

# Integration-driver player Simba raises its profile, announces support for iOS

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Simba Technologies, which provides drivers and SDKs to connect applications to data sources, is emerging from relative anonymity. A renewed emphasis on partner marketing this past year is gaining traction and giving the company some much-needed visibility. It recorded 40% growth in 2014 and claims to be on track to do even better this year. Simba also announced iOS support for its drivers and SDK offerings.

## The 451 Take

Simba has grown slowly but surely to a significant customer base – 500 and counting. The company has recently stepped up its efforts to raise its profile. These efforts seem to be paying off as it claims to have grown 40% in revenue, 20% in headcount and close to 20% in new customers. Getting customers to move over to a subscription plan seems to be going slower than expected, but Simba is making progress. With its renewed attempts to drive partner marketing, we look forward to seeing how this plays out.

## Context

After a number of organizational and management changes in its early days, Simba Technologies has been profitable since the hiring of CEO Aryn Rajan 13 years ago. Last year, the company reported 40% revenue growth and a 20% bump in headcount, which currently is about 90 employees. Simba is privately held and has not taken any outside funding. It claims to hold good cash reserves.

In our last report on the company, Simba reported 500 paying customers, which includes

businesses licensing drivers as well as those leveraging the SDKs in OEM agreements. The company claims a customer bump of close to 20%, although exact numbers were not provided. It stresses a land-and-expand strategy. Case in point: in 2013, Simba struck a deal with Cloudera for ODBC drivers and in 2014 sweetened the agreement to include JDBC drivers.

In terms of pricing, the company changed to a subscription model a few years ago and currently has one-third of its customers on subscriptions, with the remaining two-thirds on a license-plus-annual-support plan. Simba would like to move all of its customers to a subscription plan, but that is going slower than expected. Because it services both large and small businesses, there is the challenge of effectively supplying the same technology to differently sized vendors. In such cases, Simba evaluates a customer's distribution reach and then prices accordingly. In general, though, we would agree that the company would do well to move as many customers as possible to the subscription side.

## **Products and strategy**

Simba acts as a sort of matchmaker between front-end business applications and back-end data sources. It performs this matchmaking by providing both ODBC and JDBC drivers as well as SDKs for clients to build drivers. The company covers relational databases such as Oracle, PostgreSQL, salesforce.com, SAP BW and Microsoft SQL Server. With SQL moving into the big-data and Hadoop space, Simba provides connectors to a variety of sources, including Cassandra, Drill, Google BigQuery, HBase, Hive, Impala, MongoDB and Spark.

For its SDKs, the company offers two flavors: SimbaEngine SDK and SimbaProvider SDK. The SimbaProvider SDK is geared toward providing connectivity to multidimensional and relational data sources by way of OLE DB for OLAP and XML for analysis. SimbaEngine is the core technology behind the company's broad array of drivers that it offers, as well as the SDK to help customers build ODBC and JDBC drivers. Because clients often want to add some customization to a driver, Simba does offer services, where the customer sources Simba to build it. In other instances, the company provides consultation services for customers that need guidance on building a driver. For newbies, Simba offers a free webinar that guides users through building a driver in five days – albeit a basic one.

The company supports a broad range of platforms, including Windows (XP, Vista, 7, 8), Solaris, HP-UX, Red Hat, SUSE, AIX and now iOS. SimbaEngine also now supports ODBC 3.8, along with JDBC 4.1, 4.0 and 3.0. Among SimbaEngine's capabilities, Simba considers collaborative query execution (CQE) one of its key technical differentiators. CQE essentially segments execution processes. For

example, if the underlying source supports indexing but not joins, then the joins execution would be pushed to SimbaEngine, while keeping the indexing at the underlying source. The result is efficiency and performance gains.

## **Partner marketing**

Because Simba is considered an OEM player, it is not always front and center. That is changing now as the company has ramped up its efforts to increase its profile with deliberate partner-marketing efforts. In early 2014, it hired Toph Whitmore, who held previous roles at Vidigami, ActiveState and Caiman Consulting, as VP of marketing, with the responsibility of driving the company's partner-marketing strategy.

As such, Simba has begun to exhibit at industry conferences and hold joint webinars with some of its partners. The company will be hosting a partner summit in June to coincide with the Hadoop Summit conference. Other events and partner activities are planned.

## **Competition**

To Simba's credit, it has been at the driver-building business for some time and has amassed a healthy swath of tech vendors as partners. For example, the leading Hadoop distribution players all use Simba technology. The company has also built strong technical expertise regarding building drivers.

That being the case, we are often skeptical when businesses cite their main competition as internal development. For Simba, this is true - while the company is not without direct rivals (Progress Software's DataDirect being the prime example), the bulk of its competition comes from internal development and engineering groups, as well as some of its own partners. We also see some competitive challenges coming in other areas, as well.

Larger firms with significant engineering resources perhaps pose the greatest challenge to Simba. In some ways, this could be a matter of degree. The smaller shops, of course, are likely to license the driver straight up, considering that these firms have constraints on technical horsepower. The bigger players might decide to build drivers and connectors on their own or get the SDK and then add significant customization. Over time, some of these partners may move off of Simba. That being the case, the company's strong partner relationships certainly addresses such scenarios.

There are also occasional circumstances in which the larger IT system consulting firms such as IBM Global Services, Accenture, KPMG, Deloitte and others could be possible challengers - but mostly in

one-off scenarios, where a particular driver would need to be built to fulfill a specific project. On the other hand, these IT consulting providers could also offer a complementary service by licensing the SDK engine but then choosing to build out the driver-customization components.

## **SWOT Analysis**

### **Strengths**

With a balanced portfolio consisting of a mix of SQL, big-data and SaaS players, Simba is somewhat cushioned should any one segment take a dip.

### **Opportunities**

Its push to build stronger partner relationships should only help Simba fend off the competition while increasing its market share. The company's deep driver expertise makes it a trusted partner when working with customers.

### **Weaknesses**

The company's move to a subscription model is a good one; however, we see a few hiccups around pricing and pace of adoption that might need to be worked out.

### **Threats**

Simba faces the ongoing challenge of its potential customers wanting to create their drivers, particularly in one-off situations. Don't underestimate a firm's own knowledge of its technology and willingness to keep its driver development in-house.

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