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.

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Host:	**Claudia Imhoff**, President, BBBT
Guest(s):	**Bob Eve**, Data & Analytics Technical Marketing Director
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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'm so happy to introduce my guest today. He's my friend, Bob Eve. Bob is the Director of Technical marketing for Data and Analytics for Cisco. Welcome, Bob.

Bob Eve: Glad to be back. Good to see you, Claudia.

CI: This is what, eight or nine times?

BE: Gosh. I don't know.

Let's keep going. Let's keep doing it.

CI: Absolutely. I just love having you back again. All right. Let's start off with the new offering that Cisco is now about to announce. It's really very exciting. The Cisco Data Preparation. If you don't mind, tell me about it.

BE: We're very excited about Cisco Data Preparation. It's a new offering. It really addresses two major forces in the market that are converging to create a new issue for a business in IT. The one force is this rise of self-service business intelligence… Discovery, Tableau, Qlik, etc. Then, that's proliferated over the last number of years.

The challenge is, the users are doing a great job analyzing and reporting on the data. Now, they're starting to bottleneck a little bit on the data itself, the hard data integration problems that have to happen, in order to prepare the data, and in order to visualize it or report on and analyze it. That's force number one.

Force number two, of course, is this rise of "Big data" and this huge opportunity now, to analyze and leverage more and more and more

data, and take advantage of it to make a business impact. That made the data integration problem even harder.

So, we've got these two forces coming together. What we've done with Cisco Data Preparation is provide a solution to that problem.

CI: It's interesting because it has two audiences. The first one would be the business analysts. There's also an IT component, but we'll get to that. How does Cisco Data Preparation then help business analysts meet their goals?

BE: They're really challenged, because if you think about the typical project, it's different. Every project is different. Every exploration is different. The business problem being solved is different. What data do we use? That's different. What data do we even have? We have so much of it. It's all over the place. It's messy and everywhere. What help can I get? I try to go ask for help… what the data scientists do… "We don't have one," or that guy's busy. Go to IT, and they want to talk about an SDLC and specifications and a long lead time. We're exploring here.

The business users are challenged, to get through this work, this hard work. They want to do self-service. They want to deal with the fact that they're spending too much time doing this. They don't really have a great solution for that. How can we help them solve that?

CI: It's interesting that the business analysts are a focused group for you because they do have needs. They may not be technologically as savvy as IT people or data scientists. But, they are hungry to get at this data. That's what this data prep tool is aiming for.

BE: Yeah. We really want to enable them to do that self-service, but to do that, that has to be done in a different way than it would be traditionally done for IT. IT, we are used to Metadata. We're used to processes. We think about security and control and industrialization of the output, etc.

But remember, we're talking about exploratory, perhaps even one-off cases. There's that business term "Good enough" that we don't seem to know about in IT. Can we help them? The help has to come from a user interface that works the way they like to work, not the way IT likes to work. It needs to have some intelligence in there, to be able to do some of

those, to guide them, and do some of those harder data scientists' activities automatically, because they don't know how to do it.

But, if we could use the power of big data and some of the compute capabilities to do that intelligence, then they're enabled just like a data scientist would be. We want to do that.

Then, we need to think about given them something that they do, but kind of bookend it with IT, so that what they come up with, maybe they start with data from IT, and they end up with something that we may be..."That's a gem. Can we take that? Let's use that everywhere." We want to rethink about how that's been implemented, but we've met the immediate need now. Then, IT can go after it later.

CI: Well, let's talk about IT a little bit. How does this tool help IT?

BE: First of all, they're just inundated with the requests anyway for new data sets, because these analytics and reporting and all of these, that's so business critical to get the insights, so that you can compete. They don't want to say "No," all the time.

But, there's a lot of noise from these cases… requirements may be short-lived. There's already a big backlog. They're working on the bunch of strategic projects that have already been allocated. How can they say "Yes," and how can they enable? So it's almost… You guys have written about this idea of a separate investigative, exploratory kind of environment, the second mode of IT so to speak.

What we could do at Cisco Data Preparation is provide demo capability that they could serve to the business users, but have some real neat things inside that offering, to make sure that it is going to work from governance and control and scalability things, that IT really cares about. So you know, give a little bit of the cake and eat it too.

CI: Yeah. I like that idea. You put up an interesting slide. It showed basically five views cases about who would be an ideal candidate for this type of technology. If you don't mind, go over those again.

BE: Sure. The first thing is, someone needs to have a fair amount of maturity in the use of the self-service discovery tools, five years of Tableau, a large implementation and deployment, because then, they've really adopted and understood the importance of getting the business involved in doing some of their own analytics.

They're also probably feeling the consequence of data integration challenges. "Are you already using Tableau, but you're choking a little bit on the data?" You haven't got a good IT. You're just not satisfied with your ability to prepare the data for those tools.

Second, you need to be a little bit long on the big data path. If you're still doing those first experiments and not even sure that big data's right for you, then probably not a good candidate for Cisco Data Preparation, because it's built on a big data infrastructure. We really can take advantage of accessibility to lots and lots of data, and use the computational power of Spark to do some of that machine intelligence.

Those are two really good filters from a maturity point of view, and a business point of view. From an IT perspective, we've got years of interacting with hundreds of data virtualization customers. One of the things that's common for all of them is: they really think that agile data integration and different techniques for different problems is a way to go.

So, someone who's been using data virtualization in the past has a strong affinity to agile data integration, which would be a third criteria. Fourth would be, "Does IT view themselves as being in the service business? Do they want to provide data as a service to the business?"

If they have that mentality, then they would think logically that, "Let's then enable this data preparation in a way that's going to work with us together in a win-win and a 1 + 1 = 3 solution."

Finally, as always, you need to have some compelling pain that you're trying to solve, because although this is great technology and a fabulous blending of these trends and a response to those, business has priorities.

What are the real priorities? What problems does it solve? Are you working on a better engagement with your customers, and you need these

broader datasets, and you want to advance beyond where you've been, etc... That would be a good example of a compelling case… And every compelling case is always compliance… You get new regulations and that sort of thing. You got data all over the place, and how we're going to pull that together. Business understands a lot of those needs. IT understands a lot of the information of the data. How can we do that together?

I think those really set the frame.

CI: They're very clear and very succinct as well. They're different from each other.

There are products today that do data preparations. Some people call it "data munging." Others call it "data wrangling," "data blending," whatever term you put on it. What would you say is unique about the Cisco offer?

BE: There are a number of capabilities that we provide, that we think are unique and provide business benefit, which is the key to a unique capability.

The first is a great, easy to use user interface. It's easy as Excel. In fact, it looks like Excel. We allow the business analysts, to work with the real data and not worry about things like models, or specs, or any sort of the IT-ish things.

The genius is, it keeps track of all the activities that did occur in a workflow that could be rerun. We don't ask people to describe the workflow. We show them the data, and let them start working on it. We keep track of the workflow. That's genius. That's really fabulous.

A second thing that's great is a lot of machine intelligence, built-in abilities to look for data sets that should logically be joined…maybe with a 95% accuracy level… or go in and find all the different instances of JCPenney and fix it. How many ways can you spell JCPenney…? I can tell you...

CI: Apparently, many…

BE: Apparently, many…

That's an example. So that elevates the analyst's skills. Maybe a business analyst is really good with the spreadsheet, but not a data scientist, who doesn't know these kinds of algorithms for cleansing and evaluating data and graphing data, and that sort of thing.

But, what if we just took care of that for them? Or help them see it in that context?

The third thing that's unique and powerful is: this is built on a big data infrastructure. So, you get that scaling. You don't have to do sampling, for instance. You can see the real data. You can bring in lots of datasets. Why limit your analysis to some constrained "million rows sort of analysis?" Why constrain it? We don't have to. Not with big data technology.

Those are three things that the users will appreciate. The fourth and extra point from IT is, we have integrated data virtualization. So, you can start with curated datasets that IT's already done a good job providing… reusable common reference datasets, common objects, customer sales, things of that nature… that would be reused. Why wouldn't the business analysts want to start there?

So, IT can start them on a good journey, start them with the gold data. You know maybe the data analysts and some of the work the business analysts do kind of gets it a little bronzy…

But, we can then pull that back in through data virtualization later, to either expose something that's pretty good… and we can call it bronze, or we can say, "If we just re-engineer that a little bit, we would have fabulous P.O.C. proof concept of fabulous prototype business users. Fantastic. You got us going…"

But let's take that to the next level. We're going to re-engineer that, and put in some of the IT securities and controls, and things like that, because we think it will run a little better and be more useful to a broader set of people.

CI: Yeah, and to be honest with you, it's that last capability, that integration of data virtualization with data preparation. That's the difference. That's a unique feature of your offering that Cisco can only offer.

BE: Yeah. We just need to close the loop and enable businesses to say "Yes to IT," and then take the "best of" that comes out of the business, and really enable this investigative environment in a very professional way. Then, still in sequence, run that traditional analytic environment that IT's worked so hard on to develop over the years.

CI: Terrific. All right. Last question. Where would customers find out more information about Cisco Data Preparation?

BE: Well we have data sheets, and white papers, and that kind of content that you'd want to have to review this.

And, you can go to our website, so cisco.com/go/datavirtualization. So we'll have it there on our data virtualization pages. You can see some of that data preparation and data virtualization, and how they work together.

CI: That's terrific, all right. Well Bob, unfortunately, we're out of time. Thanks so much for speaking with me. That's it for this edition of the BBBT Podcast.

Again, I'm Claudia Imhoff. It's been such a pleasure as always to speak with Bob Eve of Cisco today. So again, thanks.

BE: Thank you, Claudia, for the opportunity to talk about our new offering, and to see you.

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!