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Zoho Proves That “Business Intelligence” Is Not an Oxymoron

By Opus Research

Zoho Corporation recently announced the release of its Zoho Business Intelligence (BI) Platform. The platform touts AI-driven data analytics and self-service through data preparation and augmented analytics. According to Zoho, the BI platform will enable its customers to “cleanse, unify, and analyze cross-departmental data, obtain an encyclopedic view of the company.”

The solution combines Zoho DataPrep, which automates and simplifies challenges of importing data sources, with an enhanced version of Zoho Analytics 5.0. Users can also launch queries for a deeper understanding of data by using either graphical tools or with Ask Zia, Zoho's conversational AI platform. The goal is to make it simpler for end users to construct and share analytics featuring pre-built, visual dashboards, data integration, and flexible deployment as well.

A critical part of any business analytics initiatives begins with preparing the data for insights. Bob Sullivan, chief operating officer with digital marketing solutions firm Vector Solutions, had previously relied on home-built data preparation architecture. Zoho's DataPrep takes out much of the manual work to correct formatting, update fields, and determine missing values automatically. This allows his clients to set up once and save time without relying on cumbersome and sometimes inaccurate spreadsheets.

Zoho DataPrep includes auto modeling and Machine Learning-based enrichment and enables users to retrieve data from 250 data sources. Zoho also offers its DataPrep tool as a stand-alone service.

Zoho Analytics 5.0, integrated with enterprise portal builder (Zoho Sites) and presentation software (Zoho Show), enables business users to create a slide deck and seamlessly embed reports and dashboards to make an interactive and immersive presentation. “Ask Zia” enables both technical and non-technical execs to surface data and insights using their own words to form queries. Zia Insights tool automatically surfaces trends and relationships between datasets without requiring an end user to even launch a query. Vector Solutions’ Sullivan said his best clients leverage the Ask Zia conversational piece to track revenue and pull predictive, forecasting trends reports, making it very simple to access business insights.

Connor Norbert, director of Analytics & Technology with Pulse LLC, makers of sales assistance and behavioral change platforms, first started with Zoho CRM. They’ve added the Analytics platform based on very favorable licensing (compared to Tableau) and the option to white-label allowed secure delivery of healthcare info to their clients. Norbert cites the ability for Zoho to handle large numbers of queries in their system, easing up their own bandwidth, and a nicely designed, professional dashboard as important benefits. Zoho is “clearly investing in the Analytics platforms and pushing the envelope forward in terms of functionality,” says Norbert.

The Zoho BI platform, first introduced in 2009 with 100 users, now has over 13,000 cloud users and is consumable through Zoho Marketplace.

Market Appeal

Zoho is moving to reduce the cost of BI to the point where it becomes accessible to a broader range of organizations. Benefits of this approach include:

- Speedy preparation
- Ongoing hygiene / continuous improvement
- Access to dashboards, predictive insights via Conversational AI and visualization tools
- Reliable at scale
- Value and certainty in pricing/licensing

Bottom Line Impact:

Strikes a great balance between automation for data prep and AI for conversational queries and predictive analytics.