



Industry Leader Interview



Rich Lauer
President and CEO
Raining Data

Raining Data's Rich Lauer Describes the Future for this Multivalued Database Stalwart

Formed by the combination of Pick Systems and Omnis Technology, Raining Data offers new functionality and prepares for the XML revolution.

DBTA—Although Raining Data is a relatively new name in the multivalued database arena, the company has a deep pedigree in the industry. Describe how Raining Data was formed.

Lauer—About a year ago, a group of us were able to acquire Pick Systems from the estate of Dick Pick. Dick Pick died about six years ago. There was about five years of a difficult and interesting process but after five years the company was finally for sale. It was a really a tribute to the strength of the product and the technology and the customers that the company got through that intact.

DBTA—Why were you interested in Pick Systems?

Lauer—The new senior management team had plenty of Pick background, knowledge and experience, and I like to think respect, in the multivalued market. I had been vice president of sales and marketing for a three-year period in the mid-1980s.

DBTA—What were your first moves?

Lauer—We started on a new path in March of 2000. In August, we acquired the Pick technology from the remaining licensee, General Automation. That brought a considerable amount of critical mass as far as our company was concerned and further consolidated the remaining pure Pick Technology. In December, there was technically an acquisition of Pick Systems by Omnis Technology.

DBTA—Why?

Lauer—Our principal financial supporter for the acquisition was also heavily involved with Omnis Technology. It turns out that our technologies were surprisingly complementary. Omnis has a rapid application development suite that is a very elegant, object oriented and component rapid application development tool. It is not multivalued in its orientation, but it is very advanced, sophisticated technology that has evolved over the past 15 to 18 years, and, much like the Pick market, has a very loyal and dedicated community of

users, and a widely installed customer base around the world.

DBTA—What kind of synergy do you get from that?

Lauer—Pick has an extremely well-regarded database technology but no GUI front end. The Omnis technology is a great front end development tool and does something that Pick has not done very well. We knew that we were going to have to develop a GUI front end and the Omnis tool set was way more than we would realistically be able to consider developing ourselves.

DBTA—What message did you want to say to these two loyal communities that perhaps didn't know each other?

Lauer—We wanted both communities to know that we would continue to develop and maintain products for both communities. We are not going to abandon either one. One would not prevail over the other. Both sides are very complimentary.

DBTA—Do you have a practical example how the two sides work together?

Lauer—We are in the process of delivering our first combined product. We call it mvDesigner, and it is a deep integration of the Omnis RAD tool with the multivalued database product. It is a remarkable capability that allows a multivalued developer to get the advantages of a rapid application development tool and deploy it as a thick, thin or ultra-thin client, utilize the multivalued database, the business rules and the basic programs that are in place and still not learn a completely new paradigm from a development standpoint. Given that we were able to pull this together in just a few months is a tribute to how powerful this environment really is. It is quite a polished tool.

DBTA—In which applications and contexts has multivalued technology been really able to demonstrate benefits?

Lauer—You can find us in across-the-board business data processing applications. We are particularly well-adapted

for distribution and manufacturing applications. In the old days, multivalued databases were characterized as being found in small and medium-sized enterprises, but if you look closely, these days as often as not you find them in as many Fortune 500 companies as anywhere else. You find them in Blue Cross/Blue Shield organizations across the U.S. You find them in major government organizations. Of the more than 10,000 automobile dealerships in the U.S. today, probably greater than 95 percent are running on multivalued solutions. Around the world, probably 80 percent are using multivalued-based solutions.

DBTA—What are the benefits of using a multivalued solution?

Lauer—The benefits are usually ease of use, total cost of ownership, small footprint, and performance.

DBTA—What are the drawbacks?

Lauer—Frequently if you are looking for maximum coverage from an enterprise perspective, the multivalued solutions tend to be less complete. Historically, the capabilities of the multivalued systems have not have been as comprehensive as in traditional systems but that is not the case anymore. We have capabilities in some of our systems that are as robust as they would be in an Oracle or DB2 system. It depends on how specific you are these days.

DBTA—What is your view of the overall database market?

Lauer—The overall database market is growing modestly. That is true in the multivalued business as well because we don't have the critical mass the relational business has.

DBTA—So what is your plan at Raining Data?

Lauer—We have found that our core technology has some interesting applicability in newer areas like business intelligence and XML. We will continue to grow our multivalued and multi-dimensional database business organically and from things going on in the market—we are committed to the multivalued market.

DBTA—And beyond that?

Lauer—We can apply the Omnis technology and the multivalued technology in hotter areas in a surprisingly natural way without a lot of research and development. Those new products represent additional revenue opportunities.

DBTA—Can you give me some specifics?

Lauer—With XML in particular, there is a completely new paradigm that is closing in on us, that is a totally different way of storing, transferring and dealing with data than has been the case. Interestingly enough, data being handled in an XML format lends itself to a multivalued set of tools more readily than it does to a traditional flat file SQL structure. We are finding some interesting opportunities to apply our technology in that area.

DBTA—What is the implication of that movement?

Lauer—The whole environment is changing. The whole approach to how data is structured, transported and dealt with is changing very rapidly. As new systems evolve, they are being built on a different foundation. This structure will bring some opportunities to us. We have most of the fundamental technology in place to allow us to deal with that.

DBTA—What would you like to say to the folks who were unable to attend your conference in May?

Lauer—From the multi-dimensional standpoint, we are the folks who are committed to this technology. We have a series of announcements including mvDesigner and mvEnterprise, which is the platform that we will take us to the next level of standards compliance. We are pointed to the SQL 3 standard. We have always had to deal with the notion that we are not standards based. Now all the relational database people are dealing with SQL 3 and we are closer to that standard than they are and we expect to be there before they are. Those are cornerstones of our multivalued strategy.