

The Zoho Analytics Platform

One Platform to Help Them All

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Zoho is a privately-owned technology 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 55 business, collaboration, and productivity applications. These include applications for CRM, project management, finance, human resource management, analytics, and support.

The company is headquartered in Chennai, India. It has eleven offices in India, five in the United States, and has offices in Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Australia, Japan, Singapore, China, Egypt, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, Germany, and the Netherlands. Offices in France are in preparation. Zoho has more than 15,000 employees as of mid-2024. Zoho is present in more than 150 countries with more than 750,000 customers and 100 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. All applications are built by Zoho, using one single hard- and software stack. They are deployed and delivered via Zoho owned data centers in the United States, Europe, India, China, and Australia. 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.

Core values of Zoho include corporate self-determination, privacy as a principle, and a commitment to delivering high value.

The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform

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. Additionally, it is available as an embedded platform that can be leveraged by other vendors. Originally, it was aimed at line-of-business users and in the meantime has evolved into a full-blown BI platform with around 17,000 customers, as of August 2024. Within the Zoho One suite, it is used by 70,000 business on a daily basis. This makes Zoho Analytics the second-most used app, after Zoho CRM, of the Zoho One suite.

The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform covers the complete analytics workflow from data preparation through visualization and exploration. It addresses challenges that a broad range of users, from data scientists and developers to line-of-business users, have.

This new Zoho Analytics release features more than 100+ updates, including new visualizations, enhanced dashboard building, audit and admin controls, revamped mobile apps, right-to-left (RTL) support, and more.

The new version of the Zoho BI and Analytics Platform shall address five key challenges, namely:

- Data velocity and diversity
- Data management and -governance
- Complex analytical needs
- Limited adoption of analytics caused by diverse user needs
- Rapid technology changes.

Zoho addresses these challenges using four different levers.

1. Deepening the data and integration management using a powerful data management hub to establish a strong data and data management foundation
2. Infusing AI, particularly generative AI, across the platform to accelerate BI adoption
3. Increasing the ability to build machine learning models for analytics workloads by making this capability available to a broader user audience
4. Enhancing the platform's extensibility to serve more use cases.

Data management hub

With this release, Zoho adds 25+ new standard connectors to the offering, to now offer more than 500. This includes connectors to data streams via Apache Kafka, Cloud Pub/Sub and PubNub. The synchronization of Zoho apps, especially Zoho CRM, now happens in real time instead of being scheduled. More importantly, Zoho has created a common domain model supporting business analytics. This helps in preparing the data, creating analytical models and dashboards up to enabling the interaction with the data using natural language and Zia.

The building of ETL data pipelines is now supported by a visual builder and the ability to create custom transformation and machine learning models using Python in Python Code Studio. Additionally, data transformations can be done using Zia and natural language. Automatic versioning and sandboxes make the data management more robust, while the integration with Zoho's workflow engine Flow helps business users orchestrate data pipelines.

Built on top of this, and using Zoho’s domain expertise, Zoho delivers a metrics layer together with a metrics store that offers predefined metrics and the ability to build custom ones. This is supported by access controls.

The data management hub is targeted at data engineers, data analysts, and data experts.

Generative AI infused analytics

Zoho Analytics now offers decision intelligence that contextually provides key driver analyses for reports. These answer the “why” question and offer actionable recommendations in natural language via Zia. Zia itself has been enhanced to support more types of queries and trigger actions.

Auto Analysis is an AI-powered generator that allows to automatically create metrics, reports, and dashboards for faster insights.

The integration with Open AI has been enhanced to support RAG based augmentation and contextual assistant for formula and SQL query generation and to find public data sets.

The increased offer of AI, including generative AI, is targeted at business analysts, data analysts, and business users.

Data Science and Machine Learning Studio

Zoho Analytics now includes a data science and machine learning studio (DSML) that supports users in the creation of custom machine learning models with the help of a no-code assistant named AutoML. AutoML allows feature engineering, hyper-parameter tuning, comprehensive model analyses and management as well as deployment of models.

In addition, DSML offers a Python development environment called Code Studio. Code Studio is an integrated coding environment that enables the development of custom models and functions using Python. Additionally, Code Studio allows to import Python models or externally built libraries, which then can be executed within the Zoho Analytics Platform.

The main user groups that are addressed with the DSML Studio are data scientists and citizen data scientists.

Platform extensibility

The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform is now more extensible. With this release, it offers a no-code connector builder that gives users the ability to build custom connectors to bring data in from external applications and to publish to and sell these connectors on the Zoho Marketplace.

The new BI Fabric offers a portal that helps businesses consolidate insights from multiple BI platforms, such as Power BI and Tableau, into one, easily accessible and searchable user interface. Access to this portal is governed by fine-grained authorizations.

Lastly, the Zoho BI and Analytics Platform is now integrated with Zoho Flow. This enables users to trigger actionable workflows, including URL and Webhook actions from a known environment that offers more than 500 triggers out of the box.

The main user groups that are addressed by Zoho Analytics platform extensibility are BI developers and data engineers.

Analysis

With this release, Zoho certainly did a leap forward. The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform has truly arrived in enterprise territory. It builds on last year's major release that already showed Zoho's enterprise chops and the comprehensive vision for its BI and analytics platform, then with a focus on enabling line-of-business users to operate the system without SQL knowledge. Last year already, the largest implementations had more than 2 billion database rows with 3 TB of data. They are accessed by more than 2,000 concurrent users, which clearly shows the platform's scalability and enterprise readiness.

With this release, Zoho builds on the existing strong foundation. The Zoho BI and Analytics Platform now provides more immediate business value while in parallel making the platform more powerful for more technical users. This enables them to provide even more sophisticated capabilities to line-of-business users.

While there is some catch-up involved in this release, there are also some nice twists and definitely some points that make Zoho Analytics stand out. Catch-up items include, for example, the ability to do custom transformations and machine learning models using Python libraries.

Nice twists include the ability to access Zoho Analytics via messaging apps, in particular MS Teams. This capability is important to increase the attractiveness of the Zoho BI and Analytics Platform for Microsoft customers and would be important to offer for Slack as well. Underlying this capability is an increasing ability to interact with business applications in a human – conversational – way.

Three major points are its high usability, the focus on directly adding value to the user by providing capabilities that are immediately useful, and the breadth of user groups the platform supports. Some of the best examples for this are the decision analytics, which provides contextualized insights and (soon) recommendations, and the Auto Analysis feature that automatically provides AI-driven in-context metrics, reports, and dashboards. Both features answer pressing business questions



immediately, in the case of decision intelligence, in a conversational manner. Decision intelligence will become even more interesting when it not only answers the “why” but also gives good recommendations for solving the identified issue.

Although this release clearly focuses on supporting Zoho’s enterprise ambitions, SMBs should still consider the Zoho BI and Analytics Platform when looking for a BI system, in particular when they are currently using more front-end oriented tools like Power BI or Tableau, which it can also replace. This is especially true for existing Zoho customers. Due to different editions with attractive pricing, tight integration into the Zoho application landscape, and the Zoho BI and Analytics platform being bundled with many Zoho offerings, there is simply no need to look elsewhere for existing Zoho customers.

SWOT

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong focus on delivering value while addressing the full analytics lifecycle • Decision Intelligence that answers business questions and recommends solutions • Direct integration with Tableau and Power BI for integrated analytics in multi-platform landscapes 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The messaging is very enterprise-focused • Still fairly low awareness of Zoho as a strong BI player • Ask Zia is not yet exposed via Slack
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pushing the data connector builder that enables to publish connectors to the marketplace to prosumers • Continuing the messaging on privacy without losing capabilities • Using white labeling even more to increase the platform’s reach 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The platform has become so big and powerful that there is a risk of not reaching the SMB market anymore • The breadth of the addressed audience makes it hard to communicate the platform’s value



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