



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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| Vendor: | Information Builders |
| Date recorded: | July 12, 2013 |
| Host: | Claudia Imhoff , President, BBT |
| Guest(s): | Michael Corcoran , Executive VP & CMO |
| Run time: | 00:16:45 |
| Audio link: | Information Builders |
| Transcript: | [See next page] |
| Transcribed By: | CastingWords |



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.

CI: I'm Claudia Imhoff, and I'm pleased to introduce my guest today. He is Michael Corcoran. Michael is the Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer for Information Builders. Welcome, Michael.

Michael Corcoran: Thank you, Claudia. Always a pleasure.

CI: It's great having you here. I really have enjoyed hearing all about Information Builders. Let's start off with a quick overview of the company, just in case somebody doesn't know about your company.

MC: Thanks. We're focused on delivering software products that help customers solve three problems -- the integration of data, then fixing the integrity of the data, and then delivering that as intelligence and information to people on a broad scale. We call it the three I's -- integration, integrity, intelligence products. With that, we offer full service behind those products to make sure people can implement. We have services. We have partners. We have education and whatnot. A full service company.

CI: You also have remarkable customer studies. I was blown away by many of them. If you could, if you don't mind, just talk about a few of these.

MC: We focus primarily on not just providing software but helping customers solve real problems. We take a very consultative approach. We typically won't even engage with an organization unless we hear about a certain project or problem or something they're trying to do that's going to have a real benefit and real users involved. We do a really good job of getting them, once they get to completion and success on those projects, to work with us and document them.



We have 250 of those in production on our current website. I have another 50 ready to go up by the end of the year that we're working on. We just videotaped 20 customers at our user conference talking about the kinds of solutions and applications they've solved. It's part of the relationship. It's part of the focus there.

Ford Motor Company solved some really interesting problems with their service partners and warranty costs. Royal Bank helps customers reconstruct bankbooks instantaneously online. There's a lot of interesting ways that these organizations have changed their business and their business models through information.

CI: One that caught my eye, and I thought it was just incredible, is the City of Richmond. The law enforcement analytics that you've put together for them is a remarkable success story. Talk about that.

MC: Yeah. They were the first we worked with in that kind of model. There have been many others. North Carolina, Raleigh, they've done some really interesting things, and the rest of them. The premise is typically always the same, "How can you take something like predictive analytics, in some cases the search capabilities, and put that right into the patrol car?" For people who are trying to prevent crime, the word "prevention" is a strong word. Let's try to prevent it before it occurs. Being in the right place is parcel to making that happen.

If you look at the data -- historical trends, arrests, and crime rates -- what are the other elements tied to them? Weather has an impact on crime. Location has an impact on crime. Events have an impact. There are many elements.

When you can bring all of those elements together and model them, and then put that into a usable form without training, where a police officer... If someone can be told where to go, and they can see on a map where to be, based on a current crime spree or something that we've learned about from years of history, it's really powerful.

CI: What was interesting to me was the success of, at least, the City of Richmond. I had no idea how crime-ridden it actually was.



MC: They won major awards for the results that they had back when they started the process. They've received great kudos for it. They had great results. We're seeing the same results pretty much across the board. In fighting crime, at first glance, it sounds like science fiction, but it's really a practical and a pragmatic approach with the technology.

CI: Let me mention one other thing about your customers that I found rather remarkable. You have somewhere around a 98 percent customer satisfaction, which is unbelievable in our business. That's astoundingly high. What do you attribute that to?

MC: Right at the get go, when we engage with an organization, we're very pragmatic about what we are capable of doing. We don't take things outside of our scope unless somebody else who has that ability can do that with us, maybe a major systems integrative partner or someone like that. We typically know what we're great at and what we're good at. We don't try to go beyond that scope. Then we manage the process. We're privately held. Our cost of sale and our cost of operation is much higher than other companies, but we were able to maintain profitability. The result is a customer service philosophy and a handholding approach that's really unlike anything else in the market.

CI: It's that, and it's also the loyalty of your customers. You've been in business for, what, 38 years?

MC: 38 years, this year.

CI: You have customers that you've had for 38 years.

MC: There's a few of them that have been around 38 years. There are some big name companies who just joined us this past year, and then more that will join us this year, a few that have just joined us this week. We're excited by that. If we do a good job with communication and staying involved in what they're trying to do, there's always ongoing projects and opportunities. The more that they use that initial software buy -- it's not like they have to buy new software each time, because we give unlimited user licenses in many cases -- they'll constantly get more value out of an initial investment. Then maybe they'll just add some services to help them



build new projects. It's been very successful to grow the usage within those companies.

CI: It has indeed. Let's also turn our attention to something else. You had a slide up that said, "Everyone makes decisions." I wholeheartedly agree with you. From the business analyst to the executive, to the customer service rep that's on the phone with the customer, they're all making decisions that impact the profitability of the organization, its reputation, its sales and so forth and so on. One of the things that started was this discussion, though, of the value chain, if you will, of analytics. Many companies, rightfully so, focused at first on just gathering the data into some kind of enterprise data warehouse and doing strategic or perhaps tactical types of analytics. Comparative, how did we do this week versus last week, and so forth.

The real value, to me, though, is not so much that simple reporting or simple comparative types of analytics. It really is getting into the more sophisticated forms of analytics -- predictive analytics, real time analytics, operational analytics. It is that continuum. You don't stop at just reporting. You've got to keep pushing and moving forward into these other areas of analytics.

Why don't you describe a little bit about where Information Builders plays in this value chain?

MC: We've long been a big believer of this philosophy. How can we extend and integrate what's going on in the back office with the specialized analytics, the people who really do the hard modeling and crunching and the work that they do for management? As well as, how do they integrate that more tightly with management, with their dashboards and iPad apps and whatever they use? How do you also now bring it down to the newer communities. Those are the operational employees, who years ago probably feared technology, wouldn't want to touch a computer on their desk, but today they feel very differently. Because of the consumer devices they have, they're comfortable with technology, and they demand it at work.



If you can align those people, and especially embed some of the more complex capabilities, if you can simplify them down and make them consumable in these operational applications for them, the value potential, like in that police car or in that delivery truck or out in the sales rep's hands or the field technician providing support, all of them can play in this role.

When you can provide comparative metrics down there, we see people change behavior in companies. You're starting to get people performing the way management really does want them to perform. There is a strong alignment there. But why stop there? Go outside the firewall. Take it to your customers.

Our mission has been, I think for the last 10, 15 years, we've made everybody better informed with the largest deployments of BI. Now you bring analytics into the mix. How do we take things like visualization, predictive, and search, and make them more consumable to more people? Certainly tools for the back office analyst, but how do you make those even consumable to the less technical people? That's the opportunity here.

CI: Yeah. It really is. The next slide, or one shortly thereafter, had a lot of the challenges on it that we've all faced over the years. For example, from the business side, some of the inhibitors, if you will, are things like the culture of the business, the leadership of the business, and even the politics inside of it. Some of the technological inhibitors have been things like the access to data. How do I even get access to that data? Do I trust the data that I'm getting access to? Even more important, perhaps, is the user adoption. How do I make these analytics consumable, not just easy to use, but easy to understand?

How does Information Builders go about helping to break down these inhibitors?

MC: The interesting thing, Claudia, is that they're all related. If you have people using too many different ways of doing things for political reasons, or they select different kinds of tools in different business units chances are that at the end of the month, people are going into the boardroom with



different answers to the same questions across the company. It happens all the time. I had a customer, the CIO of Coty Fragrances who said it best. He said, "I really want to be out of the business of having these people spend two weeks gathering data and trying to make it useful in the boardroom, only to have them produce erroneous information or a lot of discrepancy, and then have them all go back for three more weeks to try to figure out what went wrong."

CI: If companies would only measure how much loss in productivity they have through reconciliation, it would pay for BI systems.

MC: We did an independent survey a few years back and found that, in marketing, people were spending up to four hours a day just getting data, just gathering their data and trying to make sense of it.

CI: Half a day.

MC: Half a day.

CI: Every day. Wow.

MC: Amazing.

CI: For Information Builders, then, your three I's are solving many of these problems. Now, some of them, the leadership and the culture, we're going to have to worry about that a little bit. But certainly from a technological standpoint, the access to the data and the trust of the data and so forth, the adoption, you're able to solve many of those.

MC: There are business inhibitors and technology inhibitors. We've focused on the technology inhibitors. We're counting on folks like the analyst community, the independent consultant community, and the large research firms to help guide organizations on the strategic, getting management involved, getting their buy in, getting alignment in management. I don't think the culture is such a problem anymore. I think the users really are demanding. There's a lot more demand than fear of information now. I think that problem has gone away.

Our focus, though, is, how do we make that information accessible to people, everyone, at the right latency for everyone? How do we make



the information accurate and consistent? That's where the trust comes in. Then how do we get the adoption so that all these different kinds of people in an organization, even outside the organization who need it? How do we get them to be productive with it in a way that's comfortable for them?

The delivery mechanisms and requirements have really expanded for different kinds of users. You can't give the same tool to everyone. That's where this has failed for a lot of people. That creates shelf-ware, expensive shelf-ware.

CI: Let's talk about your technology stack a little bit more in a little more detail. Again, the three I's, starting at the bottom with the integrate, and go from there.

MC: Our iWay platform gives us two of the I's. It gives us the integration. It gives us access. We have native integration adapters to not just all the data sources but also all the application sources, document formats, and different transaction streams. Virtually any source and any form of data, we can incorporate into the model. We can model it, transform it on the fly in real time or in batch, in ETL mode. Or we can deal with data in place in lots of ways and just prepare it a little bit better.

We can apply the data integrity products that iWay provides, the data quality fixes, and even create a master data environment with the new platform, to make sure that the data is accurate and consistent across definitions, across the business units.

Lastly, as we layer on top the WebFOCUS platform. It's all the same architecture. It's all the same core technology base. The WebFOCUS is the pretty pictures. It's the dashboards and the mobile interfaces and all the things that allow you to deliver.

We've really gone beyond the strengths we've had years ago of reporting and dashboards and Microsoft outputs, Excel, PowerPoints, et cetera, to go into embedding some of the more predictive, some more of the advanced analytics, advanced visualization, location intelligence. We were one of the first to adopt that into the mix with mapping. It goes very,



very broad. Now you've got social media intelligence and all kinds of factors in there text analytics and whatnot.

CI: Yeah, a very smooth, very full offering of all the solutions.

MC: Very integrated too.

CI: Very integrated.

MC: That's the challenging part sometimes, but it's all very integrated.

CI: It is, indeed. All right, last question. Just 30 seconds, if you don't mind.

MC: Sure.

CI: Tell me a little bit about where Information Builders is going to go from here.

MC: In some cases, we packaged up applications in some industries. In the MDM space, we created these Omni products. We started in healthcare and retail. Those have been dramatically successful. Organizations who wouldn't know what to do with MDM tooling and architecture can buy a packaged solution. That's going to be an ongoing venture for the company and to other vertical industries. There's a lot of discussions with customers about that. Similarly, on the BI and analytics side, we're packaging up applications in that mode.

We're going to continue to make R&D investments, very strong in the foreseeable future in advanced analytics. We've added a great number of visualizations to the new release. Everything is embeddable across platform. It's not just having them as specialized individuals, but again, they become deployable in broader applications as well.

That whole mantra of how do we make the average person more analytical in nature, that's going to be an ongoing investment for us. Advanced analytics, I think we're scratching the surface. We're going to go a lot further there.

CI: I think that's a smart move.

MC: We hope so.



CI: I think it is. Well, it sounds like a very bright future, but unfortunately, we're out of time. That's it for this edition of "The BBBT Podcast." Again, I'm Claudia Imhoff. It's been a great pleasure to speak to my friend, Michael Corcoran of Information Builders, today. Thanks so much, Michael.

MC: Thank you. The pleasure was mine.

CI: I hope you enjoyed today's podcast. You'll find more podcasts from other vendors at our web site, www.boulderbibraintrust.org. If you want to learn 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!