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### Q&A with Brad Peters, Chairman and Founder, Birst

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# Q&A WITH BRAD PETERS, CHAIRMAN AND FOUNDER, BIRST

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*The man behind one of Silicon Valley's leading Cloud Business Intelligence and Analytics firms shares his thoughts on the future of the data business*

*Q: The BIRST website states that the BIRST technology was developed because BI platforms in the mid-2000's were powerful but "their deep fragmentation and excessive configuration caused an unacceptable deployment timeframe and that data-driven businesses of the future would demand a better way." Have you succeeded?*

A: I would argue that yes, we have succeeded so far in providing companies with a new approach to making data and analytics work for them in new and more efficient ways. Moving to a Cloud-based approach offers companies far faster deployment, but the impact is not just at the start; it's about making it easier to bring in new sources of data and make them analytic-ready so that employees can make use of them faster

This ease of use argument is important – there are many companies that aim to make it easier to work with data as individuals. Birst is leading the market when it comes to bringing this same ease of use to the whole business.

*Q: BIRST's 2-tier analytics model appears to marry the best of both worlds: central control for data integrity that also allows for timely access for end users, and thereby producing representative on-the-ground information. In your experience, are businesses and business leaders ready to confront the technology/mindset challenges to adopt this approach to BI? Or are they still unwilling to give up central control?*

A: If you ask users, what they want is to make better decisions. They don't care about the technology underneath, but they do care about the quality of the data that they have available to them.

At the same time, IT does not want to be building individual reports and sending them to people. It's far better to put the tools into the hands of those who can ask the best questions. IT can provide the guidance and ensure that the guardrails are in place so that the results of any analytics requests are as accurate as possible, and that all the data sources that should be included are available.

Centralised control does not mean ownership of the analytics and how this is used within the business; it means ensuring that business users can get the most out of their data.

Ultimately, ensuring success with analytics today requires meeting end-user demand for self-service capabilities without sacrificing governance and trust in the data. Business users should have the agility they demand, and IT leaders should have the governance mechanisms they need to deliver a complete and consistent view of the business.

*Q: Who should be leading the conversation in transforming an organisation's BI/analytics structure? The CEO or the CIO?*

A: The best approach here is based on a partnership between the CEO and the CIO. Both sides have to be aware of what the end result should be from investment in BI. In a perfect BI world, there would be a CDO (Chief Data Officer) that was charged with the success of these initiatives. I believe strongly that data is one of only a small handful of components that every company can leverage for success.

That said, getting the backing of the CEO makes sure that the use of data is seen as more than just an IT project, but as a business-change project instead. CIOs can lead the implementation and work with the various business units and suppliers involved. CEOs can make sure that these projects are followed through from initial results and into being "business as usual."

Now, Cloud BI might start small in one department, but the overall objective should be to make more use of data across all decisions made within the business over time.

I think of it this way: IT projects tend to focus on making one change to produce 100 percent more benefit, then move on to the next one. Data projects such as this should instead aim to make each decision that someone makes one percent better every day. The cumulative impact that all those improvements can have over time is much greater across the whole business. CEOs can help drive this change.

*Q: How has cloud technology helped in the advancement of BI and analytics?*

A: Cloud has made it easier for more companies to adopt BI. In the 1990s and early 2000s, traditional BI projects were affordable only for the largest global enterprises in their most critical projects. However, they did not follow up on the promise of providing a complete vision of activities across the enterprise. They got part of the way, but the requirement for budget, skills and support infrastructure meant they never made it further.

Cloud BI has made it possible to extend more of the value from BI across the organisation. Enterprises can implement data and analytics projects for departmental level projects, or at country level. The potential to build a business case for investment is that much greater, and it is possible to be more agile in how analytics are developed and used. Rather than monolithic individual projects that get set up and then left in place, Cloud BI supports ongoing development alongside the business.

That is what makes BI exciting now. There are more people that will be able to make use of data every day. Today, we are getting to that promise that BI had in the past, and Cloud is an important part of that.

*Q: What will the BI and analytics field look like in 5 years?*

A: There are a range of new players in the analytics market today; as more companies move over to using BI as part of their daily operations, there will be more integration and consolidation.

We see different emerging technologies that are finding a role in BI, and their potential for transforming the way we think about analytics is very exciting. But, ultimately, the leaders in the field of BI and analytics will be vendors whose solutions are capable of meeting the demands of user-led decentralized teams for greater agility and ease of use while supporting the needs of centralized teams for enterprise-grade BI.

Another important change will be within the businesses that are using BI – more people will be using reports and analytics as part of their daily routines. Understanding of data will become a more crucial skill for everyone to develop. That is not to say that everyone will become a data scientist; instead, getting awareness on where data comes from and how that then gets linked to business processes will be a useful skill to develop.

*Q: Should all enterprise software within an organisation be linked to a BI/analytics platform in the name of complete data coverage/analysis?*

A: Many applications within businesses hold huge volumes of data, but they don't provide that data out to be used. This data can create more value for those that use the applications every day.

The challenge is that physically bringing all this data together can be a monumental task. It is often impractical for organisations to devote the expertise, time and money required to do this. This is one of the reasons business users end up resorting to alternate methods of extracting data on their own, which leads to analytical silos. This means that employees spend more time arguing about whose data is correct than having meaningful business conversations.

This tension between the desire to deliver a complete view of a company's data and the business need for immediate access to data in order to make faster decisions is at the core of the divide between agility and governance. Ensuring success with BI means finding ways to deliver a complete and consistent view of the organisation without the heavy lifting and long delays associated with traditional methods.

For enterprises, linking up all the different internal and external data sources centrally will help them to create a more coherent view of where the company is within its market. This is the real opportunity for what is called “big data,” and it can help business leaders transform their companies into data-driven organisations.