ANALYTICS AS A SERVICE

Telecommunication service provider – Lanka Bell entered into a collaboration with data analytical services provider – Whiteklay Technologies to offer 'Analytics as a Service' to enable businesses to adopt a focused approach to solving problems by basing decision-making on vital insights provided by data analytics. Dr Prasad Samarasinghe, Managing Director, Lanka Bell, and Amit Kumar Parija, General Manager Worldwide, Whiteklay Technologies spoke on the advantages for businesses to secure their data on Lanka Bell's Cloud platform and also the associated solutions provided.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe and Jennifer Paldano Goonewardene. Photography Mahesh Bandara and Menaka Aravinda.

Can you tell us the significance of the partnership between Lanka Bell and Whiteklay?

  Amit Kumar Parija (AP) – Lanka Bell has been in telecommunications and IT, while Whiteklay Technologies has been operating in the Data Exchange and economics. Lanka Bell lacked Cloud⬚based solutions as one key solution in its offerings. Telecoms around the world are also ISP owners – internet service providers, and they also have a Cloud of their own. Lanka Bell would be the first teleco to have a Cloud offering of its own. Whiteklay's expertise is in providing Niche Cloud solutions to enable a seamless Data Exchange platform with business analytics. Offering services from the Cloud will help many companies to get onto the analytics journey much faster. We see that there are business players from the SME segment, and from the large segment, who are trying to go on an analytics journey. But that requires infrastructure space, skills, and ability. This particular offering will help businesses jump onto analytics as a service. The name of the offering is 'Analytics as a Service.' There are data points inside companies where the value has not been defined, or the insights have not been drawn. The moment a value gets attached to a data point, that is where a company can draw insights.

Dr Prasad Samarasinghe, Managing Director, Lanka Bell.

What are the strengths that each company will bring together?

 AP – Our strength is in delivering data as ser⬚vice or analytics as a service, which includes busi⬚ness analytics and operational analytics. We spe⬚cialize in that area. Lanka Bell has been in the IT Infrastructure and telecom space for a long time now, and our strengths put together will help other companies access Lanka Bell's offering over its Cloud platform, and that is where we see a lot of opportunities grow in Sri Lanka. If you want to do analytics on your iPad, but if you do not have any infrastructure with you despite having the data, you can log into Lanka Bell's secured Cloud plat⬚form, insert the data and start analyzing the same. There is a guarantee of data integrity and all you need to have is certain KPIs such as sales forecast⬚ing or a revenue dashboard across products across regions inside Colombo. We would have these KPIs inserted into the platform

along with your data and the end result would be self-serviced visual dash‑boards around the same, which are offered to you as a service. A business can look at these dashboards every morning to make informed decisions.

Dr Prasad Samarasinghe (PS) – The way forward for Lanka Bell is by thinking from the customer's point of view, and that involves what we offer them, because ultimately what they require is a peace of mind. Customers look for a complete solution. Our strength is technology, and that is how we hope to move forward. There is so much talk about the next industrial revolution that Sri Lanka can benefit from, so why not support it. While we are moving away from the usual product offering to a complete solution offering, we are offering a solution that does not demand a significant CapEx, a lengthy process, and a waste of time. With our new product offering, customers can do a POC straight away and use it, and if they want, they can move out as well. Whatever they are paying for is what they will use. In technical terms, it is more like an accessory.

What we intend to do is in line with the Industrial Revolution 4.0. Providing analytics is a starting point. We certainly want to add more offerings to our basket through partnerships. We selected Whiteklay Technologies because we saw that they have a keen interest in this region and have also performed well. The fact that they understand what we want is essential for this type of product because we are selling a solution, and understanding the needs of the customer and their behavior is essential. I believe we have made the right choice. We want to see the impact on the country as a result of using this solution.

Can you elaborate on why analytics as a service, can cut down on huge set-up costs without compromising data security?

AP – Considering the Opex and CapEx in busi‑ness and if a company wants to build an analytical solution, multiple milestones need to be crossed beyond merely introducing a solution by deploying software and start running it. There is a long journey where you decide the pillars and design a strategy to achieve the end goals. For instance, obtaining insights into marketing or insights into customers, you need to develop a Customer 360 practice, which would help you understand how consumers are using services and products, and the kind of benefits they receive therein. If a busi‑ness designs a Customer 360 practice to understand the customer, the analysis needs to be done over a period, from a perspective of how the customer can be profiled based on buying pattern, how to segment the

customer and other important KPI's. This is how the business can benefit the customer on a personalized note and not by running a mass campaigning. Gone are the days when people used to do mass campaigning to create loyalty. Today the focus is on customized campaigns so that only related customers can benefit. Data security is going to be the heart of this platform with new age encryption algorithms and access controls in place.

PS – It will take some time for the regulator and other parties to accept this service, as the data will be kept outside Sri Lanka. We came up with the solution, where users will be given a full visibility of how the data would be kept in our environments, we have made sure that there is a data localization and everything stays in Sri Lanka through the Lanka Bell cloud. As an operator, we have more than 20 years of experience, which has ensured that customers have a high level of trust in us. Businesses do not have to think twice about uploading their data into the data center of Lanka Bell's Cloud platform because they can trust us to keep their data security.

AP – Some of the key USPs inside this is focused on ensuring data sovereignty, data governance, and data privacy. We understand that data is essential to every organization, and a significant focus is going to be given to the aspect of data privacy by focusing on the General Data Protection Regulation type of laws. This particular platform can take in any data. Therefore, it will just not be a single type of data. It is divided into multiple segments, such as structured data that is already available in organizations. Then social data, which is unstructured, is available on twitter, Facebook or other web logs, and even data coming from IOT devices. Companies are becoming increasingly digitally aware, wherein they want to run certain types of campaigns on Facebook and messaging on Twitter. There are consumer sentiments attached to these campaigns that you run. The opinion could either be negative or positive. Most of the companies that are going to be digitally aware and are going to run such campaigns would also want to understand that these sentiments are from the public. This particular platform could play a significant role in understanding those sentiments. So you can ingest the social data logs, and consume a sentimental analysis out of that, which can be of tremendous advantage to companies that need to increase their marketing portfolio. The marketing world is moving from an instinct-driven to an insight-driven mode because they need to empower their sales and marketing personnel. Their data empowers them.

When we look at AI, data and analytics are words that we increasingly hear these days. Can you speak about the significance of these aspects for businesses?

PS – Efficiency will improve with increased data prediction. For instance, a business that has details of 1,000 customers will want to know the ratio of success what it intends to upsell or cross-sell. If the company has analyzed and understood the behavior of the customer over many years and positions the customer with the right product and takes the correct information, then the success ratio of a sale will be very high. It is an excellent example of targeted marketing, where there will be an increase in efficiency and a reduction in cost. This can be done repeatedly and thereby expand the business.

Can you tell us about Whiteklay Technologies?

AP – Whiteklay Technologies started in 2013 with a considerable focus around high-performance computing and big data analytics. Since then, the sweet spot has been telecoms globally. We have worked with telecoms like VEON Telecom of Amsterdam, Bangla Telecom in Bangladesh, and Safaricom in Africa and Tata Communications in India. What we have learned from these partnerships regarding telecoms is that since they are already an ISP, they are looking at

avenues to manage others' data. The focus has been towards data exchange and analytics as a service. We have been working with a lot of these companies. In the last one and a half to two years, our portfolio has diversified into banks, automotive companies, and manufacturing, which include Volkswagen, ICICI Bank, and the National Stock Exchange in India. Coming into Sri Lanka, we have been having multiple discussions with Lanka Bell on how this particular solution will help and have a more significant reach to organizations who, in turn, could reach out to their customers. We are a total data-focused organization.

How will this partnership take Lanka Bell to the next level?

  PS – In the past, the customer came to Lanka Bell to get a phone line, and that era changed to internet services as well. Today, we provide dedicated internet services to corporates and related applications such as SMS and bulk SMS. We moved to provide PABX systems and wi-fi services as a complete solution. Today, we offer PABX systems and wi-fi services as a comprehensive service, and everything related to IT is becoming a service offering. This new Cloud offering will make it easier for the customer to make decisions, such as to either expand or reduce the business, so that they don't take on considerable risk. The Industrial Revolution 4.0 component is another significant element that we want to give our customers. We also provide IoT services and camera accessories. If a company intends to use its data history to understand insights, they can use analytics as a service from Lanka Bell. Rather than doing it by ourselves, we want to partner with the right people to make sure the customer gets the real benefits, and that is the reason for selecting Whiteklay Technologies as a partner. This new offering allows businesses to understand customer behavior and act on those insights at the right time. We hope to bring in more customers into this joint offering, and with that to come up with more success stories soon.