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):	**John Ryan**, Director of Product Marketing
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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 pleased to introduce my guest today. He is John Ryan. John is the director of product marketing for Yellowfin, so welcome, John.

John Ryan: Thanks, Claudia. Thanks for having me.

CI: It was nice to have you here. You always bring in excitement and something new and different to the BBBT, so I'm always glad to have you here.

JR: Thank you. I'm very passionate about what we do, so it's good to speak to people who are similarly passionate.

CI: It's a wonderful thing. Let's go to the very beginning. You started off by saying that data is more valuable when it's shared. I don't think anybody would disagree with that, but why is this collaborative capability so important to your customers? Perhaps, more importantly, why is it such a focus for Yellowfin?

JR: Sure. Yellowfin is a business intelligence and analytics tool. That's what we do. Where we see ourselves different, it's fundamentally driven by that belief that data is more valuable when shared. The fact that everyone agrees with that… If that was true, they wouldn't say data is in the oil, because you can't share oil, you consume it, and it's not there for everyone.

We think data is more like renewable energy, and the more people that have access to that data, the more value you can actually get from the data.

What drives us as a company is trying to work out how to get data into the hands of more people within the organization for them they to be able to consume and make decisions with.

Within an organization, you have so many different types of users. You've got some that are more technical than others, and they can use data in different ways to help them do their jobs or to analyze or to make decisions. A lot of decisions are made outside of the BI room, so people sending emails to each other or making decisions in meetings.

Where we're trying to take our company is actually being a little bit more than just a BI tool. We think that's very, in our vision, perhaps thinking small, so we want to be the platform where you can take data to make decisions anywhere… within your presentation layer, whether it's collaborating in a social media-like Facebook environment, which we have as part of our platform as well. It might be embedding those reports in the data or into other applications, because that's absolutely going to reach a larger audience doing it that way so people don't have to log into your application… they can consume it from anywhere.

Also, just doing the standard process reporting that we're also familiar with.

CI: It's really quite good. And it's being validated, as I see, or as you showed us, by a number of analyst firms by the large companies that do nothing but analyze where BI is going and what the technologies are doing. If you don't mind, just touch on a couple of the results that you presented earlier.

JR: Two of the key analyst firms that you certainly look to, the first is Gartner, so we are on the Gartner Magic Quadrant, and we have been for the last two years. They're really a big one just because on the enterprise space, if you're not there, you can actually get knocked out, no matter how good your product is. That's a deep box official.

There's another one that we really like as well, which is BARC's BI Survey. What we like about that is the actual analyst opinion has been removed, and it's actually what the customers are rating their own BI tool. It's hard to

really argue with that. They're either saying you are good with something or you're not good at something.

We have participated in that now for the last four years in a row. We've always got some really good results, which is quite nice. We were the leader in a number of categories this year, the two that pointing out across all regions around collaboration.

We were the leader by quite a significant margin. In fact, the number two behind us, significantly behind us, was actually Excel and PowerPoint, so that's still how most people are collaborating.

CI: Wow.

JR: Obviously, we're significantly ahead of that. Also in innovation, for the last four years in a row now, Yellowfin is being rated as the most innovative BI tool in the area. There's lots of others as well, so proportion of employees, using the productive adoption, nice types of areas that we really try to look forward to. It's a good validation for us.

CI: It's great. You talked about with was a customer survey, so let's talk about a few of your customers. If you don't mind, give me their story.

JR: Sure. Yellowfin has over 10,000 clients around the world, and we have actually a million end users on our platform. Why it's that big is we have a lot of really large enterprises consuming product for huge deployment.

As a couple of examples, Sisense in Australia, they're deploying Yellowfin in it to over 200,000 users. This is an embedded top scenario where people are coming to Sisense. It's like a White Pages that they have to consume their own usage data of their advertising, as an example.

Another really big story for us, really, in the last year, if you have heard of BMC Remedy, which is a very, very popular BPM tool, and Yellowfin is now the reporting layer within BMC Remedy. All Remedy 9 users have access to all of their dashboards and reports driven through Yellowfin, and they've got our timeline capabilities in there as well. They've got the freedom as well that we have to connect to that remedy data source and be able to create any type of additional charts they want.

So they're more embedded and analytical application use cases. There's a lot of enterprise use cases in there as well, which are a bit more traditional.

CI: If you don't mind, I'm going to bring in one more just because I like to save the planet, and that's Coca-Cola.

JR: We've got a great implementation with Coca-Cola through one of our partners, Integral Management. Essentially, what they're doing is they're trying to measure CO_2 emissions from all of their plants. Particularly in Europe where they have that emission trading scheme, you need to able to track that stuff to get your credits, essentially.

This dashboard, what it's essentially doing is rolling up from thousands of different facilities what their emissions are, and you have this plot back on a map, apply filters and see how the emissions are going up or down over time and where the emissions are actually occurring. That one's certainly a really interesting one.

CI: I think it's fascinating, and it's the entire logistics. It's not just the plants, it's the trucks, it's everything, right? From start to finish? What is the CO_2 that they're producing?

JR: That's right. Business intelligence is not everything today, so there's a lot that is also happening in the background to enable. We're really the cherry on the top that's actually doing the visualization there. They've got some really clever systems, which allows us to have the data in the right shape.

CI: Nice story, really nice story. Thank you. I love the way you put things. You had a wonderful comment that BI is more than just data discovery. Boy, that is so true, and yet data discovery seems to be the shiny new thing that everybody's jumping on.

I agree. It is more than just data discovery, but why don't you talk a little bit about what you meant by that.

JR: Sure. Everywhere you look, you hear data discovery. One needs data discovery, and it is really great. Maybe it's got the Paris Hilton syndrome or

whatever it is where everyone's obsessed by it for the sake of it. The reality is, it is just solving a specific use case of being able to find out and discover what's in your data. That is not every use case.

To pretend that data discovery is going to kill traditional reporting… it's not. It's always going to be there. It's fragmenting into another different type of use case.

How we see it is that there are so many different analytical use cases that are actually out there. That's why we have 50, 70 different BI tools that are actually getting and growing a lot of traction because they are catering to all those use cases.

One of the areas where we think Yellowfin is unique is we see ourselves as a very broad platform. We do do data discovery. It is very easy to connect to data and discover it or build a dashboard where you can just see everything in the data and filter and do all sorts of things.

We also do traditional reporting, which has a saying at the BBBT session, "it's not sexy."

CI: No, it's not.

JR: It's mandatory. Everyone has that need. That need probably comes even before the data discovery area in many cases. It's not just traditional reporting and data discovery, there's also really real use cases where now I want to get this data…I want to share that with people outside my organization in a controlled way.

That's where the embedded areas come in. You can go into prescriptive or picture perfect reporting. There's all type of different use cases. We keep discovering more use cases and more distinctions within those use cases. What we really look to do is find out what do people want to do. How do we make them do that quickly?

CI: Let's go into a little more detail there, because you also then showed us the different types of dashboards. I think the one thing that Yellowfin does so beautifully is it sets up very clear, very simple, easy to understand different kinds of dashboards. If you don't mind, talk about them.

JR: Sure. We didn't invent this theory, but this is it essentially. If you do your research online, there's essentially three types of dashboards that people consume:

There are strategic dashboards, which essentially executives seeing over time if the business is on track.

There's analytical dashboards, which is that whole data discovery end-piece where the market seems to be obsessed.

There's also operational dashboards, which is really short term decision making. How much stuff do I need to order this second, or whatever it is.

With each of these different dashboard use cases, they come with different functionality that's required. Most BI tools, certainly the main ones we compete against… we're all really good. I think it's parity in the analytical dashboards, which is where you have filters and brushing and all of those types of areas. You have all of your data linked together. That's the typical use case.

If you're building a strategic dashboard, two of the things, the key areas that we find missing is most BI tools are actually limited to one data set per dashboard. How can you get a global view over the business if you can't drag in data from different data sources? That's the first key one.

The second is drill through. Not drill down, which is where you go down the hierarchy by actually clicking on a piece of data and going into a report filtered by what you clicked in, which is different from that report. When an executive is consuming those strategic dashboards, with KPIs and summary charts and things like that, they want to be able to click on that and expand that to find out more detail.

The typical BI tool, that's not filtering. You're actually finding. You're asking a direct question and you're getting an answer rather than discovering.

On the operation level, this is where the biggest opportunity is. If we want everyone to really be using data to help them do their jobs better, you need to make it as part of their day to day job, which quite frankly means

they're not using it in your specific tool. They're using it however they're actually consuming the data.

The analogy that I'd love to use here is the dashboard in your car is an operational dashboard. There is no analysis whatsoever. There shouldn't be anyway, maybe some of the new cars, I think they're bit scary. When you're driving, you just want to make the right decision to drive. Do I need to speed up? Am I going too fast? Slow down? Do I need to fill up my car?

CI: Yes.

JR: Exactly. That's an example of an alert. The red light comes on, telling you that you need to do something.

Applying that to the BI analytic space, it's about people. They've got a question, they want the answer in the short term. How much stock do I need to order, or I get an alert if I'm running low on stock. Really, the trick here is you want these operational dashboards becoming off-operational data sources, off live data, where if it's analytical, if you have that in a fast database, that's also much, much better.

Essentially, you want it running off live data, and you want those proactive alerts to tell you what it is. In many cases, you actually want to reduce the interactions with those operational data sources. You don't want to get people spending more time. You just want them to get their answer and get back to their job as quickly as possible. That's really where the value is.

CI: Real quick, DashXML. It is an addition to these?

JR: Yeah. DashXML is probably more on the analytical side, but what we're finding is that there's a new market appearing for organizations who want to build an analytical application.

What that means is, they have their own application. It could be on anything...The social media companies are great examples where you can actually go there and consume and analyze your own usage consumption. What these organizations are doing is, they're actually building a consumption-only application for you to consume from.

There's no ability to create your own content from scratch. Everything is completely locked down exactly as that customer wants it. I've got a lot of really good examples with organizations who their job is selling advertising. They need to give these analytics to their customers to help them know that it's actually… they're getting an ROI from that and where they should actually buy from.

It's a really controlled, extremely flexible, fast-to-create environment. It's just another workflow of be on the create things quickly. It's not just for an analyst, it's actually a developer being able to create an application very quickly.

CI: And flexibly. We're almost out of time, but I do want to get to the exciting news. There is a new version of Yellowfin coming out, 7.2, sometime next year. If you don't mind, I think I'm going to focus down on one of the features that is going to come out on this version, and that's the Task Management feature. Can you just talk a little bit about what that is?

JR: Yeah, sure. I always think this is very exciting, and shout out to the BBBT. It was actually the last time that we're here, one year ago. I guess we got a lot of the inspiration from this. We obviously spent a lot of time working on it as well.

CI: I think it was a suggestion by Neil Raden.

JR: That's right. Thanks Neil.

What we see with the BI and analytics world is that it's actually an analyst-only workflow. If you were to work your way through that workflow and listen to the messaging of the other vendors, it's about connecting, data prepping or discovering, analyzing, and then essentially, sharing…is essentially their story and it's that workflow.

What we see in the real world is that's very analyst-specific, analyst creation. That's not what actually happens in the real world. In the real world, there are things that are actually triggering that analysis happening in the first place. There's workflows that are happening like people having discussions in terms of how it's produced. There's review processes.

Then once you've actually created that report, how do you actually create action with it? How do you share that and get people consuming it?

What we're working towards, and you'll see a lot of this with 7.2 is, a business workflow that encompasses everything that was there on the analyst side.

But really thinking about if a business user has a need, how do they actually get that need actioned? Rather than just sending off an email, hoping it happens, or using a task management system they don't understand… actually sending off the email and being able to see if somebody's actually working on the task, or Ii they've started it, where it is in the queue.

We're really thinking about the different ways we can trigger other people working collaboratively. So, "I get a task, I now need to create a few other different tasks for other people." It's ultimately about exposing the queue so that people know that they're getting the job done and being able to collaborate and review around that.

CI: It's nice. I found it to be a very interesting feature. I think people will find it to be quite nice. There are others, we don't have time to talk about them, but new connectors, trends and forecasts, certainly more visualizations and source filters, and report queuing. I love that idea. People will have look up what it is.

Activity streams, smart tasks, boy, you've done a lot. It's all coming out next year, right?

JR: Yeah, so, we will be having a public beta version that's available later this month. You're more than welcome to go and play around with it and break it and tell us how we could improve it.

CI: Yellowfin.com?

JR: Yeah, it will be available on our support section of our website.

CI: Wonderful.

JR: Bu yeah we love your feedback. We're doing new things here, so getting your feedback in terms of what actually works and what we could do better is only going to help us get a better product.

CI: Excellent. I'm pretty sure...

JR: We'll release it next year.

CI: I'm pretty sure our members will contribute. Unfortunately, we're out of time, so that's it for this edition of the BBBT Podcast. Again, I'm Claudia Imhoff, and it's been such a pleasure to speak with my friend John Ryan of Yellowfin today. Thank you so much, John.

JR: Thank you so much, Claudia. It's a pleasure being here, appreciate it.

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!