[Zoho Goes AI with New Self-Service BI and Analytics Platform](#)

By: Jorge Garcia

9/9/2021

TEC | Technology Evaluation Centers

Zoho recently released their new business intelligence and analytics platform. The new offering incorporates artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies and focuses on self-service capabilities to bring a single platform that allows organizations to efficiently perform the entirety of their BI and analytics functions for enhanced insight generation.

Read this post, by TEC's Jorge Garcia, to find out:

- the vendor's approach to developing the platform
- major functionality enhancements, such as augmented data prep and management, and
- the benefits that companies stand to gain from using the new offering.

Earlier this summer, India-based cloud software company Zoho announced the release of their new BI and Analytics self-service platform.

With a slew of new functions and features to be available in this new version, the company looks ahead to modernize and prepare their BI and analytics stack for a new era of enhanced BI and analytics solutions.

The new release announcement emphasizes the incorporation of new software technologies in the quest for bringing extended analytics capabilities to Zoho's growing analytics user base.

Learn About BI Software Features

The company has been focusing on offering key enhancements within this new Zoho BI and Analytics platform, including:

- enhanced self-service data preparation and management capabilities,
- important new features for augmented analytics and data stories creation, and

- a set of new marketplace apps (Jira, servicenow, shopify, Zoho's own marketplace, etc.) to solidify their offering in keeping with the company's key corporate strategy.

Putting the "Self" to Service

On top of the many improvements and new technology feats to the platform is the delivery of self-service capabilities, inarguably, the main functional focus of the platform. To achieve this, the company has put special attention on the incorporation of three main functional elements:
- artificial intelligence (AI)–driven analytics capabilities
- prebuilt tools including visual dashboards, comprehensive data integrations, and data preparation functions, and
- augmented analytics capabilities.

The incorporation of these key functional elements aims to empower users to achieve actionable self-service resources from their first contact with the platform. To this end, Zoho has worked to develop and improve capabilities in four specific areas of the BI and analytics cycle:

- **Augmented analytics**. By taking advantage of Zia, Zoho's conversational AI assistant, as well as other AI technologies, the platform will offer textual narration of key insights from reports and dashboards or natural language data querying. These capabilities will not only significantly reduce data exploration times on the front end but also enable advanced and easy-to-use what-if capabilities for more effective scenario analysis (see figure 1).

Figure 1. What-if analysis with Zoho's BI platform (Courtesy of Zoho Corporation)
(*click image to enlarge*)

- **Augmented Data Preparation and Management**. On the back end of the process, Zoho has added an AI-based data preparation service tool called Zoho DataPrep. When added to the BI platform, this tool provides users with an easy way to create and manage data pipelines, from start to finish (allowing for integration, modeling, transformation, enrichment, as well as cataloging).
- **Data Stories**. This feature aims to provide users with an enhanced way to deliver information and insights (figure 2). Data stories embed key information from live reports and dashboards within a web presentation to allow information workers to provide key information in a more effective way. Zoho's self-service platform can now create sophisticated and effective data stories, via its integrated enterprise portal builder called Zoho Sites, enabling organizations to become data-driven—according to the company, easily and with less friction.
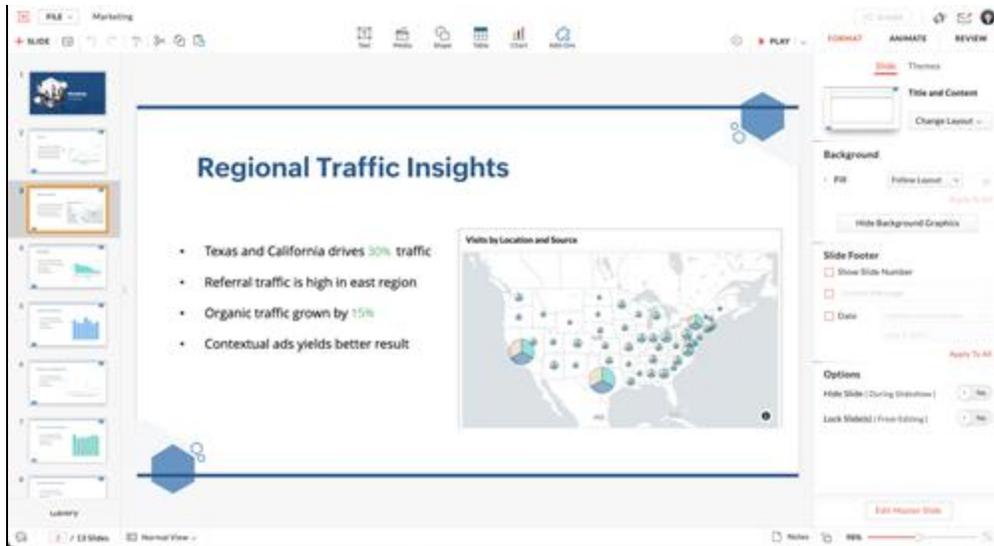
Figure 2. Data stories slideshow (Courtesy of Zoho Corporation)
(*click image to enlarge*)

- **Marketplace.** Continuing with Zoho's efforts to expand the offering of its cloud-based software stack across markets, the company is enabling partners, through Zoho Marketplace, to develop and publish analytical apps and integrations that can expand and enhance Zoho's original analytics capabilities set to strengthen their platform. This expansion strategy also includes Zoho offering their BI and analytics platform within third-party marketplaces including Shopify, ServiceNow, and Atlassian.

Zoho's self-service BI and Analytics platform is available in both the cloud and on premises. The company offers a general pricing guide, with the cloud version set at $8 per user per month and the on-premises version starting at $30 per user per month.

Putting the "Service" to BI

On the one hand, Zoho's BI and analytics self-service platform is aligned with the company's general market and service expansion strategy. To that end, the platform can scale and be extended to more than 250 sources to enable companies to integrate it and analyze data coming from a wide range of sources including Zendesk, Hubspot, Microsoft, and many others, potentially providing service for companies with a variety of data sources for processing, analysis, and insight generation.

On the other hand, with the incorporation of top-notch AI technologies, along with new data preparation capabilities, Zoho aims to offer a tight yet robust analytics-cycle offering for customers looking to have a full spectrum of capabilities to deal with data, from collection to transformation to insights and information generation—within a single offering.

In this regard, Raju Vegesna, Chief Evangelist for Zoho states that:

"For data to be a true catalyst of business growth, there can't be any gaps in the collection, management, or analysis process. Too few BI platforms in the market excel in both data preparation and analytics, which leaves businesses with weak—or worse, flawed—insights. Zoho's BI Platform is industry-leading because it ensures organizations are acting on legitimate data, which can be effectively leveraged to determine new revenue streams, refocus funds, drive productivity, and overall gain a competitive edge among peers in their market."

Proof of Zoho's commitment to a service-oriented approach is exemplified by the vendor making their Zoho DataPrep tool also available as a standalone offering, giving users the option of a platform or tool-based approach for scaling and growing their BI software stack.
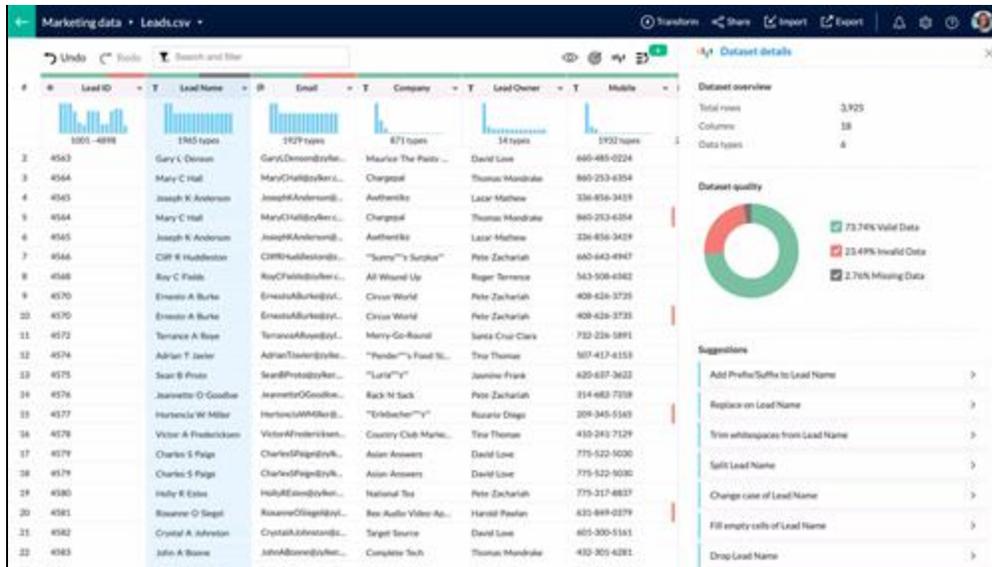
Figure 3. Zoho DataPrep screenshot (Courtesy of Zoho Corporation)
(*click image to enlarge*)

So . . .

In recent years, Zoho has gained prominence to become an important player in the enterprise software market. The vendor's unique approach to growth and expansion is translating into increased market presence, with a bigger footprint in not only the small and midsize business (SMB) segment but also enterprise-grade customers.

It seems only logical then to see now an enterprise approach to BI and analytics as part of the vendor's growing process—one that contemplates having a full stack of BI functionality that covers of the full analytics cycle for any small, midsize, or large company.

Read Latest TEC Industry Report on Zoho

Finally, readers interested in finding out more about Zoho's new self-service BI and analytics platform can watch Zoho's introductory video.