



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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CI: Hello, and welcome to this edition of the Boulder BI Brain Trust, or the BBBT. We're a gathering of leading consultants, analysts, and experts in business intelligence, who meet with interesting and very innovative BI companies here in a beautiful and, today, sunny 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 marketing direction and messaging. The BBBT podcasts are produced by my company, Intelligent Solutions.

I'm Claudia Imhoff and I'm very pleased to introduce my friend, Donald Farmer. Donald is the Vice President of Product Management for QlikTech. So, welcome, Donald.

DF: Thank you very much. It's great to be here again.

CI: Yeah, it's nice to have you back. It really is. It's been about a year (DF agrees), and it's been an interesting year for QlikView. In fact, you started off with a question to us, and that was "What's difference between traditional BI and data discovery, or business discovery, whichever way you want to put that. What did you learn?"

DF: Well, I think the most interesting thing I learned was that half the members of the BBBT enjoy discussing taxonomies and new definitions and half of them hate it. So, um... (Laughter) I guess I got the most answers from the half who enjoy it. Um, the distinction that came across from the feedback I got was that it's less about the technology than it is about the way of working with it. That what the business discovery technologies have done, what, I suppose in some context you'd call "self service", has been (to) put capabilities in the hands of a new set of users, and it's actually the working practices of that new set of users that are significant, even more than the technologies that enabled it. In other words, you can catch up in the technologies, larger vendors, more traditional vendors can add some of the capabilities, but if they're not changing the way of working of the user, they're not really changing very much.

CI: So, in other words, BI needs to match the way business users use data, how they interface, how they think, the patterns of their utilization.



DF: Exactly, yeah, and the business users are now in the driving seat, if you like. I say this regularly, but, it's, I think it is worth repeating, the biggest change in technology that I see is actually the fact that we have better technologies at home than we do at work. When you can come into the office in the morning, log on to your office network, and log on to your office computer, you're downgrading from your experience at home. At home, you have better technologies, you have newer technologies, because you can upgrade them whenever you want. And, very often, you have better performance, and, you know, more flexibility, and (it is) easier to use. (CI agrees). So, that's really very significant, because it means, now, that the business expect more when they come into the office (CI agrees). They come in with a set of expectations that traditional IT can't meet.

CI: Well, and they are much more fluid, they're much more unrestricted, as you put it -- within reason of course.

DF: Within reason, yeah, yeah, and sometimes without reason. (Laughter)

CI: And sometimes without reason. The other thing, that I thought was very interesting, that you said is that there's no such, there should not be, anyway, such a thing as "end" users. You don't like the term end users. Why don't you explain why?

DF: Exactly. Yeah, in fact, we don't even have an end user license agreement any more. We just have a user license agreement. The end of the "end" user for me comes about because every business user should have the capability to make discoveries within the data, to make decisions with those discoveries, and to share those discoveries. So, that means that, in a sense, they are not at the end of a technology chain, because they can bring their own technologies, whether it's bringing their own device, or bringing their own collaboration technologies. They can even bring their own data, with many of the business discovery capabilities. They're not at the end of an information supply chain because they can collaborate on it. They're really not at the end of anything.

CI: Yeah, in fact, in many cases, they really should be the beginning.



DF: Exactly, yeah.

CI: I thought your story about giving the business users the ability to play with their data is such a wonderful story. (DF agrees)

DF: I think "playing" is actually very important. And playing can be kind of a serious business. The example I often give is the cat. If you've got a cat, then you know that cats love to play with mice and birds that they catch, but there's a serious purpose behind this, which is pretty serious for the mouse as well.

CI: Yes, it is.

DF: The cat plays with the mouse, and many times the mouse will actually escape. What's happening there is that the cat is mastering her hunting skills. She is an expert hunter. She knows every trick in the book that a mouse will use to escape from a cat, but the mouse still gets away. This means that, first of all, she doesn't want to wipe out the entire population of animals that she wants to feed on, and it also means that when she really does need to hunt, she can catch something and she's an expert hunter. Now, how does this apply to data? Well, imagine some of the situations that arise where you have to do ad hoc analysis. Why do you have to do ad hoc analysis and discovery? Well, because something new and unexpected has happened in your business. We've had customers who've been affected by everything from, you know, tsunamis, to Somalian pirates stealing their ships, to, you know, a serial killer in Sweden, to all sorts of things happening.

CI: Or to a competitive campaign launching suddenly. (DF agrees)

DF: Could be as simple as that, like a competitor coming out of nowhere. (CI agrees) It doesn't need to be dramatic, but it can be dramatic for you. If you haven't practiced, if you haven't trained, if you haven't played with the data, then, if on the day that happens, you're sitting down, doing ad hoc analysis and experimenting with the data for the very first time, you're not going to be an expert in it. So, we encourage, and a lot of our best customers encourage their, users to play and explore with the data.



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- CI: Yeah, and I think that's. I agree with you. I think it's an important thing. "Play" sounds a bit trite.
- DF: Yeah. It does sound trivial, but it's really not.
- CI: It's not. It really is getting familiar with the data, understanding how the tool works, understanding how to manipulate the information, how to find the information, how to discover the information, that you just talked about.
- DF: And you're not going to be able to do that with a passive system. It has to be very active (and) interactive. And it's one of the reasons I like the name "discovery". Not because I want to define a new technology, but because that's the experience that we give people.
- CI: It's more descriptive. Yeah. Now, you also gave us a wonderful case study. I was blown away by this. It's called The Noble Group, and, if you don't mind, go over what they've done, because they've really pushed the frontiers, I think, of what they've accomplished.
- DF: I think they're doing fascinating work. The Noble Group are based in Hong Kong, and they're a global supply chain company. So, one of the things they do is have these massive, kind of dry storage tankers that move around the world, shipping iron ore, and kind of basic aggregates and things like this around the world. They're a global company. They're in 140 countries. They have, you know, thousands of people distributed around the world. And they use QlikView in some very interesting ways. They have very traditional reporting systems, based on, you know, Crystal and reporting services. Very traditional data sources, like Oracle and SQL Server. But they also have QlikView providing business discovery. And these projects that they build with QlikView are short. They typically don't last any longer than 3 months, and typically they last only for weeks, so they're building the projects very, very quickly. They're collaborative, in the sense that they've built some really interesting collaborative technologies around them using QlikView native collaboration features, but also integrating into their enterprise's existing collaboration systems, like wikis, and email forums, and the kind of information hubs. And the two things that I think they've done that are particularly interesting is they



train their users in this playful experience of exploring and sharing the data, exploring by using search and the QlikView associative experience, which is an inherent part of every application they build, but also collaboration in the ability to bookmark discoveries that they make, and share those bookmarks. And then integrate discussion of those bookmarks into wikis and email threads. (CI agrees) I think it's just fascinating -- the way they built that entire structure.

CI: Yeah. Very sophisticated utilization of QlikView, beyond what the ordinary company, I think, would do.

DF: Absolutely, and based also on the fact that they can do this rapidly. And that's important, because they found that, by doing it very rapidly, and getting results, say, within days or weeks, and, at the most, you know, three months on a project, what they're able to do, then, is keep all the stakeholders engaged in this, and that's very important.

CI: Yeah. Really agile development.

Well, now, the other thing that you talked about are the mobile BI applications. Mobile BI is becoming critical. You mentioned a company, it might have been Noble, where most of their users started out with desktops, and, today, most of them, if not all, are on some sort of mobile instead of their desktops. So, why don't we talk a little bit about mobile BI and what you see as success factors in that area.

DF: Well, we see this all the time, that, you know, the IT department deploys out, primarily thinking that desktops are going to be the main consumers of the dashboards and the applications, but then users pick up the mobile device. Very often in the bring your own device scenarios, they'll bring their own device and then expect to use the same applications. So, the things which are critical for us to make this successful have been to have a "deploy once, consume anywhere" sort of philosophy. So, we use HTML 5.0, which is important because then it's flexible for almost any platform that needs to consume the data. It can be consumed on Blackberry and Android and iOS for example, to enable a small device experience as well. So, you can deploy once with a dashboard, for example, many objects on the screen, but the small device experience enables you, on



an iPhone or an Android phone, to pick, you know, one object and focus on that and explore that one object, and swipe between those objects one at a time, so you can see it on a small device. And then, we've also introduced, particularly for iOS on the iPad, the ability to do some caching of data, so you can take away selections, bookmarks in fact. You can bookmark something you're interested in, take it away, and investigate it further off line, if you happen to be somewhere where you don't have connectivity.

CI: Yeah. On an airplane, for example.

DF: On an airplane. Yeah, that's classic example, isn't it?

CI: Yeah. Seems like we all would like to have that.

The other thing that you said, I think this was from a survey that you ran, you said that 80% of clicks are actually subsets of the previous selection. So, in other words, almost 80% of what people are doing is using some. They're drilling down. They're looking at data that they've started out with. Only about 20% require the refreshment of the cache going after new sets of data. That becomes, at least in my estimation, pretty important when you're talking about big data.

DF: It does, actually. Yeah. I mean, we started this, kind of looking at this, from the mobile point of view, because we were looking at this problem of how do you cache things to take them off line, because we didn't want people taking the entire data set off line. So, we were caching subsets and new bookmarks that they could take off line. The research we did -- we have a user experience research team, we have labs teams, we have strategic prototyping teams -- but the UX research guys, they discovered that, you know, about -- and it's funny how these numbers do work out. We always talk about the 80/20 rule. It actually was, you know, remarkably close to 80/20.

CI: Spot on.

DF: About 80% of the work you do, you can answer those questions from the initial selection that you make, because you're mostly, then, drilling down into that selection. Well, that suggested a caching strategy. In particular,



when we looked at our approach to big data, the ability to kind of go back to a big data system. For a business user, you still want a very interactive, exploratory system. One of the challenges of big data is that it's not designed, the infrastructures, the architectures that we build for it are not really designed, for exploration. A data scientist, when they issue a query, they pretty much know what they're looking for and understanding. They might be interested and even surprised by the results, but they're constructing. They have a theory behind what they're doing. The business user, playing like the cat with the mouse, is just trying things to see what they're going to find. So, we've kind of built a kind of caching strategy around the fact that they're more like to find this information within the cache that they initially started with.

CI: All righty.

And then, in the next minute or so, a new thing, and that's QlikView Direct Discovery. Why don't you tell me what that is?

DF: So, that's directly related to this question -- of the caching -- because Direct Discovery is a technology which enables you, not only to use the in-memory technology that QlikView is famous for, but also to go out of memory and connect to, for example, a very large EDW -- we've got a partnership with Teradata for example -- or to a big data system -- we've got partnerships with Google Big Query and with Cloudera -- and to be able, then, to connect your in-memory system to vast volumes of data which are never going to be in-memory. They're stored out of memory. You still get the exploratory experience and the associative experience because we use this caching technology to give you the best of both worlds. So, we call it a hybrid experience. You get a big data experience and you get an in-memory experience.

CI: And it's a really sweet tool, I have to admit. It was a very nice interface, a very nice feature, I guess, "addition" to your suite.

DF: And it's the very start of something. You know, it's the very start of a new generation of QlikView, which includes this hybrid experience of in-memory and out of memory that's been critical to our success.



CI: Nicely done.

Now, you also have some very exciting news that you want to share. I understand that QlikView is, yet again, on the acquisition trail.

DF: Yeah. It's always fun doing these things, and this is a particularly fun one. We've acquired a small Swedish company, small in size but very big on technology and very big in ambition. The company was called NComVA, which stands for something long and complicated in Swedish, but we'll just call it NComVA for just now. They're a visual analytic company that is a team of people. They all have Ph.D.s in information science. They all have Ph.D.s in data visualization. And that really comes across in the technology. It's highly advanced, very beautiful, interactive data visualization technology, with storytelling, with animation, and with very sophisticated graphing, charting capabilities built in to that. It's a very very exciting addition to our technology stable and to our team. So, we're super excited about it.

CI: Oh, I think it's a wonderful addition. You know, the ability to visualize information is becoming so critical today, so important today. So, congratulations to you and to the company whose name I can't pronounce. (Laughter)

DF: Exactly. NComVA. Thank you very much.

CI: Alright, well, that's it for this edition of the BBBT podcast. Again, I'm Claudia Imhoff and it's been a great pleasure to speak with my friend, Donald Farmer, of QlikTech, today. Thanks so much, Donald.

DF: Thank you.

CI: I hope you enjoyed today's session. You'll find more podcasts from other vendors on our web site. That's www.boulderbibraintrust.org. If you want to read more about this 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!