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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Vendor:	**Progress Software**
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Host:	**Claudia Imhoff**, Founder, BBBT
Guest(s):	**Dion Picco**, General Manager of Progress Data Direct and **Sumit Sarkar**, Chief Data Evangelist
Run time:	**00:16:21**

Claudia:	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 and analytics 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 guests today. They are Dion Picco and Sumit Sarkar. Dion is the General Manager of Progress DataDirect, and Sumit is the Chief Data Evangelist, I love that title, for Progress Software. Welcome to you both.
Dion Picco:	Thank you, Claudia. Thanks for having us.
Sumit Sarkar:	Great to be in Boulder.
Claudia:	All right, Dion, let me start with you. If you don't mind, give me a quick overview of Progress Software's 30-year history.
Dion:	Progress has had a long history in data integration, database management, as well as application development. Certainly, the company has evolved over the last 30 years to be a leader in both of those areas. We are a public company, we're listed on the NASDAQ, with nearly 2,000 employees globally, and over 140,000 companies I'm proud to call our customers across over 140 countries.
	Huge customer base, ISVs as well as direct enterprises, and again, really focused on application development and data integration.
Claudia:	Who uses your software?
Dion:	I'll focus on the Progress DataDirect business units specifically here, because I know we've been talking about data so much today. We're very proud that six of the nine leaders in the Gartner Magic Quadrant for BI use Progress DataDirect. You may not know about

us, we're under the hood, we're fully white labeled, but we're a core part of those applications.

Companies like MicroStrategy, for example, a premier BI player, uses DataDirect under the hood for their connectivity. I could also call out many other companies -- Board International, a great startup BI Vendor in the UK, using us for hybrid connectivity from cloud to on premise data.

Companies like NetSuite, for example, that want to give their customers the flexibility to use their favorite BI tools. They've partnered with us to make sure their connectivity is an open standard, and easily consumable by all of their customers, no matter what tool it is they want to use.

Claudia: It was a remarkably broad spectrum of companies. It wasn't just BI companies, or database companies. SIs, ISVs, you've got just about everybody.

Dion: Yeah, BI companies, data integration companies, data prep vendors, which are very hot today, SaaS application partners. You name it, we have partners all across the world, and we also sell direct to enterprises. Some of the largest financial institutions, retailers, you name it, have been customers of DataDirect, and I'm very proud to work with many of them.

We have a unique view, across the industry, certainly from a BI perspective, in the sense that we get to see what our partners are wanting to do, as well as what the enterprises themselves are demanding of our partners.

Claudia: You should be proud of it.

Sumit: In addition to some of the customers Dion mentioned, we also have some really exciting technology partnerships with different companies. We've got things with Marketo, Oracle Service Cloud, Tableau, different vendors will leverage our ecosystem of connectivity to make their customers successful as well.

We have several different strategies on getting our connectivity out to different users.

Claudia: All right. Let me continue with you, Sumit, if you don't mind, a little bit about how it works.

Sumit: There are our data connectivity components -- they're built against those leading industry standards. A lot of these are very popular in the BI space. You've got the things like ODBC, JDBC, OData, the emerging standard of the web friendly world and hybrid connectivity.

We build software to these different interfaces and standards, and we build that in a way that's robust and enterprise ready. We focus on performance, we focus on breadth of connectivity, and we do all this in a lightweight package so that it's also friendly to deploy in other applications.

At the end of the day, we need an application to leverage our connectivity. They are components that you embed with your software, or if you're an end user, you would install it to use in plug-and-play.

Claudia: What about your market? How do you market to your customers?

Sumit: Marketing to people who are looking for data connectivity, we have two channels we go after. Dion mentioned primary channels -- we have direct end-users and organizations, financial services companies, healthcare organizations, governmental entities. They look for certain use cases where they have a project, and it's deficient in connectivity. Whether it's too slow, there are missing security requirements, maybe they need cross-realm Kerberos software authentication. Whatever requirement they're missing, they consolidate that data connectivity, and they come to us directly.

Then there's that other channel of ISVs. We've got software companies we target, we work with. We've got giants to unicorns, to startups, so we get the whole gamut of software companies we

are looking to market to. We want to be part of their success early on, so we have fantastic partnerships.

As a company, in Progress, that's what we were fantastic at – partnering with technology companies and organizations. We have 350+ ISVs we partner with today, plus about 10,000+ direct end users.

Claudia: Wow, astounding. As an example of how you guys work, and the benefit that you bring, can you talk a little bit about the firewall that you have?

Sumit: What we've done is, with this move to hybrid connectivity, you have a lot more data sources that are either on the cloud or on premise, and you have applications on cloud or on premise. Almost every time, we talk to people with different shows, and it always seems to be in the converse. It's never on the same side.

We've introduced the DataDirect cloud service for hybrid connectivity, it's a connectivity service for business intelligence, and various use cases. You can connect directly, through a firewall, over HTTPS. You can issue SQL statements over HTTPS.

It's a really amazing technology to provide to software vendors and end-users challenged with this migration to the cloud. We call it disrupting that disruption from these technologies.

Claudia: Great tagline. What I like about it is that it's a single interface, right? The vendors that are trying to go back and forth don't have to go through multiple things. They go to you.

Sumit: Right. One code base, one API, that's amazing value. You really don't want to build a whole bunch of different connectors to different types of data sources. Maybe you have one around the firewall, one is on premise, one is through TCP, one is through HTTPS.

There's just too much to handle. We have 200 people who do that for you. Don't reinvent the wheel; we'll do it for you.

Dion: I think the thing to add there, as well, is if you're a software vendor, you need to connect, you have a SaaS BI tool as an example, and you need to connect back to this on premise data. Do you need to go and convince every CIO, or every enterprise that you need to open up a hole in your firewall, that you need to do some network configuration before you can adopt my application?

That would be terrible. Talk about slowing down your sales cycle. The ability to deal with the firewall that's in place today, in a very friendly but secure way is really what ISVs need. That's how they sell quickly. That's how they make IT comfortable, and ultimately how they win.

Claudia: Let's stick with the security question a little bit longer, because we actually had a question about that. Talk to me a little bit about your company's stance on security, and what your products have for security.

Dion: Let me just start by saying, we have a maniacal focus on security. The reason is pretty simple. If we were to go out, and because of some error in our software, for example, or some vulnerability, an enterprise got hacked, that would be terrible.

What's far worse is that, if we had a vulnerability in our software, and our key ISVs, all of their customers got hacked, multiply the pain by 1,000. It would be a terrible situation for us. Our partners trust us. They white label our components, they embed it into our application, so they trust that we're going to do the right things from a security perspective, and also make their life easier from a security perspective.

We're really focused on that. We make sure that our software integrates with, no matter what your security system is, will integrate very seamlessly, and hopefully, and past history has shown, we've always done it in a very secure way. It takes so much of the pain from an ISV out of the picture.

They just trust that we're going to do it right, so we stay on top of all those vulnerabilities. Things like Poodle, or LogJam, or more recently Drown, key OpenSSL vulnerabilities, we're there from day one, alerting them, giving them work around, patching our software, getting the new versions ASAP so that their customers are no longer exposed to vulnerabilities like that.

We plug in across platforms. We give them a single sign-on environment. We give them a single API to program against, and we stay on top of all known vulnerabilities so that they don't have to. That's the reason why they trust us.

Claudia: That's brilliant. Sumit let me go back to you then. The company has had a long heritage with open standards and APIs. Why are these important – these open standards and so forth – and what are the benefits from them?

Sumit: Open standards is core to the data connectivity business. We have the heritage in terms of: we co-founded the ODBC specification; we've very active in the JDBC expert groups to bring new things to the specifications to meet the demands of today's intelligence. We're also members on different communities, and ansi-SQL and OData technical standards.

It's really important to our business, and we consider ourselves a vendor-neutral vendor. We are all about open standards, getting data into everybody's hands, everybody's application.

These open standards really facilitate that in a way that organizations and software can really work out of the box. Those standards are all about interoperability. Coming back to Dion's comment about the one code base, I noticed that big trend with citizen BI, citizen integration, citizen development, you really can't do that without a standard.

You need a single code base so that you can let your users point, and click, and drag, and drop their way to intelligence. It's more

democratizing BI through data connectivity. It's core to our strategy, and our products.

Claudia: It certainly is a huge benefit. You've got one standard, or perhaps two or three standards, but at least a small number that you have to deal with, rather than hundreds. If you get more than 10 standards, the question becomes, "Do you even have a standard?"

Sumit: That's a great point. We do focus. I think our participation in the standards, and working with our technology partners really helps to drive you and pick which one's going to win, and then everybody can sort through the noise and build their applications.

Claudia: Dion, let me go back to you. Why have you focused so much of the company's attention on software-as-a-service connectivity?

Dion: As lines of business take more control of the spending, as they start to really dictate the technology selection, as well as really the rise of the cloud, as we all know, what's happened is that the number of SaaS applications deployed is at a number that I've certainly never seen, from a number of applications perspective.

20 years ago, when I was doing integration, you would see companies that would standardize on Oracle. Now, it's all best-of-breed, across the entire ecosystem, or across the entire company, quite honestly -- hundreds of SaaS applications being in use at a company.

That creates tremendous integration challenges for, certainly, the IT department that are faced with a shrinking budget. While the line of business is growing, and they're making their choices, IT ultimately has to integrate this at some level, and they have more applications than ever.

The thing about these SaaS applications is they all have proprietary interfaces. Each and every one you need to integrate requires you to do some element of custom coding. Not only do they have proprietary interfaces, they have proprietary security mechanisms, they have proprietary qualities of service.

Some are really great. You take something like the SalesForce API, it's a fantastic API, but it doesn't at all resemble your favorite marketing automation platform. We've seen with these, they return incomplete data sets, they do error handling in a very different way. You may need to batch up requests in a certain way, to get the performance you need. They have bulk APIs that are not documented. That becomes a tremendous pain for an IT organization.

For us, we think we can really bring tremendous value by applying these open standards to the needs of SaaS-based integration, which has become so prolific across every enterprise these days.

To us, one of the key missions that we have moving forward is to really bring harmony to that integration. Bring harmony to the BI analytics you need to do against that data.

Claudia: I feel a kumbaya moment coming on.

Sumit: In addition to SaaS activity, which is a very popular topic, you did ask, what about Oracle challenges too. We just take one of our core drivers, before SaaS was one of the relational drivers, like Oracle and SQL server. We're doing a lot of things over the wire.

We're making high performance over the wire. We're able to support Oracle 8I, 9I, 10G, 11G, 12C, all with a single connector. We're able to support advanced security features, TAF, your failover and transparent application failover. We're able to support seamless bulk load with all SQL loaders.

The amount of things we're able to do over the wire, with relational sources, we see that with SaaS sources as well. That's where our heritage comes from. When you're talking to Oracle, you get all the advanced features at the connectivity level. The same with SQL server, the same with Sybase, and the other relational sources, big data sources as well, in addition to the SaaS.

Claudia: That form of SaaS. All right, last question to you, Dion. What does the future hold for Progress?

Dion: Progress is at this interesting point. Our application development, as well as our data integration, data connectivity background, really positions us well for the future of digital transformation. So many companies are trying to reinvent how they do business with customers, how they interact with customers, what the customer journey looks like across that.

That's where Progress is really position today. Our portfolio brings together the apps that people are interacting with, whether it's on desktop, mobile, in the cloud. We make it easy for them to build those types of applications, but also recognize that no application exists as an island anymore.

Applications are more integrated than ever before, and more integrated with a bigger variety of applications than ever before. Our data connectivity business brings, again I'll use the word harmony, brings an element of harmony to that, as well.

When companies are starting to undertake a digital transformation, and engaging with their customers in a new way, with new types of applications, and new requirements on integration, that's how Progress is positioned. I think we're well positioned to be a leader in that new era of digital transformation.

Claudia: I agree. I think you're in a marvelous position. I was very impressed with your company, and with your technology, and where you are in the market. Well done.

Unfortunately, we're out of time. 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 Dion Picco and Sumit Sarkar of Progress Software today. Thanks for speaking with me.

Dion: Thank you for having us. It's been great.

Sumit: Our pleasure.

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!