The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform

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Company Overview

Zoho is a privately-owned enterprise software company that was founded in 1996 as Adventnet, Inc. and has quietly evolved into an ambitious global player that serves the SMB and enterprise markets with cloud applications. The company offers a suite of more than 45 business, collaboration and productivity applications. These include solutions for CRM, project management, finance, human resource management, analytics and support.

The company is headquartered in Chennai, India. It has three offices in India, two in the United States and has offices in Mexico, Australia, Japan, Singapore, China, United Arab Emirates and the Netherlands. Offices in France and Germany are in preparation. Zoho has about 9,500 employees as of mid-2021. It is present in 180 countries with more than 60 million users.

ZOHO is led by its co-founder and CEO Sridhar Vembu. Being a privately held company, Zoho is not obliged to, and does not publish revenue or profit numbers. However, the company indicates a track record of profitable growth that is well in the double digits.

The company manages its growth organically, i.e. without acquisitions. Following this unique approach, the company has built a solid platform with a unified data model that allows it to grow and deliver software at high speed.

Zoho BI

The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform has its origins in 2009 as one of the first self-service cloud BI platforms. It can be installed behind firewalls locally or can be deployed on cloud platforms such as AWS, Google Cloud and Microsoft Azure. It is aimed at line-of-business users and has evolved into a full-blown BI platform.

The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform covers the complete analytics workflow from data preparation through visualization and exploration with a focus on the line-of-business user.

The platform architecture is correspondingly organized in the three layers

- Data Management

- Analytics

- Visualization

Figure 1: The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform architecture

The system can ingest data from around 250 data sources via its own connectors and expose insights via web based or mobile UIs. It can be embedded into other applications and reports can be scheduled and sent into a variety of channels, including Slack or Microsoft Teams®.

The system is compliant to several security standards.[1]

Data Preparation

The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform offers strong data management capabilities, including data cleansing services for the source application via pipes that ingest data, cleanse it and push it back into the source system. This includes the ability to intelligently suggest cleansing. Machine learning (ML)-based data enrichment combines data from different sources.

Being a self-service oriented system, the availability of domain models and the ability to automatically generate domain models enable line-of-business personnel to work with BI with little input from the IT department.

The data itself is stored in the Zoho BI data warehouse (DW), unless the customer decides to use an external DW, e.g. Snowflake. In this case only metadata is stored in the Zoho DW and queries are routed to the external DW via a live query technology.

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[1] https://www.zoho.com/compliance.html

Analytics

The analytics system offers a variety of statistical and predictive models. It also offers automatic analyses via Zoho's proprietary AI, Zia (Zoho Intelligent Assistant), which is also integrated into Zoho's suite of business applications.

Insight

The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform enables ad-hoc and standard reporting for line-of-business users. It offers more than 100 prebuilt dashboards that offer rich visualization and the ability to create data stories. On top of this, the system can be queried via Ask Zia, a natural language interface, powered by Zia.

Visualization itself happens either via web or mobile interfaces and visualizations can also be embedded into external applications or intranets. In addition, reports can be scheduled and shared via different communication channels, including messenger systems.

Analysis

Zoho presents a comprehensive vision for its BI and analytics platform that ranges from data management through visualization and analysis to the generation of insights and actions, where it shall be possible for line-of-business users to operate the system without SQL knowledge. One point that is particularly interesting is that the data management subsystem can be used on its own for data cleansing purposes, which in itself improves data quality in the business applications.

In contrast to the other Zoho business applications, the Zoho BI and Analytics Platform can be deployed not only on the Zoho infrastructure but also on AWS, Azure, GCP and on premises. This allows for wide-ranging white label implementations that allow customer specific rebranding. White label implementations already now make up a significant contribution to the installed base of around 20,000 customers. The new marketplace is prone to extend this even further by offering analytical apps that are hosted by Zoho and can be embedded into pretty much every non-Zoho application. Already now there are integrations with leading apps, including Salesforce, Zendesk, ServiceNow, Hubspot, Xero, Quickbooks, Stripe, Mailchimp, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Eventbrite and more.

Zoho BI, including Zia, is not only sold as a solution of its own but is also deeply integrated into Zoho's suite of applications, e.g. via Zoho One, where it powers the

analytics functions after being activated. In addition to the white label installations, this increases the solution's reach far beyond what it has on its own.

According to our information, the largest implementations have more than 2 billion database rows with 3 TB of data and are accessed by more than 2,000 concurrent users (SaaS implementation) and 250 million rows with 150 GB of data, accessed by more than 300 concurrent users (on premise installation).

All this makes Zoho BI a solution that should be considered by SMBs as well as enterprises when it comes to selecting a new BI system, be it to augment an existing one, or to establish entirely new BI capabilities.

SWOT

Strengths

- It is offered in multiple deployment options, ranging from the Zoho cloud through other hyper scalers and including on premise.

- Wide range of integrations that help using Zoho BI outside the Zoho ecosystem.

- The data management platform can be used on its own to improve data quality.

- The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform is deeply ingrained into the other Zoho applications, like CRM, finance, etc.

- The solution can be implemented fast, integrates seamlessly and delivers fast results.

Weaknesses

- The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform is new to the market although some parts of the functionality have been available for several years.

- Zoho's focus online of business and ease of use for its BI product might indicate relative weakness in deeper analytics and data science uses.

Threats

- Zoho is not yet recognized as a strong BI player, which might lead to an early dismissal when it comes to deciding on a new BI platform.

  - The deep integration of Zoho BI into the Zoho application stack obfuscates its strengths.

- Low market awareness about Zoho's BI abilities, including the ability to be used embedded into other applications reduces Zoho's visibility in the BI market.
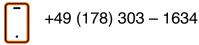
Opportunities

- Spreading the news, making the strong capabilities better known in the marketplace.

- Emphasizing the Zoho BI and Analytics Platform's ability to interact with a broad range of data sources.

- Taking up the slack in the SMB BI/Analytics space.

- Continuing to emphasize on Zoho's stance on privacy.

Your CRM Evangelists

Ralf Korb

📱 +49 (178) 303 – 1634

✉️ ralfkorb@email.de

🐦 @lonerangerCRM

in ralfkorb

Marshall Lager

📱 +1 (516) 476 - 6696

✉️ marshall.lager@aheadcrm.co.nz

🐦 @lager

in marshall-lager

Thomas Wieberneit

📱 +1 (425) 428 – 2382

✉️ thomas.wieberneit@aheadcrm.co.nz

🐦 @twieberneit

in thomaswieberneit