



BBBT Podcast Transcript



About the BBBT

The Boulder Business Intelligence Brain Trust, or BBBT, was founded in 2006 by Claudia Imhoff. Its mission is to leverage business intelligence for industry vendors, for its members, who are independent analysts and experts, and for its subscribers, who are practitioners. To accomplish this mission, the BBBT provides a variety of services, centered around vendor presentations.

For more, see: www.bbbt.us.

Vendor:	Platfora
Date recorded:	March 7, 2014
Host:	Claudia Imhoff , President, BBBT
Guest(s):	Peter Schlampp , Vice President of Marketing Lara Shackelford , Vice President of Products
Run time:	00:18:09
Audio link:	Podcast
Transcript:	[See next page]



Claudia Imhoff: Hello, and welcome to this edition of the Boulder BI Brain Trust, or the BBBT. We're a gathering of international consultants, analysts, and experts in business intelligence, who meet with interesting and innovative BI companies here in beautiful Boulder, Colorado. We not only get briefed on the latest news and releases, but we share our ideas with the vendor on where the BI industry is going, and help them with their technological directions and marketing messages. I'm Claudia Imhoff and the BBBT podcasts are produced by my company, Intelligent Solutions.

I am pleased to introduce my guests today. They are Lara Shackelford and Pete Schlampp. Lara is the Vice President of Marketing, and Pete is the Vice President of Products for Platfora. Welcome to you both!

Peter Schlampp: Thanks. It's nice to be here.

Lara Shackelford: Thank you, Claudia. It's a pleasure.

CI: It's so nice to have both of you here. It's a little snowy today, so thanks for hanging in with us.

Well, Pete, let me start with you, and, that is, give me a little bit of an overview of Platfora. A fairly new company, your product came out last year, but you've got a remarkable run record already. Give me a little overview.

PS: Absolutely. Platfora is as you said, it's still a young company. We were founded back in June of 2011. Really from the funding time to now, it's been a race. We've been running really, really fast. The first two years was all product development.

Ben Werther, who used to be with Greenplum, founded the company and obviously a guy with a very deep data warehousing background. When he founded the company, he was looking at the Hadoop trend and the Big Data trend in general, and was trying to imagine what a new data architecture would look like if Hadoop does transform some of the existing ideas that we have of the existing data architecture.

For two years, we developed a product. In March of 2013, we went GA. Now, it is the beginning of March 2014, so it's been a year that we've been



in market. In that time, I'm pleased to work with some amazing customers, some global 2000 customers across a variety of industries financial services, media, online, that have taken this leap with us, and it's been a real pleasure.

CI: You've done well. Lara, let me go to you now. A lot of questions about the difference between business intelligence and big data analytics. First of all, what's the difference between BI and big data analytics? Is there any difference? Then secondly, why would customers benefit from having your solution in place over a traditional BI type of solution? Let's start with the difference first.

LS: Sure. Having come from a BI background myself, I've lived to the experience of having access to some great reporting tools and information. But I've still, even when I had access to incredible tools, as a business user, I was still at the mercy, if you will, of IT and of an ops team who had to predefine a set of data for me to have access to.

Anytime that I would get beyond a certain set of data, if I wanted to suddenly say, as a marketer, "I want to analyze how this marketing campaign has performed, but I want to match that up against customers who've renewed in the last 18 months and see who went to this event, who renewed. Then maybe marry that up with call center records, did they call into support within this window and what kinds of questions did they have?"

When I wanted to get to that next level of insight, it was always nearly impossible. When I learned about Platfora, I immediately felt like they could solve a problem that I've personally been trying to solve for a very long time.

To answer your question, the difference is the ability to stitch together different data sets and do it in a way that in a self-service manner, in a way that I, as a business user, could get to that insight quickly and iterate on it and investigate.

CI: Yeah. I think it's that self-service aspect. You really did focus on that today in our session. The ability for a business analyst, perhaps not the most technologically astute wizard of technology, but certainly someone who wants to do the types of things that you just mentioned, bring in unusual



sources of data, perhaps, blend them up together and be able to analyze them. That's the real benefit, isn't it, to the customers?

LS: Exactly. Really focused on customer interactions, machine data and transactions, and bringing those together to garner new insights that weren't possible before or were impractical.

CI: All right, let's delve into that a little. If you don't mind, tell me some use cases.

LS: Sure. At Platfora, we're seeing really a few use cases where customers are getting the most benefit. Our primary use cases at Platfora are a few things customer analytics, the Internet of things, and media analytics. Then also, we do see some customers who are working with us for network security.

I would say almost 50 percent of our use cases today are focused on customer analytics, where customers are looking to see correlations between behaviors, actions and results across every touch point. Those use cases then play out with things like omni-channel pathway optimization, purchase affinity analysis, customer churn analysis, and more.

One specific use case, though, that doesn't obviously fit into those is, we had one customer who, they're a very large travel agency, and they have operations in many countries. They had their information in silos in each of these countries. They didn't want to spend more on a traditional data warehouse. They were looking for a way to decelerate that spend and they wanted more insight into their procurement data.

What they did is brought it all into Hadoop and put Platfora on top of it, to decelerate that spend on their enterprise data warehouse. In doing so, they very quickly saw that they could gain additional insights that would generate them a hundred million dollars in cost savings over a couple of years.

That led them to then look at other use cases. Once they got their procurement data into one system, then they could start to see patterns of behavior and stitch together social sentiment and buying behaviors. So, they went from one important use case, as a driver, to eight different use



cases that are teed up right behind it, most of them now related to customer analytics.

CI: That's terrific. It's such a good example of the idea of augmenting the existing data warehouse. You're not ripping and replacing it, that's not what you're advocating. What you're saying is, "We can help," as you put it, "decelerate the cost of the traditional data warehouse." It stays in place, it does its thing. You bring in all these wonderful experimental and investigative capabilities that, I think, no data warehouse really can do. It's not set up to be that kind of experimental environment.

Let me go back to you, Pete, and talk about some of these examples of activities, these experimental things that customers can now do, that they couldn't do before Platfora.

PS: Sure. When I talk to customers that are starting to use Platfora for the first time and they're looking, "What is it that I can do with Platfora," or, even at a higher level, "What can I do with big data analytics that I couldn't do before," they fall into two categories, for me. One is pretty straightforward, it's economic. The other one is technical.

I always hesitate when I talk to customers and they say, "I couldn't possibly do this before." I always think, "Yes. There's always a possible way to do most of the things that you can do with data." If you have enough time and enough money, services on top of that, and money to buy a big data warehouse, it's possible to do most of these things, but in many cases it's impractical.

One of the examples that we talked about today during our webinar, Claudia, was a customer of ours who was trying to bring together data from four different disparate business units. They challenged us to actually be able to do this in a month. They challenged us to be able to do it in December, 2013, and they needed results before the Super Bowl.

To have a project of that scale to happen within a month is impractical. Using traditional technology you wouldn't even start. It would be, maybe, ten million dollars, plus. In terms of a price tag, you just can't do it.



We were able to do it and it wasn't just us. It was this fantastic underlying technology called Hadoop, which most people have probably heard of. They were able to store as much data as they wanted in a really economical way. Then, they were able to, on top of that, build the analysis that they needed to answer the questions during the Super Bowl. They were looking at advertising and how the advertising impacted their website during the Super Bowl. They were able to do that on Platfora in four days. So, that is, economically, a huge benefit.

Then, there's the technical side. On the technical side, there's a series of capabilities, for instance, the ability to do what we call "event series analysis." That's to look at the behaviors of their customers or their devices, over time, and to be able to do that across massive amounts of data. Technically, you really need to be able to leverage a massively MPP style system like Hadoop, to be able to do that type of work.

There is no other technology which really wields the power of Hadoop like Platfora. Being able to put that power to do event series analysis or segmentation on customer dimensions of a hundred million plus. To be able to do those types of things, there's not another technology that allows to do that.

CI: All right. Let's dive into big data a little bit. A lot of people are tired of hearing it, they're very confused about, "What exactly is it?" and, even worse, more confusion about, "Does it even have any value for me? What do I get out of big data?" A lot of hype, all swirling around this term "big data." I guess the first question along these lines is, "Is it all hype, or is there actually some real value to be found in big data?" Maybe, you might want to start off with, what you mean by "big data."

PS: Sure. I have found, I think as with many people that are in the space, that the term big data has lost almost all meaning for anybody that's trying to understand it.

CI: That makes you want to ask, "What's little data? Or what's the difference?"

PS: Exactly. I think some of our friends and colleagues have actually coined the three V's definition of big data, which is interesting. It serves a purpose. For me, out of the three V's volume and velocity are interesting, but it's just



a kind of a linear progression, in many ways, from where we've been in the past. The variety one, for me, is the one that really defines this age.

I try not to use the word big data as much, anymore. I talk about modern data. Modern data for us, at Platfora, means the combination of transactions, customer interactions, and machine data together.

Then, modern analytics on top of modern data would be one of the types of the questions that you want to ask on top of those new datasets. When it's mixed together, what are the answers that you need to get out of that? That's my definition.

Do I think big data's hyped? Sure, it's hyped. Do I think that customers are getting real value out of it? Yes. I think that there's a couple of things that impacted that. At first... I was just at the Strata Conference two weeks ago, I think, in that range. Time flies. The one thing that stood out to me was that there has been a level of stability that's come into the market, where a year ago so many of the big players were diving in.

When big players dive into a new market, it causes instability and it means that businesses freeze. They say, "Let me let the dust settle for a minute and decide, should I make a bet on this player or this player? I don't even know what's happening." So, a level of stability has come in. That doesn't mean that there's not a mass amount of innovation that's happening as well. I think, there's just as much going on, if not more, today than there was a year ago, in terms of new innovation.

I think, for the business, they're starting to feel a little bit more stability, with the big players starting to sell down a little bit. Then, they're looking for the real value out of big data, and that's what our goal is. Our goal at Platfora is to make business analytics or big data analytics accessible to the business user, as opposed to just IT. Jumping that chasm has held people back at first. I think we're having a lot of success there, and our customers are seeing value in it now.

CI: Let's get, very briefly, just into a little detail about how Platfora does manage the volume and variety. I agree with you. I think that it is so overhyped, and who cares, but we still do have to worry about a fair number of transactions, and different sets of data coming in.



As I understand it, what you do is you wait for everything to get into Hadoop. It has to get into Hadoop before you can, then, use it. Then, you layer on top of that a pretty mature, pretty sophisticated, set of analytical capabilities through your lens, the lens capabilities that you offer. Describe just briefly what that's all about.

PS: Sure. Once data arrives in Hadoop, and we do provide ability to pull data from existing sources into Hadoop, we provide an end to end semantic layer, a metadata catalog about the data that's in Hadoop, allowing everybody from IT up to the business to discover what's available on Hadoop. Then, we actually generate MapReduce that pushes down into Hadoop to pull out, of the massive petabyte scale data in Hadoop, a smaller scale to analyze lens.

That's a term that you just mentioned. Lens is a compressed columnar representation of the raw data that's in Hadoop.

That is, then, analyzed through an application that we call VizBoards, and that's directed directly at the business user. It's a visually interactive, 100 percent web-based application to explore through the data. The beauty is, of course, connecting the end user all the way down to the raw data. If they need something that is not in the lens, they get to control that themselves.

CI: Alright, let's finish up. You do have some competitors, so why don't we talk about how you differentiate yourselves from your competitors. There's a lot of people jumping on the Hadoop bandwagon. As we all know, it's the hot, shiny, new item for a lot of people. How do you differentiate? How does Platfora differentiate from the other folks jumping on this shiny object?

PS: The biggest thing that differentiates us, and I feel is one of our biggest competitive advantages, is the fact that we span from the business user all the way down to the raw data, and we control everything in between. The disadvantage that our competitors have, typically, is that they are using a series of interfaces in between each one of those steps.

I'm a big fan of SQL Lingua Franca, it's awesome! I love SQL, but it does not allow you to do some of the more interesting things that you want to be able to do with big data. Event series analytics, being able to track the



behaviors across these massive fact tables. Try to do that with SQL, it's really hard. You're not going to find a good end user facing tool that does that.

I like to compare what other people are doing to what we're doing, as trying to take this little "sippy" straw. I've got kids and they are always drinking Capri Suns after their soccer practice and they're trying to stick the sippy straw into their Capri Sun. I think about taking the sippy straw and trying to put it into the Hadoop data reservoir and try to sip big data through the sippy straw. I think that's the position that our competitors are in.

Unlike that, we control the entire process all the way from raw data up, and we can do anything that we need to do to analyze the data in the way that they need to analyze it.

CI: Interesting. I'll tell you, Capri Sun thanks you for the plug!

Unfortunately, that's it for our time today, for this "BBBT Podcast." Again, I'm Claudia Imhoff, and it's been such a great pleasure to speak with Lara Shackelford and Pete Schlamp of Platfora, today. Thanks to you both.

PS: Thank you so much for having us.

LS: It was a pleasure!

CI: I hope you enjoyed today's podcast. You'll find more podcasts from other vendors at our web site, www.bbbt.us. If you want to read more about today's session, please search for our hash tag on Twitter. That's #BBBT. And please join me again for another interview. Good bye and good business!