



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.

For more, see: www.bbbt.us.

Vendor: Tableau Software
Date recorded: July 26, 2013
Host: Claudia Imhoff, President, BBT
Guest(s): Suzanne Hoffman, Senior Director, Analyst Relations

Run time: 00:09:25
Audio link: [Tableau Software Podcast](#)
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Claudia Imhoff: Welcome to this special edition of the Boulder BI Brain Trust podcast. I'm Claudia Imhoff and I'm here in Grants Pass, Oregon, at the Humphrey Strategic Communications annual Pacific Northwest BI Summit. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to interview each of the vendors attending this event.

CI: With me today is Suzanne Hoffman. She is the senior director of analyst relations for Tableau Software. Welcome, Suzanne.

Suzanne Hoffman: Hello, Claudia. Thank you.

CI: Tableau has had a remarkable run. You've just had a remarkable number of years and you've based a lot of your sales on this ease of use of Tableau. One of the things that are very difficult today is that so many companies are claiming ease of use as their big feature. Tableau lives and breathes that. Tell me a little bit about how you guys achieve this ease of use.

SH: Sure. If we go back in history, and I've been in the BI industry for a long time, ease of use has always been the buzz that's tried to generate new customers. Tableau, when they were founded 10 years ago, came up with a mission statement. It's, "We simply help people see and understand their data." That meant things had to be easy. It had to be simple. All of the cachet around access to information, access to data, had to be put in the hands of a common user. To do that -- now, if you think about it, when you're trying to build software -- to take a very complex process and make it very simple, is actually very complex.

The paradigm shift of how to make things beautiful with simple drag and drop and point and click became the hallmark of Tableau, almost from the get go. That was the paradigm.

We wanted to put it into the hands of a group of users, who previously had nothing available to them except maybe in Excel or some other cross tab environment. If they're used to using an Excel like tool, which to me, is actually complex, they could only use about 20 percent of what was there. You quickly drop down into code or you quickly drop down into a series of menus and probably, a path that you have to go through wizards that they're leading you through.



Tableau wanted everything to be immediately available at the fingertips of the user. Access to data is a simple drag and drop or point and click. Being able to do analysis and change the visualization, again, is a point and click.

The paradigm was to say, "Not the end result was easy to use but the actual process was an easier component to use."

CI: The whole process of going from...It's the pathway, basically, from "I've got some data. I have some questions. I need some results."

SH: Right. Your drop-down menus all resemble the actual process that you go through. Actually, the tabs follow the process you go through. Then the drop-downs get sequentially harder as you go through the individual tabs. Everything's available to you, either as a drag-and-drop, which is you're bringing your fields onto a palette. You're moving them through by simply dragging and dropping or copying and pasting, whatever you want to use. We use both the left-click and the right-click of the mouse button to enable that visualization that you've created, either by giving it density or giving it characteristics, or being able to then take it down into not just the diagnostic component -- which is where we are, or where a lot of people are today -- but maybe into the predictive realm and being able to do trending and do a little bit of forecasting.

There's an analysis tab. You drop down in there, and everything related to a type of analysis is available, again, either on a left-click or a right-click of the mouse button.

CI: First of all, that's really cool, because, as I grow in my analytical prowess, I go from this relatively simple...I just want to look at a report or a bar chart or something like that. I can actually grow, with Tableau, in sophistication. It allows me, then, to get into that analysis side, where I'm actually creating the analysis, not just looking at it but actually doing some kind of creative capability as well.

SH: You actually find that. If you look at, over time, people's usage of the product, it grows in complexity. It grows in creativity. It also grows in sophistication, as they become more comfortable with the data, with the story that the data's trying to tell them, and then being able to



manipulate other components of the data, whether they start to go in and say, "Let me segment the data. Let me do some groupings. Let me actually do some comparative analysis of those groupings that I've created. Let me bring in another dataset and blend it together."

You give an individual a learning path or a curve that they can grow with, and you'll actually find people who've never understood trending, never understood forecasting, that the tool tips that we provide and the underlying information that you can actually raise to visibility on a dashboard teaches the user what they're looking at.

There really is a learning path involved in it. That's not to say a simple bar chart is too simplistic for most. It's very pictorial. It tells you exactly what you need, but it's a start to the whole process or the evolution of uncovering what the data's trying to tell you.

CI: The other thing it does, too, that ability to manipulate an existing bar chart or whatever it is gives the business user the sense of self service.

SH: Absolutely.

CI: I can change things. I can change the parameters of whatever it is I'm looking at. I can do it. I don't have to go back to IT. I don't have to go back to anybody. I can do it.

SH: Yeah. The concept of a self service environment means not only that it's easy to use but then, as you're right, it's not even self service. It goes a step beyond that. It's self reliance because a polished, finished dashboard can be extremely self service oriented. If somebody else has created the environment for you, or started the environment, then you have a self service environment where you don't have to go back and ask someone else to help you.

But if you have a self reliant environment, you have an environment that easy enough for you to flip the page and start over. I want a new data set. I want to combine data sets. I don't want to look at a bar chart. I want to look at a tree map. I want to look at something more sophisticated that...Maybe a comparative analysis that has multiple arrays of data on it, all represented in different ways in a single dashboard.



Then, pull one of those out, swap it out for another visual component. That concept of being able to determine what's the best way for me, as a consumer, to consume that data or for my constituents. I can publish things using Tableau's server that will enable my users to then have those authorship capabilities from the cloud, as well, so they become self reliant in using something that I started with.

Remember, we're back to the ease of use. That paradigm has to stay there. Everything has to be easy to use for anybody who's interacting with that information. That's where the concept of ease of use transcends what you're doing with the data.

If what you're doing is simple, yes, it's easy to use. As the complexity grows, it's actually very hard to keep it easy to use.

CI: Excellent, and you've done a fine job of it.

SH: Thank you.

CI: Thanks so much, Suzanne.

SH: You're welcome.

CI: Again, my guest is Suzanne Hoffman. She's the senior director of analyst relations at Tableau Software. Thanks so much, Suzanne.

SH: Thank you, Claudia.

CI: Thank you for listening to this special edition of the BBBT podcast, and thanks to Scott Humphrey for giving me this opportunity and for hosting the Pacific Northwest BI Summit.