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):	**Kevin Courtney**, Vice President of Business Solutions
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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 Kevin Courtney. Kevin is the Vice President of Business Solutions for Teleran Technologies. So welcome, Kevin.

Kevin Courtney: Hi, Claudia. It's great to be here with you this afternoon.

CI: I'm thrilled to have you here. This has been an interesting session.

KC: I love the questions from this morning. I thought that they were really insightful. I think you've got a great group. I've really loved participating in this event today.

CI: Oh my goodness, well we're done. We can say goodbye now. Actually, we can't. First of all, let's talk a little bit about Teleran. Give me a brief overview of it.

KC: Sure. Teleran Technologies, we're a software company, so we build software products. We deliver solutions, and we have professional services to support that. Our focus is in the area of bringing visibility to data environments, to understand them, to manage them, and to control them.

We've got a couple of products that we use to craft solutions to help customers do that. We do that mostly in the data warehousing space, but we also do that in the OLTP space. Generally, our products in the past have been regarded as enterprise-sized in terms of organizations implementing them.

CI: Alright, let's get into that then. What you do is something called Application Usage Analytics. So let's start with that. What are they?

KC: So, Application Usage Analytics, this is a term that we've coined. We capture operational metadata. I know that sometimes when I said that folks' eyes glaze over. But if you're in the business and you understand databases, it's the communications that occur between the database and client.

It might be the sequel statement that's issued and then there's metrics that come out of that—response time, elapsed time, amount of data being moved. The operational usage analytics are really taking that information that comes out on this granular basis and applying statistical techniques and analytic techniques to generate analytics that can then be used to understand and gain insight about the operations of a particular environment.

CI: I love that because let's face it data warehousing, analytical environments are very data intensive. It is often quite hard, quite difficult for the people maintaining these environments to really understand what the heck is going on under the covers, right?

KC: Exactly. In fact, a few years ago, I remember talking with an operations manager and he said, "Oh, you consultants, you come in and you deliver these beautiful solutions, but then you leave us with no tools to understand how to manage and operate them."

So, we really focus not on the inside of the database, but rather those major attributes that are running outside the database: Who the users are, what are the tools that they're using, what kind of queries are they writing or misusing. You know, the data objects that are being used, and those data objects that are not being used, and the validity of the information that's there; the result sets, is it being used properly? Is it meeting the compliance and the security directors of the organization?

We're really looking at the ecosystem, the entire data landscape, making sure that it's performing as well as the database on the inside, and providing visibility to the managers that are responsible for that so that they can make the appropriate decisions to make it run better, to tune it, to know when to upgrade it, and to perform those other functions.

CI: Well let's drill into that a little bit. You've mentioned this morning that you focus on three go-to-market strategies, three big areas, where this monitoring capability really shines. Tell me about them.

KC: Exactly, so the three areas that we really have our focus planted into revolve around performance, SLA management, and business value. The second is compliance, audit risk, and governance. The third is BI modernizations, transformations, consolidations, and migrations.

Each one of them is a candidate for taking this operational metadata and this usage analytics and using them to understand and guide the activities that are there. From a performance perspective, we can help you to understand whether your users are generating great ad hoc queries or whether they are just crushing the database.

From an application's perspective, we've seen very well-tuned data warehouses that are operating beautifully, until a disruptive technology is introduced, and then everything goes to kind of a hell in the hand basket. And, nobody knows why. Everybody gets on this fire drill of running around looking. They don't have the facts; they have anecdotes; they have hunches; they have hints.

We're able to provide them with forensic data that is granular in nature and that aggregates up to a decision. "Oh, we've introduced a data visualization tool, and it's now using 30 percent of our activity. It's wildly successful much more than we have planned. It's killing us. Here are the numbers."

From the perspective of risk, risk in governance and compliance, we have customers that we've worked with for onwards of 10 years now, who have to report back in an audit capacity on who has access to the data. They live underneath HIPAA, PHI, or PCI, or Sarbanes, or confusingly all the stuff that's going on in Dodd Frank.

What they need to be able to do is say, "Hey, we've got a stream of data that tells us who, what, when, where, and why." If our legal team comes in, or our audit team comes in, or if someone else who needs to know can come in and say, "Who had access to Mrs. Jones records during June of

2004?" We're going to be able to respond to that and say, "We've gone through our Teleran database and here's your answer."

In the third area, this operational metadata and these usage analytics are critical in the success or the failure of modernization projects. I can't tell you how many times I've seen the deer in the headlight look on the eyes of someone of that's responsible, because they say, "We don't know where to begin."

In fact this morning or this afternoon, we had a discussion about an insurance company where they said they don't know where to begin.

What we're able to do there for modernization is to take a huge amount of the risk off the table by developing the picture of the workload, of the existing systems that are there, that are going to be migrated, understanding where they're strong, understanding where they're weak, understanding their remediation activities that should take place either before, during, and after.

Then, being able to provide a roadmap and guidance around how to make those transitions. What it does is it just takes a huge amount of the risk out of the project and it provides visibility into those areas where things are a little dicey.

CI: Yeah. You've got three major products that actually perform these activities. Just briefly, what are they, and what is each one's purpose?

KC: We have three software products that work hand in glove that worked together in this concentric circle starting with our product called iSight. iSight is our tracking and monitoring, and data capture facility. It's a very light weight agent that sits in front of the database and monitors the traffic that's there. It creates transactions that it posts into our permanent repository.

Our permanent repository is then accessed by our iSight analytics product which is the one that actually goes out and builds the usage analytics, provides visibility into that data, allows you to slice and dice to answer a whole host of used cases and questions about what's hot, what's not, what's working, what's not, and so on.

That will generate recommendations about good things and bad things that are happening within your system.

Our third product is iGuard. iGuard is our active policy management tool. It will take the recommendations that come out of iSight and iSight analytics, and it can actually deploy them. In more than one case especially with warehouses, we've seen users take a tool like Microsoft Access and take a 1,000-column or a 5,000-column conformed dimension, and say select star, and bring down half a gigabyte of data when really all they needed was the salesman code, the quantity, and the amount.

But they do that because they may not understand the issues that are behind there. So, iGuard can be configured to put a policy into place that says, "If you're a regular user and you're accessing a major dimensioned table and you wished there was a select star." Instead of fulfilling that request, come back with a message that says, "Please identify the data elements that you want and your report will be run."

The three of them work hand in glove to first identify, then publish and visualize, and then third, provide adequate controls.

CI: Excellent, I can think of so many use cases. You've mentioned a few, but there are so many that come to mind. For example, a data warehouse that's growing and growing and growing and the people responsible for its maintenance have no idea whether or not they've got dead data in it.

What we thought as a typical use case, what we find in most organizations is that a huge percentage, and it varies, but more than 50 percent of the data in most data warehouses is either old, it's never been looked at, or it's been looked at once and that was six years ago and yet we keep stuffing the data into our data warehouses.

That's one particular use case where you can identify that data and say, "Look, put it into colder archive mechanisms than on your hot DBMS, right?

KC: Mm-hmm.

CI: What are some of the others?

KC: To follow up on that notion, we've seen that every CIO above Fortune 500 Company has an information life cycle management strategy. Very few of them are able to actually execute upon that strategy, because dormant data is not easy to find. That's one of the biggest use cases that we see. It's one of those used cases that there's a hard ROI that folks look at it and go...

CI: Very measurable ROI.

KC: Exactly.

Over two years, or over five years, if I find this much information, I can save this many dollars. I can avoid these costs, x, y, and z. Some other areas that are some really interesting use cases: when we've gone in and helped customers with a health check, they see there are all sorts of activities that are going on. We find that, over and over again, there are serum and marketing tools like SAS that are used that take very large sandboxes of data. They pull out millions of rows, thousands of columns. They normally start out early in the morning, and the analysts, they're oblivious to the processing needs of everybody else.

Well, one analyst is problematic.

Two, or three, or four them concurrently, you've brought a big data warehouse to its knees.

We've helped customers find situations like that. We've also helped customers find unlicensed products operating in their environment.

With one of our customers I remember what they said, "Well, we have 12 or 13 products that are licensed." We plugged in and we helped them, come back and said, "We found 63 different applications that are running." They were shocked. They said, "It can't be." Then they go, "Well, maybe it is true." We have some work to do there. And there are others. We found...Maybe the most interesting is from a use case perspective, is again looking at user behavior, and seeing that sometimes users are pulling down an inordinate amount of data.

If the average data consumption for a distinct user on a day is, let's say, two megabytes of data, we see two users that are pulling down half a gigabyte

of data. There's something that's unusual. There's something that's odd there.

At further investigation, we're able to see that these users were creating their own kind of personalized, down-stream, lovingly called 'rogue data-marts' where they pulled large amounts of information, millions of rows of information, some of it containing sensitive data, and putting it on unauthorized stores.

That's a huge problem as it relates to being able to follow the enterprise compliance and security directives. Maybe a final use case to talk about, and again, we could go on for hours on this, but would be when I'm trying to migrate an application from one environment to another, by being able to take that application, look at all of the activity that goes on inside of it—taking clusters of the sequel down to a more basic and abstract layer—and then be able to take that and test it in the new environment, we can provide customers with a really, very solid close approximation of how that application is going to behave in the new, more modern environment…So they can make the right decisions about what else can be there with it.

There are lots of different ways that we can look at that data. We've picked a couple of use cases from each of the three go-to-market approach.

CI: I think you've done a fine job! Alright, well let's go to deployment options because you do have several.

KC: Historically, we had been an enterprise software company where an organization would come in. We would work with them. They would license our software on a perpetual basis. They would use it and life was good.

What we found is that we can actually increase our market share and our customer base by adding in some additional go-to-market approaches. One of them is through engagements and assessments. Rather than buying our software outright, we rented along with some professional services for a short period of time to solve a specific problem.

It might be looking at dormancy. It might be one of the more interesting ones that rings true. New chief data officer comes in says, "Oh, there's a thousand databases in the footprint of my organization. What's in them?"

Who's using them? That usually causes some angst on the faces of a lot of folks, so we set up engagements that help us do discovery work in conjunction with our clients that have real business value.

The third area then besides perpetual license sales is managed services agreements. We're finding those to be really a very positive and popular approach in working with some of the big SI's who have long outsourcing relationships. We'll just now take that and add that into the bundle of services that they offer for a particular customer.

Those are the three major areas that we go to market.

CI: Let's end on an interesting note. That was to me your products have an incredibly compelling message, who wouldn't want that. Yet, there are challenges to getting IT shops to understand that what you're giving them is what they give to their own users. You're giving them BI. It's BI for the IT group, if you will.

And yet it's an uphill battle sometimes. Why is that?

KC: I think that our strongest users are the solutions architects, and the information architects, and sometimes the VP and directors of information management. Sometimes their budgets are tied up in infrastructure and VPs of infrastructure are not always as enlightened. That sometimes is a challenge for them to be able to secure funding.

I think that we're continuing to help them with ROI analysis for justification of these kinds of projects. It maybe the other areas. Sometimes we'll run into DBAs that are extremely protective of their environment, and rightfully so. They're the guardians. They're the vanguards. It's up to them.

CI: And they get blamed.

KC: And well, they get blamed. There, it usually involves educating them about what it is that we do and how we do it…taking them into the depth of our technology, and really providing them with assurances that we're not going to be blocking user connections, that we're not going to cause any harm, and that we're going to make their job actually even easier.

It's not as if they have to go out and learn a whole new discipline, but that they can learn and use our technologies very quickly. The analysis that we provide is really rather easy to understand and easy to work with.

CI: It's so critical, so critical to the overall sustainability.

KC: I would never go in to build a brand new data warehouse if I didn't have some type of data hygiene tool to understand whether my data is clean or not.

I wouldn't go in and try to build a second generation warehouse or do major migrations from other systems, and consolidate them into new big BI platforms without understanding what the workloads look like, how the users are using it, and who are the hidden users that don't come up during the interviews that occur.

The forensic evidence is really critical in order to make correct decisions.

CI: With that, we'll end.

KC: Beautiful.

CI: That's it for this edition of the BBBT podcast. Again, I'm Claudia Imhoff. It's been a great pleasure to speak with Kevin Courtney of Teleran today. Thanks so much, Kevin.

KC: Claudia, thanks so much. I've enjoyed this immensely.

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!