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):	**Kamal Hathi**, Director of Product Management
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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's Kamal Hathi. Kamal is the Director of Product Management for Microsoft. Welcome, Kamal.

Kamal Hathi: Thank you, Claudia. It's a real pleasure to be here. I had a great discussion this morning and I look forward to talking to you some more now.

Claudia: It was a wonderful event. If people can, I hope they watch the video and the trailer. Let's start off with the mission and the vision for Microsoft, because it has actually changed. The vision and mission for BI is quite different from previous versions of that, isn't it?

Kamal: It's an evolution. In some sense it's what we've always said we would do, which is BI for everyone. We call it BI for the masses. The real difference now is we're enabling the ability for anyone in an organization, right from the regular business user to the sophisticated analyst, to be able to get value from the data… literally it's minutes.

This is what we talked about, we will cover this more, this notion of five seconds to sign up and five minutes to wow.

Claudia: Yeah, I like that. Power BI is your cloud BI offering, but it's part of a bigger architecture. I like the expression, five seconds to get going and five minutes to wow. What does all of that mean and how does Power BI fit into this overall architecture?

Kamal: Power BI really is the face of our overall offering data platform. Literally what it means is that you can go to this place called

powerbi.com and I'll repeat it at the end of this podcast again... with an email address be signed up and get value from your own data literally in minutes.

The way this happens is it sits upon a much deeper set of offerings in Microsoft. It sits upon Azure, which is our cloud-based offering and runs across the globe in large data centers. As you start to use Power BI you can take advantage of all these different pieces that are part of Microsoft's offering.

We have a set of tools there that you can start to use in an organization for collecting and integrating data, it's what we call our Data Factory. We have tools that we use for machine learning and predictive analytics is a whole Azure machine learning that we provide.

You integrate into real-time streams, literally things coming in in real time and landing them in your dashboards and reports on Power BI. It sits on top of our on-premise capabilities as well. Power BI is hybrid in nature, which means reports and dashboard run in the cloud which you can sign up for very easily.

However, any investments you made in analysis services and reporting services and all the SQL Server kinds of things, you just hook them up into Power BI and you get value out of all the things that you've invested in already.

Now with the new cloud based architecture, business users are able to go and hook these together and get real value quite easily out of it. Think about Power BI as the tip of the spear, if you will, that leads all the rest of Microsoft's data offerings.

Claudia: It's a remarkable architecture, very clear. If people go to your website, I'm sure they'll see the architecture and understand it a bit better than perhaps us even describing it. Let's focus on Power BI if you don't mind or some of the parts, if you could briefly describe some of these parts.

Kamal: Power BI is a web-based software as a service solution. It is something that you as a user can use with your personal credentials, so you need your credentials from your organization to sign up for it. It runs on our Azure Cloud Platform and then there are multiple parts of this:

One part is the actual web-based solution that you interact with, the other part is what we call an Enterprise gateway. This gateway provides the ability for you to run it on your premise, so that you can hook up to your existing sources such as SAP HANA, or SQL Server Analysis Services, or SQL Server.

You're then able to go in and have a solution that allows data to be on your premise under lock and key, if you will, with reporting and visualizations running in the cloud and on-demand pulling this data over.

The second part that's interesting in Power BI is what we call our content packs and these are the finished solutions, if you will, that we have built in conjunction with our partners such as Salesforce, such as Marketo, such as QuickBooks Online.

Where you as a business user can go in and provide your credentials and then we, working from our service in Power BI hook up with the partner service in Salesforce or the partner service in QuickBooks or in Marketo or in Dynamics CRM for Microsoft, and deliver to you a finished set of solutions with dashboards, reports, and datasets that you can start consuming.

Other pieces that are interesting in the story in what Power BI provides is something we call the Power BI Desktop. The Power BI Desktop, and we can talk a little bit more about it, but it's a tool that allows you to go and work hands-on, authoring on your Windows Desktop.

Claudia: Let's continue on with this description. From the business users' point of view, what does Microsoft offer? You've talked about authoring

and very sophisticated capabilities, but sometimes business users just want a report. What do you offer for those folks?

Kamal: Good question. Power BI is an environment where business users get what I sometimes call a Pinterest style pinboard for their data. They are able to go and look at various reports that someone has provided to them and take bits and pieces out of those reports and pin them to their own personal dashboard.

Imagine a dashboard now where you have information coming in from your sales report, information that you have picked up from the inventory report, information that you picked up, let's say, from social Twitter trends and then you have a view, a unified view of a business that you are seeing different parts and pieces coming together in one operational view.

At the same time as this, you could have things like real-time streams of data coming in, so you can then see these tweets sliding up in real time as you go live with the campaign. As a business user, now you have what we sometimes call a heart rate monitor for your business… that monitor showing you all the different pieces that you can look at.

All of these different parts of that dashboard can be drilled into. Think about it as in this heart rate monitor you find some anomaly, you can now drill in and do a CAT scan, if you will, and get a report that gives you more details.

If you see on Twitter some trend that's interesting, you can go in and start exploring where these tweets are coming from and who, and what the correlation is with your product, et cetera.

For business users then, what we're providing is an environment to look at their business in one single unified place… simply being able to get productive with it on your own with the help of IT if you need to, but you don't have to have that need.

Claudia: Again, keeping up with that BI for the masses or BI for everyone, it really supports, shall we say the technologically more naïve kind of

user, as well as, the deeper data scientist, the more advanced analytics and so forth, right?

Kamal: Absolutely. In fact, inside Microsoft, think in terms of personas, a little bit of under the cover view of how we built the software. When we build the software we keep in mind who is the person who's going to use it? We truly have distinct personas, four distinct personas.

One that we have is what we call the nontechnical business user. This is the primary persona. This is the person who is going to pay the check for why someone invest in BI. That persona is fully covered with Power BI, the dashboards and that whole experience not only on the website but also on mobile devices.

If you have an iPhone or an iPad or an android device, and of course a Windows device, we allow you on-the-go consume and get value from our Power BI offering very, very easily and do so in an intuitive and easy fashion.

Claudia: Let's talk a little bit more about Power BI Desktop. It is relatively new and if you don't mind, tell me a little bit about it.

Kamal: The other personas that we go after are what we call the analyst and sometimes what we call the BI professional. The analyst is someone who typically understands the business, knows the data and they're creating interesting reports for the nontechnical user to consume. For that particular person, we have something that we call the Power BI Desktop.

The Power BI Desktop is a standalone tool that you install on your Windows machine, for now, and it gives you the ability to mash up data, from different sources, to model the data… so add calculated columns, add relationships, friendly names, et cetera, and then visualize all of that stuff in a nice, beautiful, highly interactive canvass.

You can go in to Power BI Desktop and drag and drop parts of a data model that you have built, create interesting cross filtering, highlighting, et cetera, and get very interactive wonderful reports.

Once you are happy with what you have created, you can then go and publish the result back on to the Power BI Service, so that the nontechnical business user now can consume it and has something that they can run their business effectively with. The Power BI Desktop also allows you to integrate with R.

If you have scripts that you've written in R that have ways of mashing data up or doing some manipulation, you can very easily consume the output of the R Script inside the Power BI as a table. You can go and take R visualizations and embed them and use them inside Power BI Desktop. So Power BI desktop then is the authoring environment for the end user to work with.

Claudia: Finally, you mentioned data visualizations and what you showed us today were some incredible visualizations that other people have created. You've now got a community, if you will, of people who are donating these beautiful visualizations. I can click on one, download it, and use it. Talk a little bit about the community and the data visualizations that are available.

Kamal: Absolutely. If you go to visuals at powerbi.com you will see a whole gallery of these visuals that our community has created. They are all based on D3.js, which is a very popular framework for creating Java Script visualizations.

What we did is we took our visualizations that we use in Power BI, which are based on Java Script, our bar charts, our line and pie charts, and you put that code, that source code into open source on GitHub, so anybody can take that source code and create new types of visualizations. That's exactly what we've seen the community do.

People have taken our source code and created different line charts, different bar charts. There's a bubble chart, someone, for example, took and created an aquarium, a fish animation out of it. You can do all kinds of things. We've seen all the way from visualization of the human body for medical purposes, to jet engines being used by manufacturers, to shop floor and layout, and all kinds

of things that people are doing, because in the end you cannot rely upon your vendor to give you a certain number of visuals.

Sometimes the business just need something different and when you do, that's what we enable you to do with our open sourced set of visualization platforms.

Claudia: Brilliant. Last little bit, you do have a lot. You do have a relatively complex architecture, so if I want to get started where would I start? How would I get started?

Kamal: It's very simple, go to powerbi.com and that's all you need to know. At powerbi.com there's a huge big button that says get started. Click on get started. It allows you to sign up for the service which is power BI. If you're a business user, you can get value from your existing SaaS Salesforce, et cetera, accounts or your Excel Workbooks.

We didn't talk that much about Excel, but that's a huge part of our arsenal… or you can just download the Power BI Desktop that I just talked about and start to work with it immediately. Taking away all the depth and all the richness of the platform, it is literally five seconds to sign up, five minutes to wow.

Claudia: Remarkable. We could talk about Power BI for about another hour or two, but unfortunately we are out of time. That's it for this edition of the BBBT Podcast. Again, I'm Claudia Imhoff and it has been such a pleasure to speak to Kamal Hathi today of Microsoft.

Kamal: Thank you, Claudia. It was great. Thank you for the time and the audience here.

Claudia: 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!