



BBBT Podcast Transcript



About the BBT

The Boulder Business Intelligence Brain Trust, or BBT, 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 BBT provides a variety of services, centered around vendor presentations.

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Robin Davies, Director of Sales
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Claudia Imhoff: Hello and welcome to this edition of the Boulder BI Brain Trust, or the BBT. 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 BBT podcasts are produced by my company, Intelligent Solutions.

I'm Claudia Imhoff and I'm pleased to introduce my guest today. They are Dean Yao and Robin Davies. Dean is the Director of Marketing and Robin is the Director of Sales for Jinfonet. So, welcome to both of you!

Dean Yao: Thanks, Claudia. Thanks for having us.

Robin Davies: Hi, everyone.

CI: All right, well let's start with you, Dean. Jinfonet is not a new company, in fact, I was rather surprised to hear that it was founded in 1998. It's got a good history to it. So, why don't you give me a little bit of that history?

DY: Sure, absolutely. Yes, we were founded in 1998. We've been around quite a while, 15 years. We started off doing a lot of work with embedded solutions. Our products focused a lot on reporting, specifically for embedded solutions -- working with customers to integrate our reporting applications into their own applications.

Product wise that was our focus early on. Since then, we've been branching out to more of the visualization type of technologies. Ad Hoc reporting, working with large, different set of data sources, and moving into more things with our visual analysis features, and even big data support with our new upcoming version of JReport 12.

Our team is a quite a large team. We have a couple of development groups out in different locations in China, and we're spread across the globe. Geographically, we have sales and marketing across the United States and some resellers in Asia Pacific, as well as, AMEA.



CI: All right, well let's talk a little bit about your target market here. Who exactly do you see using the Jinfonet products?

DY: That's a great question. Our core target market are SMBs, small and medium sized businesses, and the departments of enterprises. We do focus, also, and sell to starts-ups, as well as, large enterprises, but I would say our sweet spot is in SMB and enterprise departments. We focus a lot of our solutions at their internal- and external-facing applications. Internal applications for their internal users, and external facing applications that really require high degree of scalability and stability. These are folks such as VISA and HSVC, which have very large scale deployments.

In terms of users, we focused in the past, and also presently, on BI developers and the technical managers, more so from moving now and into the future. We're focusing really on the business users, as well. These are folks that are wanting to use our ad hoc capabilities, our visualized dashboards, our interactivity of visualization. Of course, a lot of the different new types of data source that we're providing access to big data, as well as, cloud data storage.

RD: I would just like to add to that, that the OEM market is also very important to us. We actually have a large number of organizations who embed JReports and OEM them, such as IBM, EMC. That's certainly a big portion of what we do. By the very nature of the way the product is designed to be embedded into applications, that really makes sense.

CI: Yeah. Actually, I was really blown away by the percentages somewhat. 63 percent of your customers are OEM customers, right?

RD: Yeah, that's right. It's a big focus for us.

CI: Yeah, and a smart move, I think. You are in a relatively crowded space. I mean there are a lot of the traditional BI vendors. Open source, you mentioned, yes, there are certainly a lot of those vendors, as well. As well as the new comers. The folks that are not part of a larger company but actually kind of small and not open source. You mentioned a few of the highlights that differentiate your technology from these other vendors. Dean, I'm going to ask you to go over that a little bit. What do you see as some of these differentiators?



DY: Right, absolutely. One of our differentiators have to do with the guts of what we're doing with JReport, in terms of scalability and performance. Just to give a quick landscape overview, we have a lot of different categories of BI products to choose from. The traditional BI platforms, often times they are really complex and cumbersome, and hard to use, difficult to learn, and also carry a high cost. They're also somewhat hard to embed into your own application.

On the other side you have the open source tools, which are easy to embed, because you have the full source code. They sometimes lack in the features set, in terms of security and interactivity, maybe ad hoc reporting is missing. Building those complex reports with open source tools is sometimes very difficult. Where we land is in between the two.

I mentioned scalability and performance, that's definitely an area we've been working hard at. We've been providing very scalable and performant products for a while now. This is evidenced in our JReport engine, as well as our clustering technologies, where we can actually allow the cluster nodes to scale up and also prevent any single points of failure.

We're very adept at embedding. We've been embedding, as I mentioned, since the very beginning of the company, as well as concentrating fully on ease of use. Our products are very easy to, not only install, but to configure, tweak, and tune and also to use by the end users, whether they're system administrators or power users or port developers, or even the end users themselves.

CI: Well, we'll get into the ease of use a little bit more in this next question because you do focus a lot on self service BI. Let me start with the three areas that you focus on. You separate your products into integration products, analysis products, and delivery of information. Let's take these one at a time.

You have the integration. First of all, you need to define what you mean by integration and how you handle that problem. Let's start there.

DY: OK. Great. You're right. The first step solution is integration. This is really achieved with our embed-ability. The product which really enables this is



JReport Server. What we mean by integration are really two aspects -- data integration as well as application integration. With application integration, we have, I mentioned before, we have been embedding in other corporations' applications for quite a while. This is really achieve through our extensive API sets with the ability that we can package JReport Server into ER, EAR, and War files. We're written entirely in Java. We're really easy to embed in Java, and even non-Java, such as a .net environments. Really, the application integration is something that we've been focusing on from the very beginning.

As for the data integration side, we can connect to any data source that has standard connectors, like JDBC or ODBC, as well as customized data source connectors. You can actually connect to one or more data sources at any given time for the same report or dashboard. We're even working on new types of data supports for big data data sources, as well as cloud data sources, such as Amazon and MongoDB.

CI: Again, it's not data integration in the sense of ETL. It's connection to the data sources, themselves.

DY: Correct, that is a correct statement.

CI: Well, let's turn to analysis, then. Like I said, you guys are really talking up self service BI quite a bit. Why don't you tell me a little bit about how you support the self service BI, and I have some other questions in this area. We'll continue on with it.

DY: OK, great. Self service visibility is very important. The overall theme here is to allow any user to perform any work that they need to be done on their own. Whether this is a system administrator, a report designer, a power user, or even an end user. Anyone who needs to do their own work, should be empowered to. An end user, if they need to create or modify reports in dashboards, they should be able to do without having to go bother IT or a system administrator to give them the right accesses or create the components of the reports. The end user should be able to do that themselves.

Several ways that we enable ad hoc reporting is through our UI, our report wizard, which lets you do one click interactions, step by step -- walk you



through the creation of a report and to do modification of that report. We have new features such as visual analysis which lets you design as you go, view your data as you go. This is a really interactive way for you to see the data as you manipulate the design and the look and feel of it.

CI: All righty. One of the things that always comes up with self service is of course governance of the assets that they're using and, of course, the security of those assets, as well. How do you go about supporting governance and security in this environment?

DY: Security has always been top of mind for us. The reports themselves, as well as the JReport server. We've been working on security since the beginning. In terms of governance and adhering to corporate standards, or the policies that the corporation has, we're able to have users, in this case probably system administrators or report developers, design the right kind of look and feel for their template. The right kind of data access to put up templates for end users and other types of business users to just grab the template, which has been pre-approved. The access to specific data sources has been pre-approved. The design and everything has been pre-approved, so that they can just grab those templates and begin either creating reports and later modifying those reports so that everything is in strict adherence to whatever policies that the corporation has laid out.

CI: All right. Another area that you focus on, a great deal of your effort, is visualization. That seems to be something that the company has really spent a fair amount of time on. Why don't you talk about that just a little bit, and how that helps not just the ease of use, but also the ability to consume the information, especially if we bring in big data or something like that?

DY: Right, absolutely. Visualization is a pretty general term, and I'll talk about what we mean by visualization. What we're trying to achieve here is that companies have massive amounts of data, and visualization is a great way to make more sense out of that data in order for you to be able to make quick decisions by just looking at a quick snapshot of that data, or even drilling down and digging deeper into that data. All this is done through visualization, and the way we enable visualization is through



several of our products and features, JDashboard being one of them. This is a product we introduced a few years ago. JDashboard really lets you be able to customize not only the look and feel, but the way you interact with your data through different types of mechanisms. With JDashboard, you can simply drag and drop components from a component library to a blank canvas and lay out your visualized components in that fashion.

These components could be anything from charts, we have a lot of different chart types, tables other than cross tabs, even interactive components such as filter components, drill down components. We provide the interactivity to slice and dice your data. Pivots, we provide the ability to have localized parameters or have globalized parameters and even export those out to either static, such as PDF, or interactive formats, such as Excel, for instance. Excel is a very popular format to export the data out into. It's not just an image of the data, it's actually the data themselves with the table, and you can actually modify that later on.

Visualization is extremely important, and again, one of the new features, we continue to push the boundary of visualization with a new feature called visual analysis, which we're introducing in our next upcoming version, JReport 12, which really lets you extend your visualized capability, so that you can view your data as you design it. You don't have to first design it, then view, you can do it all together simultaneously.

CI: OK. Quickly, delivery's the third leg of the stool there. What's supported? I know you have a mobile delivery as well. Why don't we talk very briefly about the web delivery that you have?

DY: Sure. For web, delivery we offer reports in two main categories, page reports, which are your traditional tabular-structured reports, and web reports, which are your much more interactive reports, that you can slice and dice, filter, and do all the interactive features on those types of reports. Web, of course, is a very common way to consume this data, and we have a JReport engine, that's high powered that produces a high volume of on demand and scheduled reports.



You mentioned mobile devices, that's a new area. We released a mobile app that's available for free in the Apple app store, that lets you view dashboards that you create with JDashboards, and view and interact with them on your mobile device, whether it's an iPad or iPhone or an iPod Touch. A lot of new ways to consume your data.

CI: All righty. Robin, let me bring you into the conversation. Boy, you have a large number of customers, you've got about 1,000, and they seem to be pretty happy with your products. You mentioned that you have a 94 percent retention rate, which is remarkable. What do you attribute this to?

RD: Yes, that's definitely something that we're very proud of, something that we've done a great job of being able to maintain, and we'll look to do that in the future. I think the main thing is really the quality of our people, especially in our support and services group. When people become a customer, they really take the time to get to understand what people are doing with the product to be able to support them. Because any time something like a BI tool is introduced into an organization, the better the service and the support that you can receive. I think it really increases the chance of success with that product.

I think that's the main thing, but also the quality of the product. As we talked about, we've been doing this for a long time and we've got some big customers who are really pushing us to keep making the product better and better. That's resulted in a really high quality and stable product.

CI: Of course, Version 12 is coming out, what, at the end of this month, I believe.

DY: Yes. Version 12 is actually coming out this quarter, fairly soon.

CI: All right, Robin, let me go back to you. If you don't mind, you mentioned a couple of your customers. Why don't you go over those fairly quickly? I thought they were quite good and a very interesting set.

RD: Yes, I can give you three interesting examples.



One in the financial space that we're very proud of is Visa. They've been a customer of ours for a long time, actually, about nine years right now. We're in several applications over there, one of the main ones is a Visa small business application. Essentially, if you're a small business you walk into one of their member banks and open a credit card account. Basically, the statements that are being served, they're sort of static weekly, monthly spending statements. Also some of the online statements that you receive are all actually powered by JReport. Obviously, it's all completely rebranded. That's something that's really testament to their stability and of course the scalability of JReport, because the usage there is sort of 1,200 different commercial companies using Visa's product with each company having over 1,000,000 cardholders running reports. Yes, it really shows the scalability.

On the OEM side of things, IBM is one of our customers, and they're actually embedding JReport in five different products. Obviously, despite owning a BI tool themselves, they really see the value in the ability to embed JReport seamlessly into these different applications. Of course, we make it very easy for them to rebrand so that everything could be delivered with their own look and feel.

Another interesting customer that we've got is Bosch. We actually work with Bosch Healthcare. They have a tele-health product that's actually called the Health Buddy Management Program, where basically it's a remote monitoring system for a patient. If someone had been through a surgery, the doctors can actually remotely monitor them from their own homes or from the patients' homes rather than having to keep calling the patient back into the health facility. JReport actually provides all the reports for that system. When a doctor is making decisions based on blood pressure readings or various other metrics, that the patient may have submitted through the system remotely, they're looking through the reports that are powered by JReport to be able to make all those decisions as to whether that patient needs to come back in. You can imagine the reliability that's required for that kind of system, and we're really proud that JReport is being used in something important.



CI: All right. In the few seconds that we have left, I thought your case studies were wonderful. You also have several competitive advantages, I guess, with your product. In just a few seconds, why don't you go over a few of those?

RD: Yeah. Sure. We're pretty clear why we went against our competition. I think I've talked before about how the product is highly scalable. It's really good quality and very stable. I mean, that's proven in some of the customers that I just talked about. I also mentioned before our really good retention rate, which I attribute to our service and support team. The team, they are very experienced and knowledgeable, very long tenured. I'm sure it's very unusual that we have an average tenure in the support and services team of over nine years, very experienced people.

We also have a low total cost of ownership, particularly when we're competing against some of the commercial open source organizations that may offer subscription-based pricing. We also have very flexible pricing when we work with our OEM partners, we can be very flexible in the way we do business with them.

As we've talked about, we have a very forward thinking road map. Some of the stuff that we may be doing in the future are really pushing the data visualization envelope and increasing the usability in the different ways that our product can be delivered.

CI: Yeah, I think you have a very bright future. I'm very excited about it. Unfortunately, we are out of time. That's it for this edition of "Boulder BI Brain Trust Podcast." Again, I'm Claudia Imhoff. It's been a great pleasure to speak with Dean Yao and Robin Davies of Jinfonet Today. Thanks to both of you.

DY: Thank you very much, Claudia. It's been fun.

RD: Yeah, thanks very much. Much appreciated.