



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):	Roland Bullivant , Sales and Marketing Director Nick Porter , Technical 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 pleased to introduce my guests today. They are Roland Bullivant and Nick Porter. Roland is the sales and marketing director, and Nick is the technical director for Silwood Technology. Thanks to you both.

Roland Bullivant: It's great to be here. Thank you.

Nick Porter: Yeah, thanks very much. We've really enjoyed coming to Boulder. Lovely city.

CI: Thank you. We think it's pretty good as well.

Let me go with you, Roland. Tell me a little bit about Silwood Technology, a little of its history, perhaps, and some other information about the company.

RB: Thank you very much, Claudia. We're a niche, small UK-based company. We've been around for quite a long time now. We used to specialize in data modeling solutions, and moved very rapidly into being able to provide an insight into the metadata that underpins the data in critical enterprise applications for our customers and partners.

Where we really help organizations is when they're trying to figure out what exactly does their data mean to them in the terms of a data warehousing or a data integration project. We work with some of the largest organizations in the world. People like Boeing, Proctor & Gamble, your own department for Homeland Security, AMD, Hydro Test, mainly here in Australia, and a bunch of others.

Altogether, we have about 400 or 500 customers. We work through partners and also direct.



CI: Let me dive into that a little bit. Why is it so difficult to make sense of large packaged applications? We're talking about things like SAP, PeopleSoft, or Siebel. Nick, let me go to you for that answer.

NP: You've used the word "large," and that's part of the problem. An SAP system is nowadays in excess of 90,000 tables. Some of the other ones are a bit smaller, so things like PeopleSoft are around the 20,000 table mark. In addition to that, the table and column names in these databases are not very friendly and easy to use, and there are no relationship definitions, no primary and foreign key constraints in these databases.

You've got very large numbers of tables, not very friendly names, no relationships, so it's really hard to try and work out where is the important business information that you want, based upon that kind of architecture.

CI: That's the first question that people ask, right? "Where is the data?" "What is the data?" Maybe that's the first question they ask. In these massive systems that have 90-plus thousand or 20-plus thousand tables, that becomes an almost impossible task, doesn't it?

NP: Absolutely, yeah, and that's really what our market is. Our market is helping customers understand and, what we call "scope," the tables down from the tens of thousands into more manageable groups, because typically you are only really interested—say it's a BI project—you're probably only interested in 30 or 40 tables which are relevant business information.

CI: Out of thousands that you can choose from.

NP: Out of the thousands, absolutely.

CI: I like the tagline. You came up with it, or it was your slide, Roland, I don't know who came up with it, but it was, "The GPS for Packaged Applications," which I thought was brilliant. That's one that says it in a nutshell, doesn't it?

RB: Thank you.

CI: Roland, let me go back to you. If they don't have the Silwood SAFYR, how are companies doing it today?



RB: I think this is the big challenge that they have, is that without a decent tool to do this, they really struggle. A variety of mechanisms, I suppose. They might try to find and read documentation that they may have or may get, but...

CI: Yeah, good luck with that.

RB: Exactly. That's unlikely to be able to reflect any customizations that have been made to the system. They may ask technical specialists who, once they might be able to provide an answer probably don't know the context in which you've asked the question, so you might not get quite what you're looking for.

We have customers who use Google to search for SAP data models. Of course, there's some risks inherent in that, in whether they're going to get something that's relevant, or the right version, whatever.

We have customers who are using what they call "informed guesswork." They try a bit of hypothesis testing, going backwards and forwards. We also have customers who resort to copying and pasting lists of tables into spreadsheets and rekeying them and then trying to figure out from there, so it's a variety of very time-consuming manual drudgery that people use.

CI: That is error prone, without a doubt.

RB: That is very error prone. Humans are really good at thinking and imagination, but not particularly brilliant at repetition work, whereas computers are not that brilliant at imagination, but very, very good at doing the right thing over and over again.

There are some vendors who would purport to have the capabilities we offer, but most of them offer pure disconnectors into systems. There's no contextual information that they would be able to provide in the way that SAFYR does.

CI: Nick, back to you. Let's talk about the SAFYR approach. What exactly does it do to help this very complicated manually intensive and error-prone process?



NP: We talked about the fact that these systems have got very large numbers of tables. To get an understanding of that, you can't practically look at the database system catalog to get that information. A logical view of that information is stored in the application there—the SAP application layer, the JD Edwards application layer—they all do it slightly differently, but they store the metadata in their own proprietary environment. And that's the place we go to get a business understanding of the set of tables in the system.

We use this phrase, "Discover, Scope, Deliver" to describe the process we go through. The discovery is the reverse engineering of the metadata, and again, we're taking that from the application layer, not from the system catalog. We discover that by reverse engineering, and then we do the scoping process.

Whilst there are 90,000-plus tables in an SAP system, nobody wants that. Nobody wants to work with a data model of 90,000 tables. They want to be able to subset it down into the 20, 30 or 40 tables that are relevant to their particular requirement. That's what the product's about, is allowing the user to arrive at those subsets of tables.

Then we go into the delivery phase, where we can then take those subsets and export them into a range of tools, things like the ERwin modeling tool, the PowerDesigner modeling tool, and a range of other repository and ETA environments.

CI: We've mentioned SAP, we've mentioned a few others. What are the source systems, or the sources that SAFYR will work against?

NP: We can do any release SAP system, any ABAP-based SAP system, so SAP, SAP BW, SAP CRMs, SAP SRM, and in addition to that, we do a range of Oracle applications. There's PeopleSoft, JD Edwards OneWorld, Siebel, and then more recently, we've added Salesforce to that mix.

In addition to that, we have a capability we call ETL for metadata, and that allows us to very quickly get metadata out of any appropriately based metadata package and load it into our repository environment.



CI: That part, I think, is quite interesting as well. I think the key, though, is that it is just packaged applications.

NP: Absolutely, yeah.

CI: You're not going to go against a home-grown GL system or order entry system at this point.

NP: Yeah, because normally we won't find the kind of metadata we want in those environments. We really need to get relationship definitions and object definitions in order to provide value, to add value.

CI: Let's drill into it a little bit more, if you don't mind. Tell me what some of the main features are of SAFYR.

NP: We have two main ways to present the metadata in SAFYR.

One of those is that we present a list of all the tables that we find within the source environment, and that includes any of the customizations. We're not delivering a reference model, if you like, a static model. We are extracting the customized set of metadata from the source environment, and we allow users to browse the tables, and very importantly, the relationships. We can look at a table, and we can understand how that table is related to other tables within the system.

That's one way we've got of doing it. Another way is using what we call the application hierarchy, and that varies slightly by the packages that we do, but there we're looking at the data in the context of functionality, so in the case of a system like SAP, we can navigate through a hierarchy of SAP programs and components and look at how each of these components actually uses the data in the system.

CI: It's actually quite fascinating. One of the features that I saw in the demo that I thought was quite good is you also determine not-used tables, if you will. When someone customizes SAP, for example, typically they're doing an end run around a table that they don't want to use. They'll create their own table, or they'll modify it some way, shape, or form, which means that of the 90,000 tables, there may be quite a number of them that have zero rows, right?



NP: Yeah.

CI: We eliminate them by saying, "I want something that at least has one row of data," right?

NP: Yeah, exactly, and we can do that across all the packages that we support, including Salesforce.

CI: Very interesting little feature that you have there.

Roland, let me end with you. Let's talk about a few examples of your customers, and maybe some of the benefits that they got from using SAFYR.

RB: As I said earlier, we have a wide range of customers across the world. Let me start with a recent one, Hydro Tasmania in Australia are a major generator of hydropower and renewables in there. They've recently implemented SAP over a three-year project period, and replacing 40 or 50 legacy applications.

One of the challenges that their BI team was facing was the requirement to enhance and deliver new reports, dashboards, etc, to their business users. Having a new SAP system meant that they were struggling to understand it. They'd asked the SAP team, they'd asked SAP, they'd asked their systems integrator if they could have sight of the SAP data model and were told, "It doesn't exist."

After using a variety of methods for trying to find that metadata themselves, they ended up coming to us, and they subsequently purchased SAFYR. It's paid for itself within a couple of months from them, and according to Scott Delaney, who runs the team there, as well as supporting their Agile process and being able to deliver trusted data to the business, it's also resulted in a productivity gain of one full-time employee in his staff, and no backlog of reporting on, so they're able to keep up with what the customer's doing.

Another, slightly older customer would be RS Components, a UK-based electronics distributor, who have a very heavily customized SAP system. They have about 117,000 tables in their system, and until they started using SAFYR, they were consistently late with reporting and integration projects, consistently finding that this discovery, this source-data analysis phase, was



providing a real bottleneck to them delivering on time and on budget, and being able to deliver what the business needs.

They started using SAFYR. They use it with CA ERwin as a modeling tool, and since then, they've been able to, in their own words, gain an understanding of their SAP data that they previously had thought impossible. Again, they've now been able to deliver projects on time and to budget, so very good.

Another one, perhaps is Statoil Fuel & Retails. I've talked about SAP. This is a JD Edwards customer who migrated from SAP to JD Edwards, because they're trying to replicate a lot of that functionality. They have a very heavily customized JD Edwards system. They had a team delivering an operational data warehouse across Europe to a variety of countries, and a significant number of users.

They came to us because, again, the source-data discovery bottlenecked. It meant that they were unable to deliver according to time and budget, and deliver really what the business users needed. They used our product to help them understand the data model behind the JD Edwards system. It helped them to bring the project on plan and deliver the trusted data that the business needs.

CI: Such an incredibly compelling story, all of them. Your tool is just a compelling story that writes itself.

RB: Thank you very much.

CI: Unfortunately, we're out of time, though, so that's it for this addition of the BBBT podcast. Again, I'm Claudia Imhoff, and it's been a great pleasure to speak with Roland Bullivant and Nick Porter of Silwood Technology today. Thanks, again.

RB: Thank you very much.

NP: Thanks, Claudia. It's been a delight.



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!