. Non-reference customers tended to provide lower scores than reference customers, but the non-references did not affect the relative ranking of vendors in the survey. This report includes only vendors with 10 or more responses. Respondents' companies had 4,758 employees on average and came from these regions:

- North America (60% of respondents).
- Western Europe (25% of respondents).
- Rest of the world (12% of respondents).

Note 2. Note on the Graphics

The graphics in this report include only vendors with at least 10 survey responses. They represent customers' perceptions, not Gartner's opinion. Thus, the graphics may feature vendors that, in Gartner's opinion, do not deliver the functions described.

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Satisfaction with Overall Experience

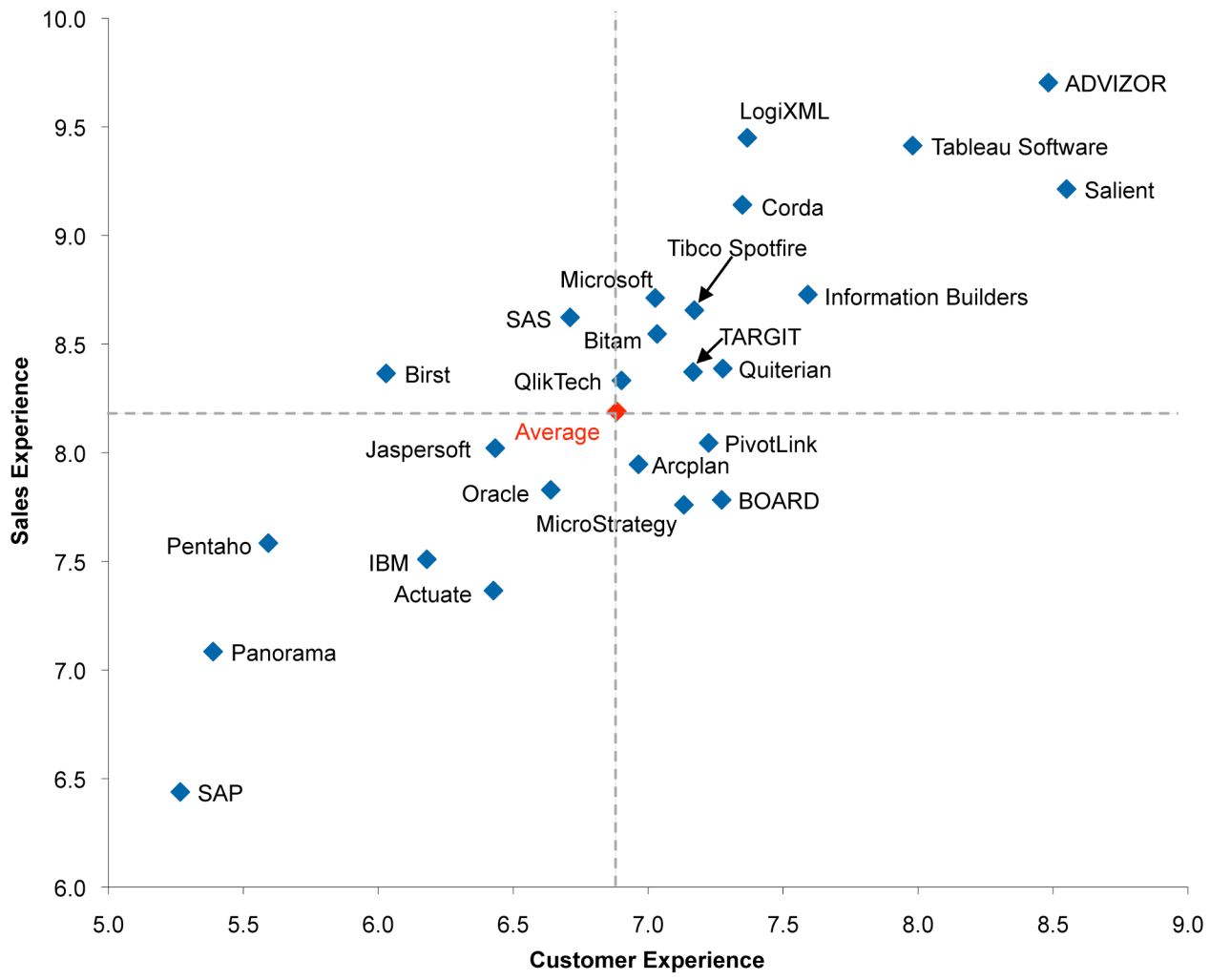
Overview of Customer Experiences With BI Vendors: Gartner gathered information on three aspects of the customer experience: software quality, support, and sales experience.

Respondents sent a mixed message about their satisfaction with their BI platform vendors (see Figure 1 and Note 3). Overall, customers appear to be happier with their vendor's sales experience than support and product quality. The vendor average for sales process was over 8 out of 10, while vendors' scores for support and software quality were lower, with an average rating of less than 7 out of 10. Moreover, there does appear to be a direct correlation between sales and experience and overall customer experience.

Note 3. Customer Experience Score Calculation

We computed the combined customer support and product quality scores to arrive at a Customer Experience score as follows: Vendor support is scored by customers on a scale of one to seven (1 to 2 = poor; 3 to 5 = average; 6 to 7 = outstanding). Product Quality is scored on a scale of one to seven (1 to 2 = poor; 3 to 5 = average; 6 to 7 = outstanding). We converted these scores into a percentage (the vendor's score divided by 7). We averaged this percentage and the percentage of respondents reporting no software problems, and normalized the result to a scale of 10 to derive the composite score.

Figure 1. Overall Customer Experience



N=1,235. Chart represents customer perception and not Gartner's opinion.

Source: Gartner (March 2011)

Megavendors, with the exception of Microsoft, do not fare well on both measures suggesting that they need to do a much better job at addressing core customer activities that drive overall satisfaction. Notably, all three open source vendors (Actuate, Pentaho, and Jaspersoft) also scored below the survey mean on both measures, although licensing and support are key to their value proposition and business model. At the same time, data discovery vendors (including QlikTech, Tableau, Tibco Spotfire and Advizor) and a number of small independent vendors (Corda, Salient, Bitam, LogiXML, Targit, Quiterian) scored above the survey mean on both metrics. It is no surprise that these vendors also have among the strongest market momentum. This year, results are mixed for the large independent vendors. Only Information Builders scored above the survey average for both customer experience measures while SAS earned above average marks for sales experience and MicroStrategy scored above the mean for support and product quality.

Recommendation: Include the product quality, quality of technical support services, and quality of the sales relationship in your vendor evaluations, and take them into account when evaluating vendors and negotiating maintenance terms.

Satisfaction With Vendors Versus Improvement in Future Outlook: In general, judgments about the vendor's future correspond to respondents' satisfaction with their vendor. The survey indicates that BI leaders remain optimistic about the future of the vendors that they use as a standard, including the large independent vendors (MicroStrategy, Information Builders, and SAS), and even of some small independent vendors such as Targit, LogiXML and Salient. This suggests that independent vendors continue to show resilience in the market despite ongoing stack-centric buying, which favors the megavendors.

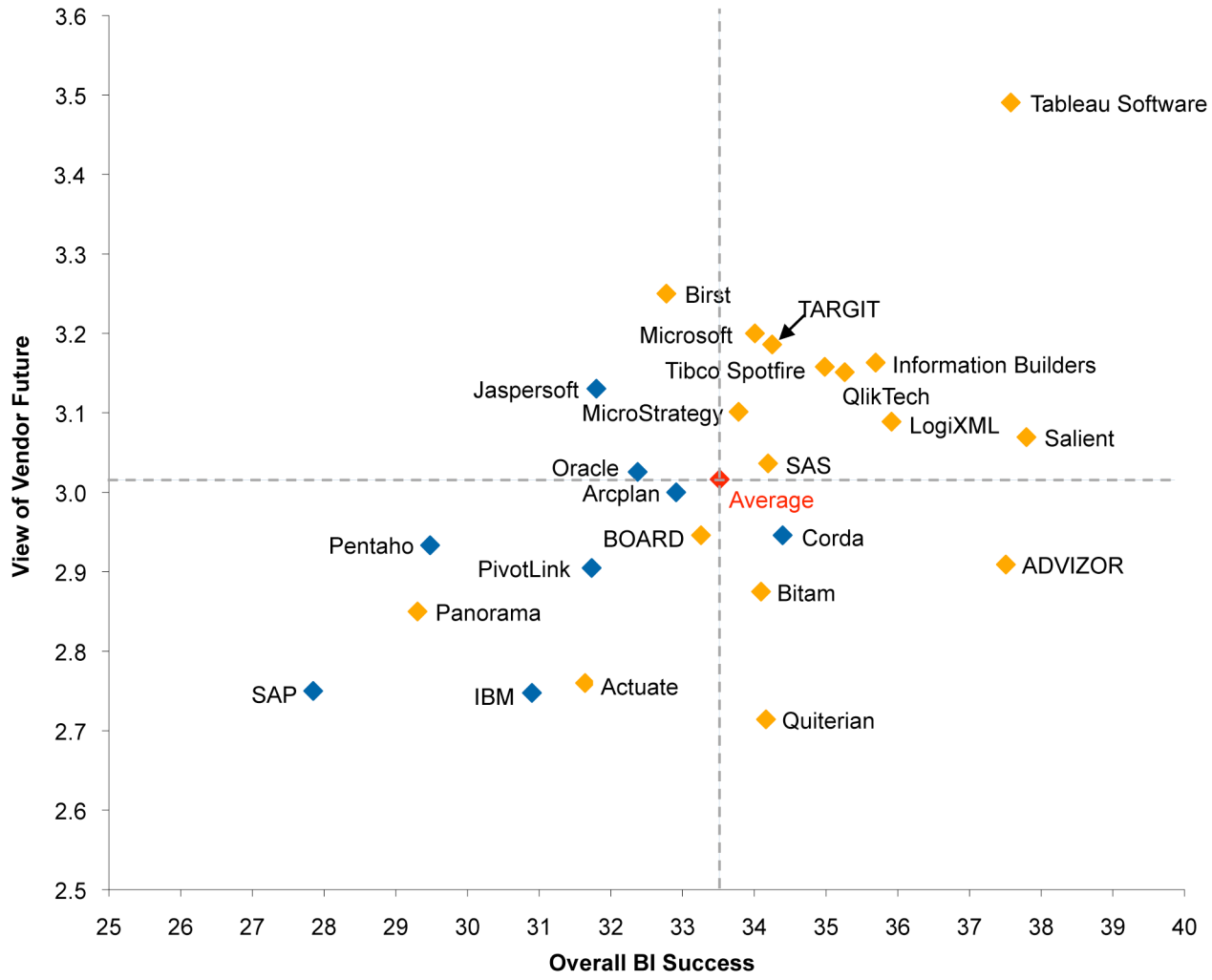
Figure 2 shows respondents' overall experience with their vendor against their assessment of whether their vendor's future prospects have improved since 2009. The horizontal axis (overall BI platform success score) represents composite (aggregate) ratings for product capabilities, support, sales experience, product quality and performance, with equal weightings for each — the higher the composite score, the more positive the overall experience with the vendor. The vertical axis records responses to our question about whether respondents were more concerned about the vendor in 2010, more positive, or unchanged in their view (1 = more concerned about the vendor's future; 4 = more positive about the vendor's future). The color of each vendor's dot represents their average achievement of business benefits score. Orange dots represent an above average business benefits score while a blue color dot means the vendors score below the survey average for business benefits achieved.

Unlike in previous years where customers tended to buy into the megavendor vision and view them more positively than their experience with the vendor, this year the results are mixed. IBM and SAP have below average scores for both measures, Oracle customers have a slightly more positive view of the vendor's future than its overall success score, while Microsoft customers continue to have a positive overall experience and have an above the survey average view of its future score. Customers of the data discovery tools tend to have the highest overall success scores and the most positive views of their vendor's future. It is notable that all the vendors with above average overall success and view of the future scores also earned above average business benefits ratings.

Just as a customer's positive view of their vendor's future is correlated to strong overall BI success, the likelihood a customer is planning or considering discontinuing use of their BI platform in the next five years is correlated to below average overall success with the platform. Figure 3 plots Overall BI Success score against the percentage of vendor's customer responses that reported they are either planning or considering discontinuing use of that vendor. An orange color dot represents above average business benefits scores; a blue dot represents below the survey average for business benefits. Vendors with an above average percentage of customers planning or considering discontinuing use, also tend to have below average overall BI success scores and below average view of the future scores. It is notable that out of the megavendors, IBM has the highest plan or considering discontinued use over the next 5 years score. This could be due to its lack of enterprise applications, which tends to drive stack-centric purchases, particularly as Oracle and SAP continue to enhance optimizations between their BI platforms and their enterprise applications. In many organizations, those optimizations trump all other considerations and buying criteria.

Gartner created an aggregate measure, Market Understanding (see Note 4), to identify which vendors are best addressing high value customer requirements. It is a combined measure consisting of a vendor's Ease of Use score, Breadth of Use score, and View of Success score (see Note 5). Figure 4 plots Market Understanding against Overall BI Platform Success. An orange color dot means the vendor also earned an above average business benefits score. According to the survey, vendors with above average market understanding scores also tend to have Overall BI Success scores and Business Benefits scores that are also above the survey average. Data discovery tool vendors Tableau, Tibco Spotfire and QlikTech score among the highest on the three measures.

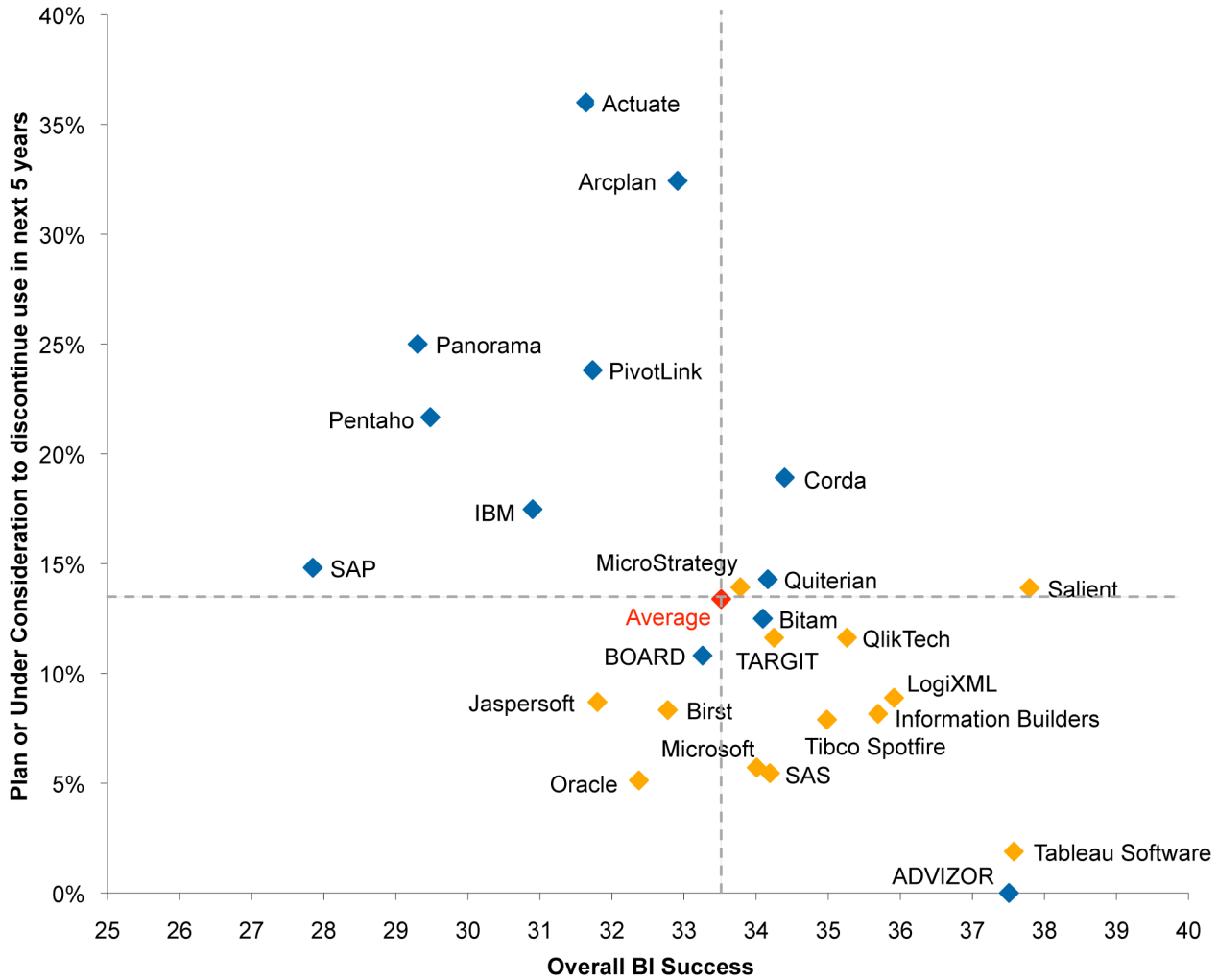
Figure 2. Satisfaction With Vendors, Change in Future Outlook and Average Business Benefits



Orange dots represent an above average business benefits score while a blue color dot means the vendors score below the survey average for business benefits achieved. Chart represents customer perception and not Gartner's opinion.
BI = business intelligence
N=1,235

Source: Gartner (March 2011)

Figure 3. Plan or Considering Discontinuing in Next 5 Years, Overall BI Success Score, and View of the Future



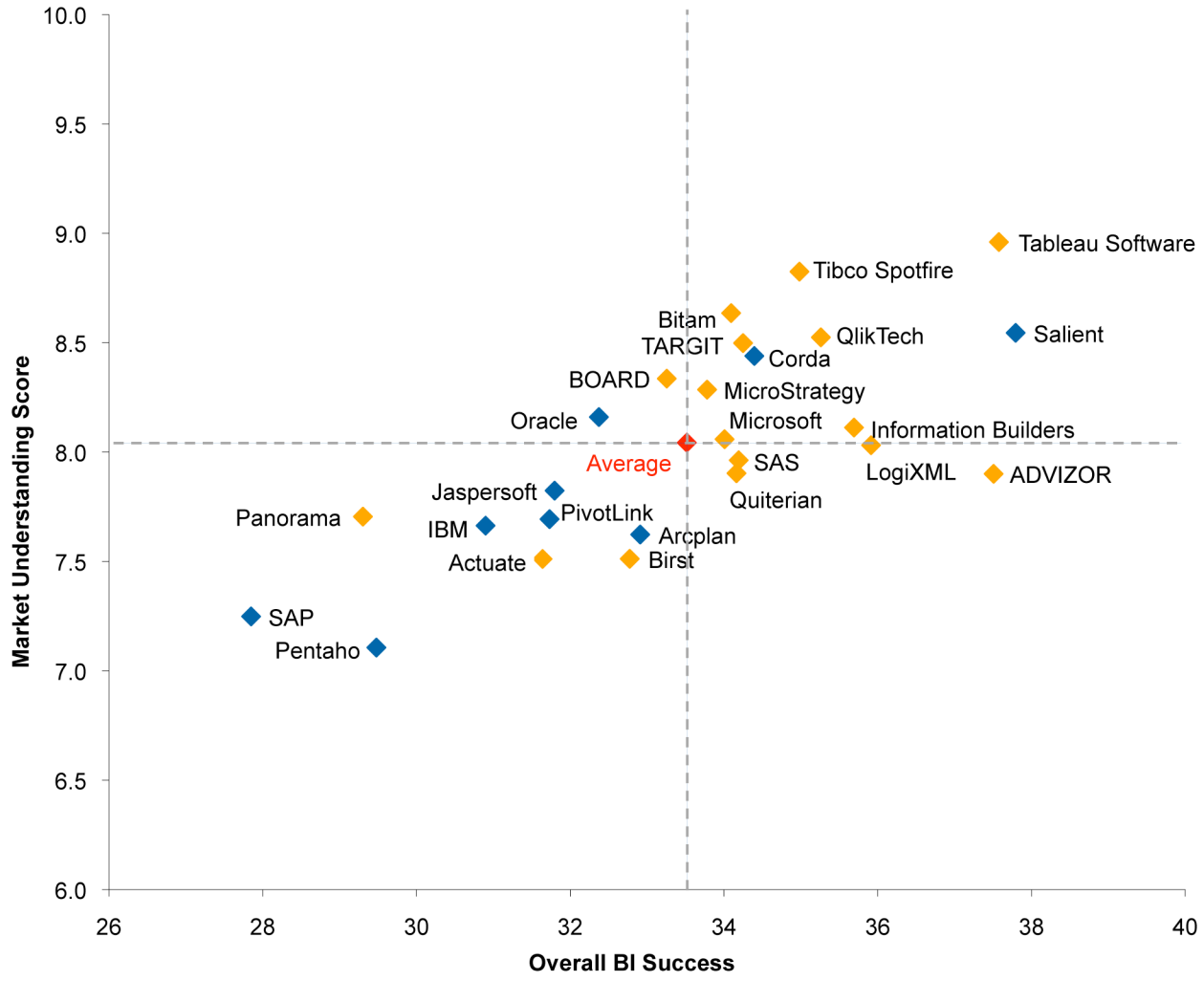
An orange color dot represents above average View of the Future; a blue dot represents below the survey average for View of the Future.
Chart represents customer perception and not Gartner's opinion.
Note: The bottom right hand quadrant with an orange dot is best.
BI = business intelligence
N=1,235
Source: Gartner (March 2011)

Note 4. Market Understanding Computation

The Market Understanding score is computed as average of the following scores for each vendor:

1. View of vendor success in organization compared to 12 months ago, mean, 1 = less successful, 2 = same, 3 = more, normalized for 10. More successful is defined in the survey as "BI platform being used more widely or with greater sophistication." Less successful is defined in the survey as "BI being used by fewer users, or being replaced by other tools."
2. Composite (aggregate) Ease of Use score, normalized for 10.
3. Breadth of Use (Sum of User activities — Viewing Static Reports, Using Parameterized Reports, Doing Simple Ad hoc Analysis, Doing Interactive exploration and analysis of data, Doing moderately complex to complex ad hoc analysis and discovery, Monitoring performance via a formal scorecard, Using predictive analytics and/or data mining models), normalized for 10.

Figure 4. Market Understanding vs. Overall BI Platform Success Score and Business Benefits Score



An orange color dot represents above average business benefits scores; a blue dot represents below the survey average for business benefits.
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BI = business intelligence
N=1,235

Source: Gartner (March 2011)

BI Standardization: Like last year, the majority of organizations (56%) in this year's survey have an enterprise BI standard. Figure 5 shows the percentage of customers that have chosen their vendor as the enterprise standard. The four megavendors feature among the vendors used by enterprises standardizing their BI, but many large independent vendors, such as MicroStrategy and Information Builders, also attract customers that are standardizing.

Recommendation: Don't automatically buy a BI platform from your major software supplier. Also evaluate independent BI suppliers, and pick the vendor that best suits your needs for functions, integration and cost. In the end, even when an organization chooses an enterprise BI standard, most organizations must manage a portfolio of tools to meet business requirements.

Small vendors provide the BI platform standard for some enterprises, but these enterprises likewise tend to be small. Figure 6 shows that most customers of Board, Salient, Bitam, and Targit have made them an enterprise standard, but these customers are less than half the size of the average company in the survey. Enterprises deploy many of the data discovery vendors, including QlikTech, Tableau and Tibco, and small independent alongside an enterprise standard to fill needs not met by the standard vendors.

Figure 5. Percentage of Vendor Customers That Consider Its BI Platform Their Enterprise BI Standard

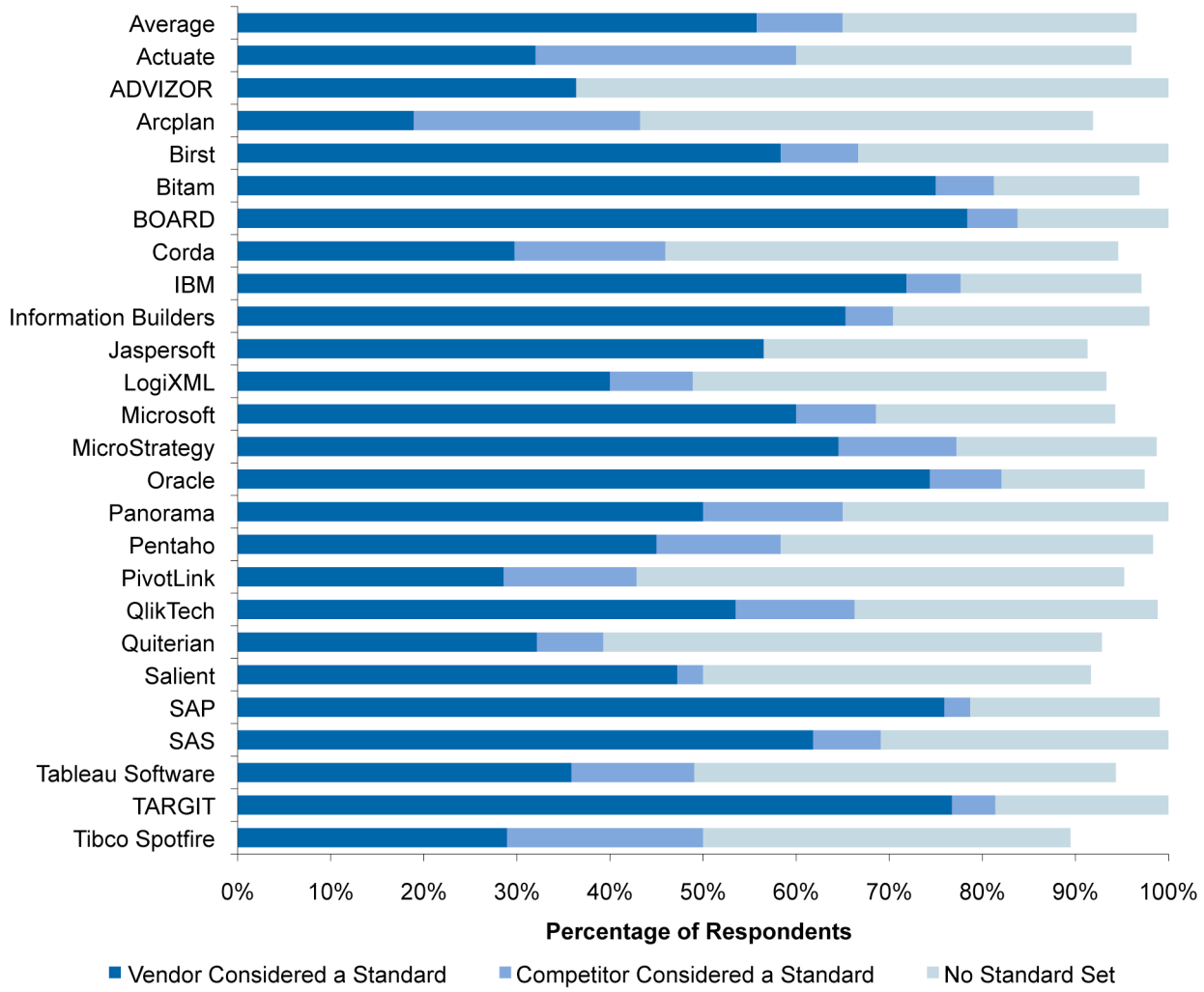
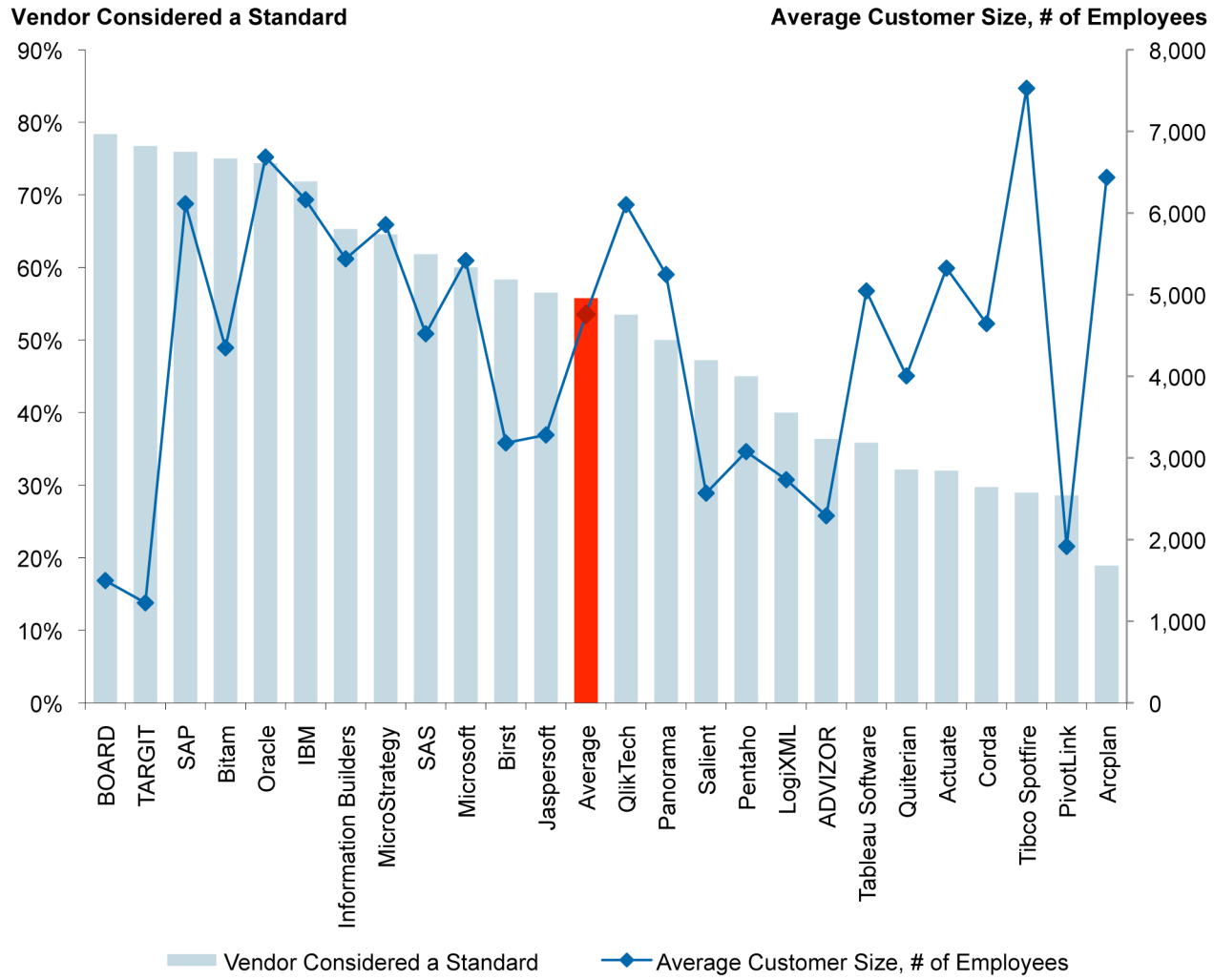


Chart represents customer perception and not Gartner's opinion.
For those vendors with responses adding up to less than 100%, the unidentified percentage represents an "I don't know response."
BI = business intelligence
N=1,235

Source: Gartner (March 2011)

Figure 6. BI Standardization vs. Customer Size



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N=1,235

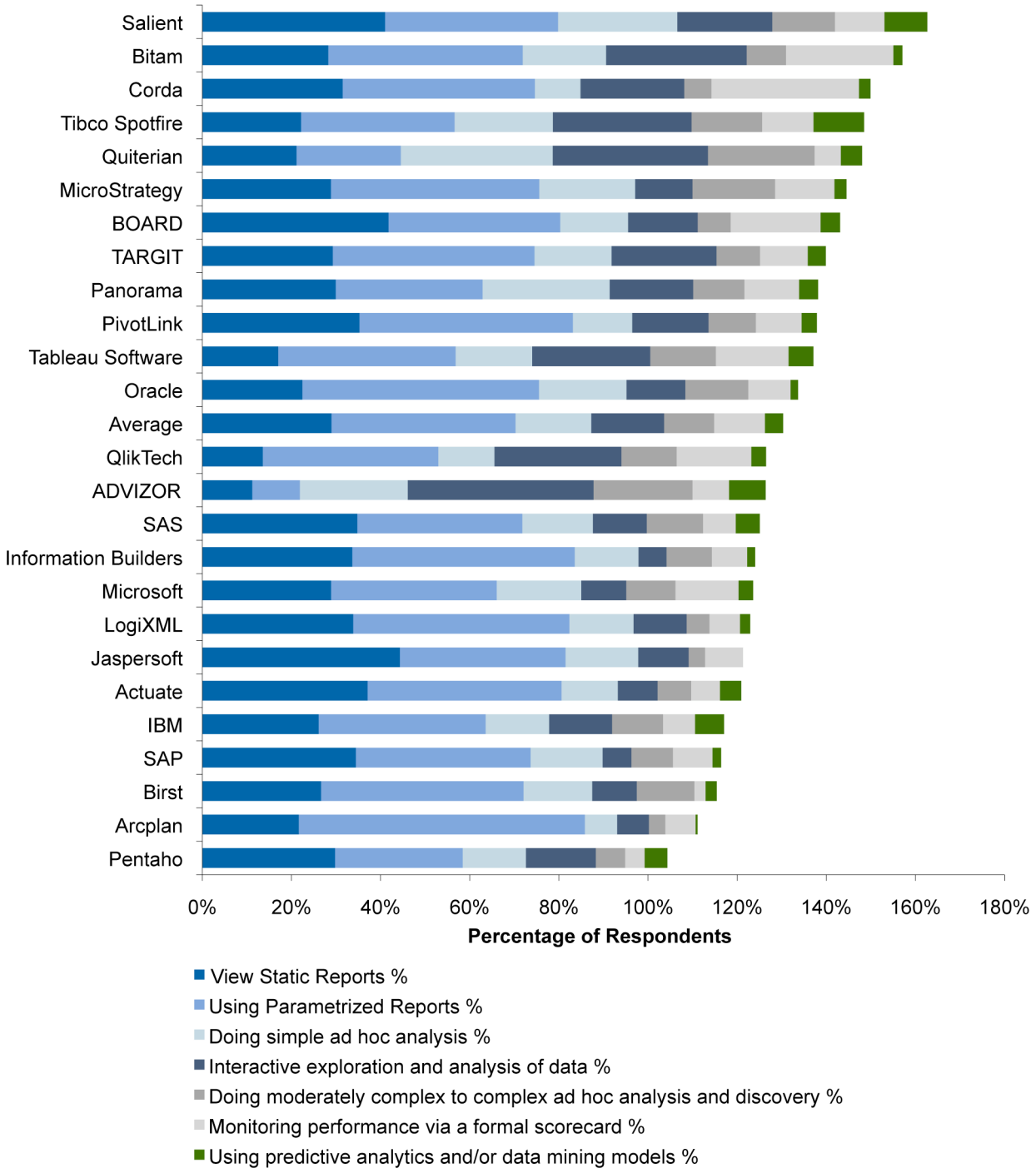
Source: Gartner (March 2011)

Customers' Satisfaction With Specific Aspects of Vendors' Performance

Decisions about buying, upgrading, standardizing or supplementing may hinge on the vendor's performance in specific areas, depending on the nature of an enterprise's project. The survey asked BI leaders to rate their vendors in a number of areas.

BI Platform Usage: IT organizations struggle to get workers to use the BI systems they have implemented. The survey found significant differences between BI vendors in how much their products are used for differing BI activities (see Figure 7). The survey asked about reporting, ad hoc analysis, dashboards, scorecards and predictive analytics. The bars in Figure 7 show the percentage of customers using each function and the total of all those percentages for each vendor (which therefore exceeds 100%). Small independent vendors, Salient and Bitam customers reported using these platforms most broadly, while Pentaho users reported the narrowest usage. Customers used data discovery tools Advizor, Tableau, Tibco Spotfire and QlikTech in addition to small independent vendors, Quiterian and Bitam the most for exploratory, ad hoc analysis — a use case of growing importance. Like last year, megavendors SAP and IBM were used on average more narrowly than most other BI platforms.

Figure 7. Number of Customers Using Vendors for BI Activities

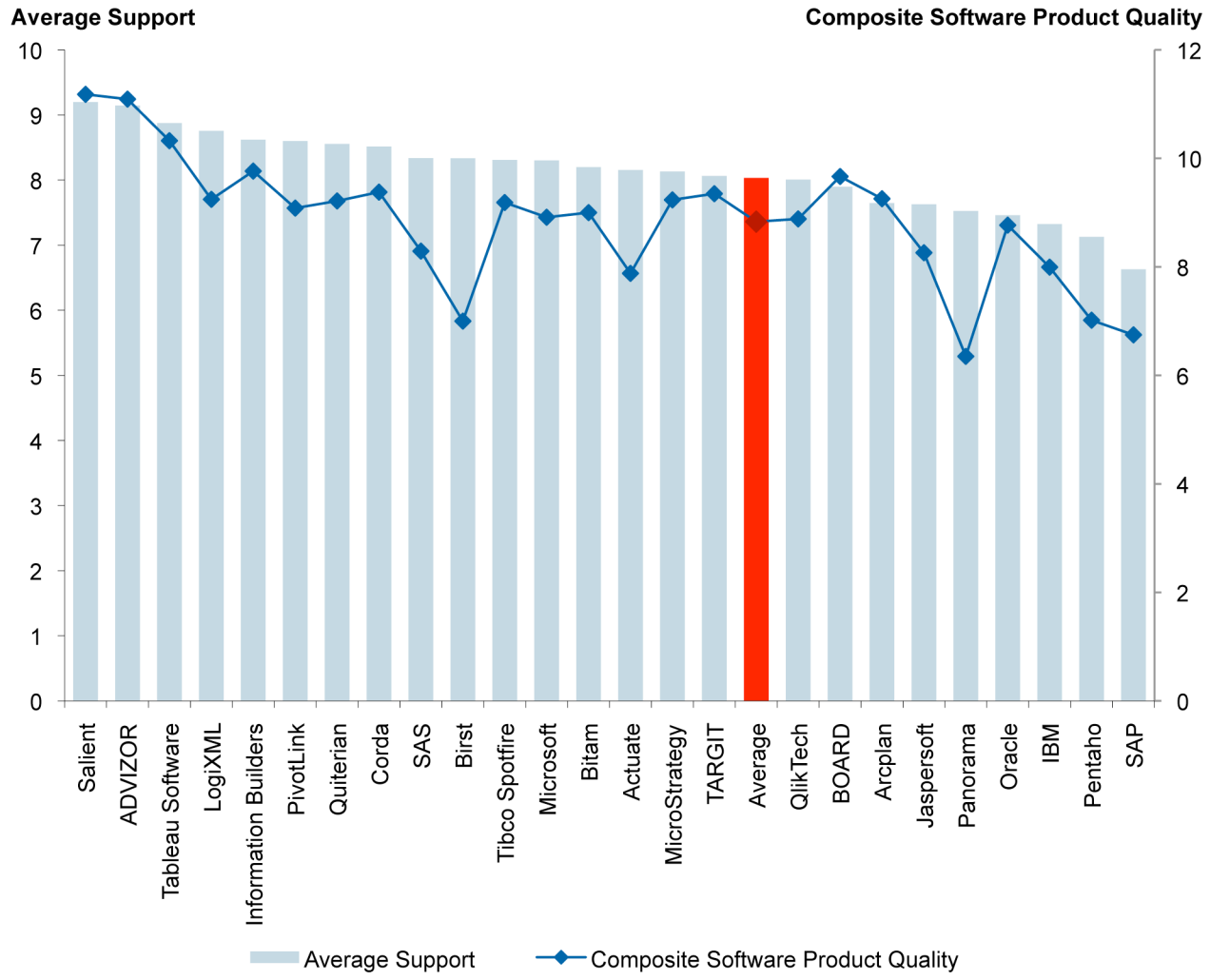


The bar totals are greater than 100% because respondents could choose percentage of use across activities and use is not mutually exclusive. For example, in theory, 100% of users could view static reports and also use parameterized reports. Chart represents customer perception and not Gartner's opinion.
BI = business intelligence
N=1,235

Source: Gartner (March 2011)

Support and Software Quality: Microsoft is the only megavendor to earn above average scores for both Support and Product Quality. Therefore, customers of independent vendors report better customer support and higher quality software on average than customers of the megavendors (see Figure 8). MicroStrategy and Information Builders scored well on both measures, likely a result of well-integrated platforms that the vendors developed organically and strong support organizations that have not been disrupted by acquisitions. Jaspersoft and Pentaho, open-source vendors that generate their core revenue from support, scored below the survey average for both support and product quality. This is a change from last year for Jaspersoft when it earned above average support scores.

Figure 8. Rating of BI Vendors on Support and Software Quality



Customer support was scored on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 to 2 = poor, 3 to 5 = average, 6 to 7 = outstanding). This score was normalized to a scale of 1 to 10.
Chart represents customer perception and not Gartner's opinion.
BI = business intelligence
N=1,235

Source: Gartner (March 2011)

Appendix 1

How Vendors are Categorized

Table 1. Vendor Categories

Vendor Category	Vendors/Products
Megavendors	IBM, Microsoft, Oracle, SAP
Large Independent Vendors	Information Builders, MicroStrategy, SAS
Data Discover Vendors	Advizor, QlikTech, Tableau, Tibco Spotfire
Open Source	Actuate BIRT, Jaspersoft, Pentaho
SaaS	Birst, PivotLink
Small Independent Vendors	Bitam, Corda, Salient, Panorama, Quiterian, arcplan, Targit, LogiXML, Board, Actuate e.reports
Source: Gartner (March 2011)	

We also refer to traditional versus data discovery platforms in this report. The table below shows a high-level distinction between the two types.

Table 2. Traditional vs. Data Discovery Platforms

Market Segment	Traditional Enterprise BI Platforms	Data Discovery Platforms
Key Buyers	IT	Business
Main Sellers	Megavendors, large independents	Small, fast growing independents
Approach	Top down	Bottom up
	IT modeled (semantic layer)	Business user-mapped (mashup)
	Query existing repositories	Move data into dedicated repository
User Interface	Report/KPI dashboard/GRID	Visualization
Use Case	Monitoring	Analysis
Deployment	Consultants	Users
BI = business intelligence; KPI = key performance indicator Source: Gartner (March 2011)		