

BI Radio

Episode 26 – (BIR 26, Mashups)

(00:00)

Station ID: This is BI Radio

(00:10)

Montage:

- I'm sort of interested in two things. One is technologies that make BI more useable, and technologies that make information more consumable.
- Sounds like there's a great value in the enterprise space and in BI tools, both from the data side and from the presentation and application side.
- I think the core business problem we're trying to solve is, you know, people want to get out their information faster.

(00:35)

Ken Seeley: Hi there, and welcome to BI Radio. I'm Ken Seeley. On the show today, decoding Enterprise 2.0. Whether it's widgets and mashups or unstructured data, we look at the technologies and behaviours that drive better business decisions. Kelsey Howarth learns how imbedded collaboration improves communication at Canadian airline WestJet. And our technology soup panel explores the business value of mashups. But first up, new directions for business intelligence. Jennifer Hanniman talks to BI Research founder, Colin White, about new ways to make BI applications easier to use.

(01:15)

Jennifer Hanniman: Hi, I'm Jennifer Hanniman. A hot buzz word in tech world today is Enterprise 2.0. Web 2.0 technologies like mashup social networking and collaboration are entering Enterprise landscapes and becoming strategic technologies, changing how business and IT work every day. I'm joined today by Colin White, the founder and president of BI Research. With 40 years of IT experience, Colin is well known for his in-depth knowledge of business intelligence, data management, and data integration technologies, and how they can be used for supporting smart and agile decision-making. He has consulted for dozens of companies throughout the world, is a frequent speaker at leading IT events, and has written numerous articles and papers on deploying new and evolving information technologies for business benefit. Thanks for joining us, Colin.

Colin White: Thank you for inviting me. It's my pleasure to be here.

Jennifer Hanniman: Can you tell us your perspective and what Enterprise 2.0 means?

Colin White: It's sort of a term that applies to some more modern web-based technologies, and Enterprise 2.0 is very much about how we introduce those technologies into enterprise computing. But the bottom line is it's really the use of the web as a general platform in the enterprise.

Jennifer Hanniman: What do you think the impact of Enterprise 2.0 will have on BI technologies?

Colin White: Where it affects BI most is in terms of the kind of data we can gather. I think we're going to be seeing new sources of data for analysis with social computing and that, and web-based architectures. We're going to get a lot of unstructured data so we can actually construct content analytics around that. I think we can use some of the better technologies for discovering data that we want to analyze. And that's probably the best example there is the use of search technology in business intelligence. And then I would say the other, the third area, at the other end of the information cycle where we can use some of these new technologies like rich Internet applications and mashups and that, to actually improve information delivery mechanisms via a variety of more friendly, more useable technologies to enable people to use BI tools.

Jennifer Hanniman: Is there any Enterprise 2.0 technology you think our BI audience should pay more attention to right now?

Colin White: Well, I think the move in the BI industry generally is to spread BI to a wider audience. I'm sort of interested in two things. One is technologies that make BI more useable, and the other one really is technologies that make information more consumable and I think they're different things. We need to make it easier to use, but then the information that we deliver to business users needs to be more consumable. I believe with Enterprise 2.0, knowledge management is much more viable. We can actually use collaborative BI to actually share information, to communicate with other people in making decisions, to get their experience, to look at how people use information and so on. So I think there's some very useable technologies here for the business intelligence user.

Jennifer Hanniman: Right. And just to talk a little bit more about collaboration, we know it's a very hot topic for BI today. Do you have any advice for customers who are considering various collaboration technologies?

Colin White: Well I think it's important that if we are going to make information more consumable, then we need to deliver information to the business user using the interfaces and tools they're familiar with and to deliver data in the right format they're familiar with. Some people may want to consume information via a mobile interface. Some people might want to use it through an office interface. Some people may want to consume it via portal. Each of these kinds of interfaces and the tools within those interfaces suit different kinds of users, so I think the advice really is to look for BI tools that really as they move towards this collaborative environment, integrate to those various other platforms that the business user is familiar with.

Jennifer Hanniman: To switch gears a little bit, there's now a lot more unstructured data and there's more opportunity with unstructured data. Why should our BI community care about accessing these new forms of data that we're seeing out there on the web?

Colin White: Well I think there's a lot of useful information. For example, if you think of some of the social computing technologies out there like blogs, the kind of feedback mechanism some of the retail sites like Amazon have, or the social media out there about opinions, about your products and services says quite a lot. You can measure also if we look to support centres, there's a rich set of value, rich set of information there that can be mined and analyzed. I think the other thing is that internally as people start to communicate and share information with each other and do collaborative decision-making, seeing how people use information and analyzing it is useful. They can think of that almost as collaborative analytics. This is early days in this area, but I think there's definitely some potential there to look to it, to mine additional information and to look at the way people access information and use it.

Jennifer Hanniman: Right, which actually brings me to the next question I have for you. We are hearing more and more the term Enterprise mashup. How do you think mashups will change how BI content is delivered to users?

Colin White: What I kind of see happening is that we will start to build, you know, there's various words for them – widget, gadget, information object – but basically a component that contains a piece of information or some analytics. And with these mashups they can assemble those, they can choose the ones they need and assemble them on the user interface to suit their needs. You know, I think some people call these situation applications. In other words, there's a great tendency up until now to say, for the IT groups to say, okay, we'll discuss with you what you want, and they build an interface and give it to the business user. And then it often turns out it's not the interface or it doesn't contain the content they want. So I think we're heading towards an era when people can start to experiment with data more, and they can build these interfaces and assemble these components. So-called situation applications that are designed to meet specific business needs. And I think IT's job will change. It will not only be to produce some of these information objects, but I think it's also rather than having hard and fast applications that IT's job will be to monitor the use of these information objects and how people use them. And some of them will sort of kind of trickle to the top and multiple people will use them, and IT's job is to capture the best business practices, the ones that provide the best benefit. And in that case, they may actually bring them into more of a governance type environment where they're sort of brought into more the enterprise. So I think it's more giving the capabilities for business users to prototype more, and IT to watch that prototyping, capture the best business practices, and then probably bring them over into the IT in a more sort of formalized manner. So I think the way we're going to be doing development in the future will change, and I think mashups is a factor that helps us do that.

Jennifer Hanniman: Excellent. I wanted to thank you once again for joining us today. It was great to hear your insights on Enterprise 2.0 technologies and the potential impact on our BI solutions of the future. Thanks, Colin.

Colin White: Well thank you, and as I said, this is a big area. We could spend hours discussing this.

Jennifer Hanniman: We definitely could. Thank you.

Colin White: You're welcome.

(09:35)

Advertisement: Become a BI champion with the IBM Cognos Champion's Kit. Discover how to increase the ROI of your investment, gain visibility for results, and increase your own profile within your organization. You'll find resources for every phase of your deployment, from setting strategy to driving adoption. Find out more online at ibm.com/cognos/champion.

(10:10)

Station ID: Interviews, insights and opinions on performance management. You're listening to BI Radio.

(10:20)

Don Campbell: Hi, I'm Don Campbell, Chief Technology Officer.

Meagan Hanes: I'm Meagan Hanes, New Media Engineer.

Stephan Jou: And I'm Stephan Jou, Technical Architect.

Don Campbell: So in this new world of web 2.0, we keep hearing the term mashup used over and over again, and mashups are becoming more popular in the consumer space, and they've got lots of airplay. What do we really think a mashup is? How would we define a mashup?

Stephan Jou: Well, we really have to give a lot of credit to Google Maps, I think. I think that's around the time when people, at least every-day people like us here, started talking about mashups in just the regular context. And typically it seemed to be taking a visual representation of a map and location data, and plotting it and combining it with some very interesting data that you couldn't get otherwise, like locations of banks, when they're open, at the time you hit the webpage.

Don Campbell: So is there value to the companies that are producing some of these technologies? They might have an application that is built specifically to do just one

thing, and now is being mashed up with other sources of data and other kinds of application content. Is there a value to be creating technology, creating content, creating applications with mashup in mind?

Stephan Jou: Oh, yes, definitely. I mean, one of the things that made these different services more mashupable, I guess, is that underneath the covers there are all these emerging standards, so standard ways for all these service providers and content providers and client interfaces to connect together in very standard ways, things like Atom feeds and RSS and REST, they all are examples of protocols and standards that sort of emerge just because people saw so much of value and synergy in combing these different specialties, I guess, together.

Don Campbell: Is it still a combination of data and a presentation, or can you mashup at other levels, mashup just at the data side or mashup just at the presentation side?

Stephan Jou: I think you can definitely do both. I guess Yahoo Pipes was a good example too, and I think Microsoft had a project for a while called palm flight that tried to do these similar things, mostly focused on the data side where you can take different feeds of data, things like time-based data and combine it with location and financial data, and combine them together and join the information and apply filters and do very interesting things at the data and analysis level, and produce some very interesting results.

Don Campbell: So if I'm looking for a place to rent an apartment, and I've got real estate data and I've got map data, and I mash them both up, I can see some great value in applications like that. But what about for the enterprise user? What about in a BI kind of context, when I want to look at my intelligence data, where do mashups play a role there?

Stephan Jou: All of the things that we just talked about I think apply even more so in a BI enterprise context. There's a lot more islands of data in a typical enterprise. Often it's very difficult to combine the data together to get the most effective value out of them. And having a mashup framework through which you can channel access to that data really, really helps a lot. The other possibility that is now afforded to you is the ability to, again, not care as much about the location, be able to combine public data and pull it into the enterprise and combine it with some data that can't leave the firewall. There's tremendous value in a lot of the public financial data, through the SEC, for example, that's available to you. And finally, that aspect of personalization, getting some very targeted reports and content, some very personalized and filtered, appropriate to your business unit, appropriate to your role, all of that are things that we just talked about in a consumer context, so highly relevant, I think.

Don Campbell: BI data in the past has been very black box. It's been very closed and very close to that corporate soul, and you just don't want to share it with anyone, you don't want to provide any of your intellectual property outside the firewall, et cetera. So mashups and being able to have that freedom for the line of business to all of a sudden be able to get the best of a presentation with the best of a data asset they may have, perhaps

even freeing them from the need to engage with IT in a large project around building an application from scratch, just assembling it maybe with skills that even exist in the business and don't require those IT skills. That must be changing the landscape of application development for the typical BI enterprise.

Stephan Jou: That's definitely true. It's interesting, we started on the journey towards self-serve and self-assembly through dashboards. But when you look at it, dashboard is pulling together content, granted focused primarily on the visual, but as you dig deeper, there's definitely mashing up that's going on at the data level as well. And all of the assembling of little bits of a dashboard, things that we learned about score carding and aggregating content and strategies, and explain that in a single presentation surface, that all led naturally to having the same sorts of conversations and requirements, but using different vocabulary centred around mashups.

Don Campbell: And I think that the vendors that are providing BI tools are now starting to think about how to make their components more mashupable, as you say, the ability to take their content and merge it into applications that they aren't conceiving of themselves. And it's something that makes the value that they bring to their customers much greater because now it's reusable value, not just locked into this one particular black box application.

Meagan Hanes: I think more vendors nowadays are considering such flexibility in APIs as more of a mandatory part of their workflow than something that would be nice to add on afterwards.

Stephan Jou: Yes, and that's been a real change, hasn't it, because in the past everyone wants to be the guy on top, they wanted to own everything, they want to own all the content and all the channels into it. Now I think people are starting to open up to the idea where I can be part of this greater ecosystem if I'm just a little bit more open, and I think of these open APIs and being more mashupable.

Don Campbell: So the area for competitive differentiation may actually be in the openness rather than on the ultimate strength of the application because you can't be the best application for every need. So if you're open enough to be used in that ultimate application, then at least you get to play and get some share of that revenue.

Stephan Jou: Yes, and that's a great direction, in my opinion. Happy to see that happen.

Don Campbell: So big value for mashups in the consumer space. Sounds like there's a great value in the enterprise space and in BI tools, both from the data side and from the presentation and application side. Just creating more opportunity to create bigger and better and more valuable systems, and that's what it's all about. So thanks again, folks. And we'll talk to you next time.

Stephan Jou: Bye.

(18:45)

Advertisement: Think big, start small, with IBM Cognos Express. The breakthrough BI and planning solution purpose built for mid-sized companies. Get integrated reporting, planning and analysis. It's easy to install at a price you can afford. Find out more with demos, videos and even a free 30-day download at ibm.com/cognos.

(19:20)

Station ID: Insights on performance management, from the people who shape the industry.

(19:30)

Kelsey Howarth: Hi, I'm Kelsey Howarth. Enterprise 2.0 and Web 2.0 technologies like mashups, social networking and collaboration are hot topics in the world of IT. With incredible adoption in the consumer space, there are still many questions to be answered. How will this apply to the world of the enterprise, and more specifically, BI solutions? How will this change BI in the future? Today I'm joined by Chris Sorensen. Chris is the manager of the Business Intelligence Group at WestJet. WestJet is a leading Canadian airline, and one of the most profitable airlines in North America. In his current capacity, Chris facilitates the management and strategic direction of the enterprise data warehouse and the supporting applications which are used for planning and analytics at WestJet. In this segment, Chris and I discuss Enterprise 2.0 technologies and what impact they'll have on BI solutions. There are so many definitions out there for Enterprise 2.0. Can you tell me what Enterprise 2.0 means to you?

Chris Sorensen: In post projects reviews, we say what could we do better, and it always seems to come down to communication. So this is the one thing that I want to get out of, how I define Enterprise 2.0 is just how we can start breaking down barriers and communicating better and sharing information with people and freeing information from its knowledge silos and treating the data as an asset across the organization because I think there's a lot of good information organizations that's locked up in people's heads or in little silos or in somebody's queue, and if we can figure out how to free that stuff up with the appropriate culture, the appropriate approach, and then finally putting some tools on top of that, and we can ultimately develop a more agile and flexible corporate culture that's going to give us a bit of a competitive advantage to those who embrace those new methodologies, and even the tools that are supporting them like we're starting to see come out on the BI world.

Kelsey Howarth: What Enterprise 2.0 technologies do you think will be most relevant to your BI solution?

Chris Sorensen: I think the most relevant ones, for myself and our organization, are more imbedded collaboration. So if we can put more value on that data point there through collaboration, I think we'd provide a much better business intelligence

ecosystem. So that's a collaboration front. Another front that I find interesting is the concept of mashups. I think people want information faster, and I see mashups as a possibility for getting more people involved, to help develop and mould potential solutions. So I think mashups has a tonne of promise. And then even taking advantage of some of the new Web 2.0 concepts, like widgets, and one of my favourite things that I have that I look at every morning is my iGoogle page, and I can choose as the user to view what I want to start my day. So I think those technologies are definitely going to be relevant in our BI solution in the next year to 18 months.

Kelsey Howarth: You mention mashups. Could you give us maybe some examples of what some of the bigger benefits or maybe some of the potential implementations might look like?

Chris Sorensen: I think the core business problem we're trying to solve is people want to get at their information faster, and we often hear IT is a bottleneck, IT's busy doing other things. And admittedly, I'm on the IT side of the world, and I would agree to a certain extent that there's a lot of things that we work on that do bottleneck things; but we want to make sure as an IT shop we're focusing on the highest value added things first. So the more people we can get involved in helping us develop our solutions, the better, so that being the business people. So they can help us get information out quicker to solve those core business problems. Business people can typically generate questions a whole lot faster than the IT shop can answer those things, and even with an army of IT folks, there's oftentimes where we just can't keep up. I think that's all well and good, but we can utilize these technologies if we architect them properly to help us alleviate some of that bottleneck and let business users mashup or mock up prototype, a solution that they think they want given the data assets and the investment we've made in our warehouse and Cognos BI infrastructure and say hey, this is kind of what we're thinking we want. And that's going to take us a whole lot closer towards that final solution, because one of the other things that is a bit of an Achilles' heel in the business intelligence side, and I guess IT development in general, is requirements gathering. So what exactly does the business user want? Sometimes they have a tough time articulating this, and if they can show us what they want through some type of demonstration mashup, then that's going to allow perhaps the BI team to focus more on a different end of the whole value stream and then take certain solutions and then harden them up for the enterprise, and deliver them across the enterprise. We can only take it so far, and then the business users, we think, can take advantage of these technologies, to do some of it on their own and bring something that is reasonably well-formed back to the BI team, and then we can say now we have an enterprise-ready solution.

Kelsey Howarth: With so many new technologies on the horizon, can you provide some advice for others on approaches to assess or introduce these technologies?

Chris Sorensen: Yes, that's always the million-dollar question, because it's really easy to be wowed and wonderstruck by all these new technologies, and I have to admit I'm a technical geek at heart. I'm an old developer, and I get very excited when I'm talking about new technologies. But you really have to make sure we remember it's not about the

technology for technology's sake. We really have to, at the end of the day, step back from what's neat, new and cool, and make sure we can evaluate its worthiness within our environment and make sure we at some point when the inevitable ROI question comes down the pipe, that we can answer it and prove that that technology did have some benefit. So some tricks that I use are making sure that whatever we have in our business intelligence environment maps to our enterprise success pillars, whatever they may be on your enterprise side. We have some core enterprise pillars that we are shooting towards in 2016. So we want to make sure as we grow our program out that we're constantly mapping back into that, and adding as much value as we can. At the end of the day, somebody also has to be willing to pay for these things, so tying back into our ROI. We need to make sure that we're going to see the value out of these tools. The other thing here too is with these technologies, one of the banes of IT is once you deliver something, someone's going to ask, well, can it do this? And inevitably it's not going to do that. So you just need to, we always need to be focusing on doing things in iterations, where I think mashups help out. And once we get something out the door, they're always going to want that next thing, and we have to just appreciate that's the way things are going to be, and that's actually somewhat flattering in some ways because then they're going to come back and ask for more of our service. And we really need to make sure these things are architected in the coherent manner, because it's one thing to get a lot of neat, new, cool tools on our shelf, but we need to make sure that they, from an architectural point of view, they adhere to standards so the new functions can snap in. We want to avoid over-licensing, so buying too much of something that we may not necessarily need. We also need to make sure we have the skills and know-how to operate those new tools, so we really have to bring the excitement of these new tools to the table but also have an eye towards making sure they do land in a BI environment in a coherent fashion so we can rely on the results of them.

(27:35)

Station ID: For more information on IBM Cognos solutions for analytics and performance management, please visit ibm.com/cognos.

(27:45)

Advertisement: Thousands of manufacturers worldwide trust IBM Cognos software to improve service levels, control costs and better manage their supply chains. Use integrated reports, metrics and plans to respond to customer and market trends and increase the value of their SAP and Oracle data. Bring a new kind of intelligence to your supply chain management with Performance Management Solutions from IBM. Visit us at ibm.com/cognos/manufacturing.

(28:15)

Ken Seeley: Well, that's a wrap. I'd like to thank our guests today. From BI Research, Colin White; from WestJet, Chris Sorensen. Our own technology soup panel of Don Campbell, Megan Hanes, and Stephan Jou. Thanks as well to our segment producers,

Jennifer Hanniman and Kelsey Howarth. And finally to our head producer, composer and audio engineer, Derek Schraner. You can find us online at radiocognos.com. We're also on Facebook at facebook.com/ibmcognossoftware. You can follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/ibmcognos, and use the hashtag BI Radio, or simply email us at biradio@ca.ibm.com. I thank you for listening. I'm Ken Seeley. And we'll see you in about six weeks.

(29:15)

Advertisement: More than 1,000 retail, corporate and investment banks choose IBM Cognos software to boost profits, manage risk, and improve customer satisfaction. Get the most out of your data with our BI software, performance blueprints, and proven industry expertise. Get the full story including white papers, industry thought leadership, and our new banking demo at www.ibm.com/cognos/banking.

(29:50)

Station ID: Performance management you can listen to. This is BI Radio.

(30:00)

END OF RECORDING