GBV
GLOBAL BENEFITS VISION
Knowledge & Wisdom for Global Employee Benefits Professionals

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class interview
  {
    /** Greg Campbell **/

    public function CEO ('Spieker Point')

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Leveraging Big Data and Software as a Competitive Advantage

COVER : AGNÈS M.

Greg Campbell

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Spieker Point
CEO

Greg Campbell P.Eng, is the CEO of Spieker Point. Greg started Spieker Point in the fall of 2005 as he saw a need in the market for a dedicated, boutique style company who applies custom software solutions to customer problems.

Greg graduated from the University of Alberta in 1990 with a Degree in Computer Engineering and acquired 15 years of senior software experience prior to starting Spieker Point.

Before Spieker Point, Greg was CTO at Taylor Scheduling Software which was revolutionary in the manufacturing industry for optimizing scheduling of finite resources.

Prior to that, Greg spent 7 years at Hewlett Packard on a key project team that built a tester that helped the Telecom industry build the early stages of the internet.

Sara Hallberg

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Spieker Point
Marketing Manager

Sara Hallberg joined Spieker Point in 2011 to take on the role as Marketing Manager. Sara graduated from Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) in 2006 with honors in Business Administration. Sara started her career at a marketing and design agency where she spent five years, eventually advancing to Account Executive and Strategist, where she was responsible for developing overarching marketing strategies for clients and overseeing execution for regional and national brands.

At Spieker Point, Sara works closely with Greg on corporate strategy. Since joining Spieker Point, Sara has more specifically led branding initiatives for both Spieker Point and DECK DecisionWare, initiated a channel partner distribution program, and oversees the development and implementation of Spieker Point's marketing strategy.

GBV interview with

Greg Campbell and Sara Hallberg

- Spieker Point

– how Spieker Point's platform, DECK DecisionWare, helped MSH International innovate in the global mobility industry with the Aviator product.

COTS
Commercial,
Off The Shelf

ERP
Enterprise Resource
Planning

DDW
DECK DecisionWare

BI
Business Intelligence

When it comes to delivering on the promise of Big Data, the very first step – and sometimes the most challenging – is to extract information from operational systems, those that handle policies, enrolment, claims, financials, etc. All too often, this is a costly and long-winded process that must be repeated again and again. Legacy IT systems; multiple sources of information; incompatible formats; and a general lack of suitable extraction tools are typical issues, resulting in valuable data sitting idle in its repositories whilst nimbler competitors act on the insights garnered from their own datasets. A systematic approach supported by a high-performance platform can be the right answer to those woes.

Global Benefits Vision spoke to **Greg Campbell**, *CEO of Spieker Point* in Edmonton, Canada, about these issues.

Greg started Spieker Point in the fall of 2005 as he saw a need in the market for a dedicated, boutique style company who applies custom software solutions to customer problems. For the first seven years in the life of Spieker Point, the company did custom software development for customers with unique problems that Commercial, Off The Shelf **(COTS)** software, was unable to solve. As time went on it became clear that there was a need for a platform that would drastically reduce the project time and cost while increasing the scalability and security of a custom solution. Greg wanted to provide a highly configurable solution that would help customers run their organizations better – eliminating the need for major **ERP**s, evolve with customer organizations as they grow and change, and provide a platform for cultivating engagement with employee, customers and other external stakeholders.

A set of software tools called **DECK DecisionWare (DDW)** was the answer. This suite of software modules allows for fast and cost-effective development and deployment of customer specific applications. It provides a modern, secure, stable and scalable core that is 100% tailored to customers' business rules, workflow, and data, providing a solution that combines existing plugins and custom extensions.

In the global mobility industry, it was used to develop *MSH International's Aviator services*. Aviator is a white-labelled instance of **DDW** that provides a platform for Business Intelligence **(BI)** and other aspects of operations for MSH International and its clients. Aviator was the answer to MSH International's goal to be more innovative and to provide better service to their clients, with increased flexibility and transparency.

In the insurance industry, obtaining valuable data to control medical premiums is not a simple or straightforward task. As a result, data is usually presented at the macro level, when policy renewals are about to be finalized. At this point, it is too late for HR managers to correct plan anomalies, or even study the methods with which companies can mitigate medical costs for the upcoming year. With Aviator, MSH International is now able to provide their customer with depth of information at incredible speed and accuracy. In a fraction of the time previously required to find, access, load, and consolidate data from a variety of siloed claim, billing, and customer systems, Aviator provides deep insights to customer accounts instantly. As a result, Aviator is a key tool for MSH International's competitive advantage of providing excellent customer service.

1. A Sample AVIATOR Dashboard
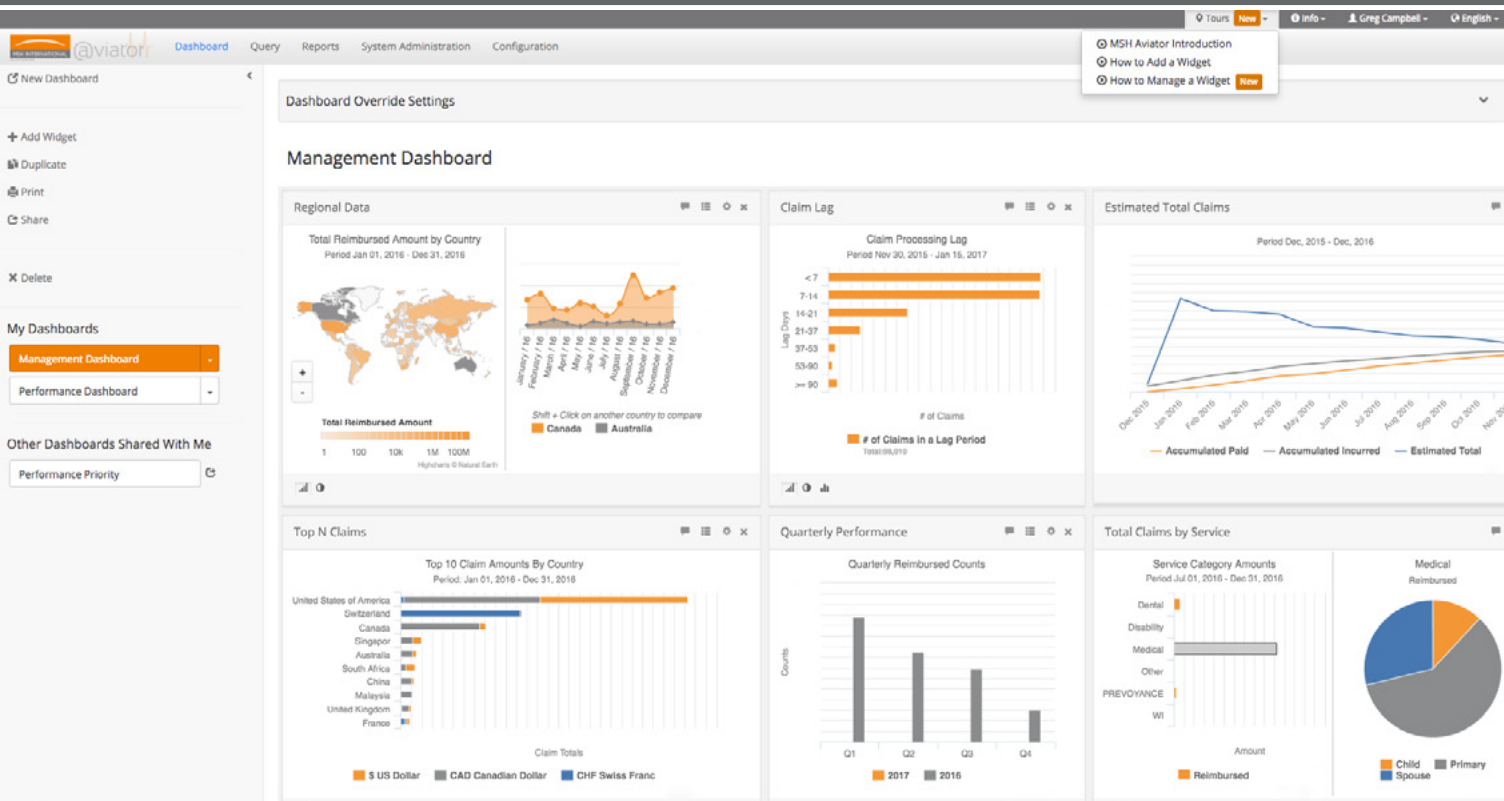
Global Benefits Vision: *Could you tell us about how you started working with MSH International?*

Greg Campbell: We ran into *MSH International* when I was speaking at a conference and **Philippe de Dreuzy**, their CEO, came up to me after the conference and said, "*We have to talk. You guys are doing all kinds of analytic stuff with large data sets*" so the relationship started fairly innocuously when they gave us some of their own data sets and said "*what can you do with this?*"

A couple weeks later, when we travelled to Calgary and presented the results to MSH International, we could almost immediately show them value in terms of data visualization and we even showed them some problems in the data that they had not picked up on, and so it was clear that we could add value to what they wanted to do in the future.

GBV: *Can you explain your role in Aviator?*

GC: That's an interesting question as it ties in well with how we work with a customer. Our mantra is: "*Pick a pain point. Resolve it. Repeat.*" This means that we take "*one small, low-hanging piece of fruit*" that is associated with a problem the client has, and we focus on that one problem. With MSH International in particular we found that they had a report, which required considerable effort from their team to compile, and we were able to solve that problem for them very quickly. As a result, MSH International was impressed with the quick and cost-effective approach which led to "*we had a huge return on our investment; can you help us with these other problems?*" And, in MSH International's case, this has snowballed and it continues to grow, as their program Aviator, built on our platform, just gets better and better – with richer functionality as a result.

PM
Project Manager

Sara Hallberg: It's important to note that we did the first release of Aviator after a couple of months, and MSH International has been using it for almost two years, so while we keep doing new releases to upgrade functionality over time, they get to see continued return on their investment in the product.

GBV: Your software development methodology seems to be closer to the Agile methodology than a conventional, watershed-type approach, is that correct?

GC: Yes; absolutely.

GBV: Could you go into more detail, then, about how the teams on the MSH International side interact with your teams on a day-to-day, or is it on a week-to-week basis?

GC: MSH International has created their own internal team that essentially interacts with us on a daily basis. That team is led by a project manager **(PM)**, who has the authority to pull anyone in from the MSH International side who is needed to answer questions or get information about what we on the software development team are doing.

On our side, our project manager, along with two of our senior architects, interfaces with MSH International's project manager daily. Together, their **PM**, our senior architects, myself as CEO of Spieker Point, and the COO of MSH International, and Philippe, the CEO of MSH International, form a Steering Committee for the Aviator product. We meet fairly regularly to set the functionality goals for Aviator – a long-term roadmap if you will. This way we can see their internal processes – especially the parts that trouble them – in terms of

what we need to build up in the functionality within Aviator. While Aviator is an internal tool for them, it also benefits their external customers, mainly brokers, insurance carriers, and underwriters who are basically packaging MSH International's insurance products to sell to their customers.

SH: Going back to building up functionality, and by way of example, we used to use a collaboration service and they ended up shutting down their service to focus on a different venture. We did research on other products including some of the bigger collaboration solutions that were out there. But they really didn't have the topical nature that we use internally. For example, and in relation to the insurance industry, we may have one conversation about claims that is about a specific workflow, and we could easily have 100 comments from different people associated with that workflow so we need to add that topical hierarchy to our conversations.

Therefore, we ended up creating this collaboration module inside our platform, because it made sense as far as where we wanted to take our holistic platform. We already had a very strong understanding of how we were going to design it and combined with the fact that **DDW** provides us with all the core pieces, it took about two days to actually do the development. After those two days it didn't have all the bells and whistles we wanted, but we did have a workable product. Essentially this shows how we can assist a customer to get up and running really quickly.

GC: Our main strategic reason for adding collaboration to our suite of software modules is so we can bring the concept of contextual collaboration to our customers. If you think of it in terms of a particularly tricky policy

renewal, internal staff can start a conversation centred around any object in the system – a document, a customer, a line of data. In this case, they can start a long-running conversation and engage team-members when needed, or ask clarifying questions of their customers. Now that those collaborations are built directly inside our platform – and we can trap those conversations in terms of why we did XYZ on this particular policy, and see the contextual history associated with it. It's really important to be able to attach a conversation to any object inside of the system, and that everything is linked within the various plugins that we have.

SH: And that's a perfect example of how we grow a project; it might not be an immediate priority when we start a customer engagement but when, or if, a customer is ready to add a certain piece of functionality to their instance, we simply engage this plugin for them.

GBV: Do you use a relational database system as the background, or is it a different kind of database management system, like a network database? Or are you working with the database model that your customer is using?

GC: The short answer is yes, there is a relational database directly behind **DDW**. The longer answer is: because it acts as a data hub for every single customer, it is dropped in the middle of all the islands of data that a customer has and ties all those islands of data together.

The direct answer to your question depends on what the "*source of truth*" needs to be for any particular data point. For example, you might have an existing database in the customer site already that needs to maintain itself as the source of truth, so our software would then reach into to that database and it would not copy

any of that data to the internal but it would just use that data referring to it.

Now another piece of data – it might not be a source of truth: let's say there's a spreadsheet out there that's critical to the business – that spreadsheet, before **DECK DECISIONWARE**, needed to be more formalized: the data needs to be protected and such. What often happens is that a customer comes along as we are developing all these pieces of functionality and that customer's data gets translated internally to the **DDW** database and so that in itself becomes the source of truth for that data. Again, sitting in the middle of all the other data, we are able to interweave all of that together and glean a great deal of extra information in terms of analytics. I know this is a complicated answer to your seemingly simple question, but it's a complicated scenario in terms of what the customer is trying to do.

GBV: Once that is done, do you have a data model view of the resulting data, relationships and computations as opposed to the actual results? So, for example, would an IT person be able to have an overview of where, precisely, the reference data is as opposed to where calculated data resides? Sometimes you need to generate and store calculated data for performance reasons and confusing that calculated data with source-of-truth data is all too easy – is that correct?

GC: So if I can paraphrase; do we give the IT department our customer access the data behind the scenes inside our software?

GBV: *Perhaps that could be necessary for audit reasons if the ultimate data comes out of Aviator, for example, or if an application is used in a regulated activity. You need to have your audit track written out or spelled out somewhere.*

GC: It turns out that our software has auditing capabilities directly built in. If a customer is operating in a regulated industry and needs auditing, the information is tracked directly inside of **DDW**. So, we typically tell a customer that our database is a "*no fly zone*" and that an IT department shouldn't have access to it. That solves a number of issues from a compliance standpoint.

And we can settle on the fact that we save IT departments thousands of hours a year by offering them a module called Query Builder. We built Query Builder because we found that IT departments are inundated by user requests to pull data together to answer ad hoc questions.

Our view was – and is still – that we can alleviate pressure on a customer's IT department because our software is already centrally situated to answer those ad-hoc questions; so if we can give a non-technical user an easy-to-use query builder -- in that they wouldn't need a Computer Science degree to pull together domain objects and run Crystal Reports and all that -- if we can give them a view into that data so they can build a filter and pare down the terabytes of information that they have at their fingertips to the point where they can answer the questions is key.

And then, even further, to be able to export that data to an Excel spreadsheet so that user can graphically represent the resulting data for their customer or management team that is asking the question – that's been a game changer for all of our customers.

SH: In addition, a customer can access a query in an easily digestible format from the dashboard as well, so if there is some data line on a dashboard that you are curious about, or if something looks abnormal, or you want to see why you are doing well in this quarter, you can access the underlying data from the dashboard.

GBV: *So does DECK DecisionWare have drilldown capabilities?*

GC: That's correct.

GBV: I'd like now to discuss features of the existing suite that are not used in Aviator, and other examples of implementations.

GC: Let's start with features that aren't used inside Aviator that we feel are incredibly important for the near future. One of the things we've actively developed towards lately is the concept of contextual collaboration and dynamic case management – and they really do go hand in hand.

Imagine a Facebook–type interface with information flowing in that same way – a constant flow of information from inside of **DDW** to groups that you might belong to: the manager that you're reporting to, or various groups that allow you to do your job better.

For example, say we're in a team of insurance account managers, and one of our accounts suddenly has a major claim with large dollar values attached to it.

That major claim case, as defined in the business process, needs to be taken care of in a different way. When we log on in the morning, our collaboration feed would show that this particular customer with this claim has now become a major case and someone in our group needs to pick the task up.

Then, if one member of our group decides a few minutes later to pick up that task and carry it through, the rest of us would see that this team member has picked up that major case claim.

This major case claim now has it's own case management view that will allow the person responsible for seeing this case through to decide the best way forward to achieve the overarching goal of major case claims. As each case requires its own unique handling,
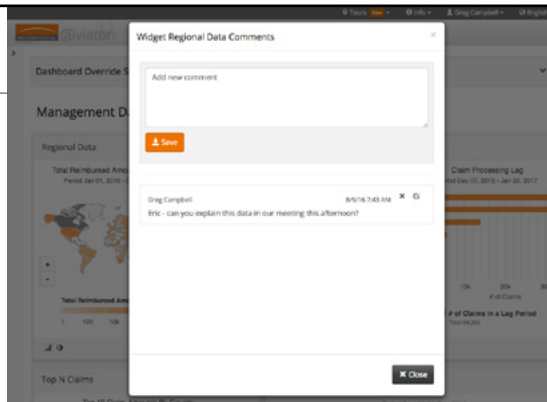
this is a much better approach than a traditional business process that is predefined, offering no flexibility.

And since our software is role–based, all of this private information is siloed and is protected. So we in the account manager group would be able to share information or bring a customer into the conversation but also be able to ensure that that information is siloed and private for our group.

We previously mentioned the importance of object linking and it's absolutely vital for an effective case management solution. From now on, the case file, supporting documents, data, people, tasks and processes are all linked together.

It's important to note that the contextual collaboration can provide considerable value to an organization on its own, whereas dynamic case management without collaboration quickly falls short.

We are super excited about both plugins as they reflect the way that organizations actually do work on a daily basis and we really feel like they are both going to become key components of **DECK DecisionWare** really quickly.

In the article MSH International CEO Philippe de Dreuzy wrote for *Global Benefits Vision*[1] a few months ago, he focused on what we call "*actionable analytics.*" What we mean by that is everyone is doing analytics these days; everyone has a package that allows you to visualize data

points but we are different from everybody else in that our competitors expect the users to see and take action on something directly inside their software or in their business.

What we bring to the table is the integration of the analytics in the business process, so we can have an algorithm running that is looking for certain environmental things to transpire and those algorithms can then trigger workflows that get people involved, depending on the business process of that particular business.

So then the workflow is tied directly into not only the analytics, but we also have a huge policy engine that resides inside the system and that policy engine includes all of the auditing functionality. An auditing rule in the system might actually trigger a particular business process as well, to ensure that somebody takes care of this particular issue as the system recognizes that a policy might be broken.

GBV: Can you illustrate some of the uses of DECK DecisionWare other than Aviator?

GC: To us, the beauty of **DDW** is that it is industry agnostic. Any vertical that is looking for better ways to make their data play nice and then leverage that data to empower users throughout the whole organization with tools that help them work more effectively and make better decisions – can benefit from one or several components of the software suite. Generally, the more complicated the data, processes and policy requirements, the stronger the use case. We are actively pushing into the finance technology industry as we have many of the key components for a very

SaaS
Software-as-a-Service

strong service offering there. Our experience with insurance and banking is kind of what has brought us there. We also have customers the healthcare industry, professional services, field services and various government bodies.
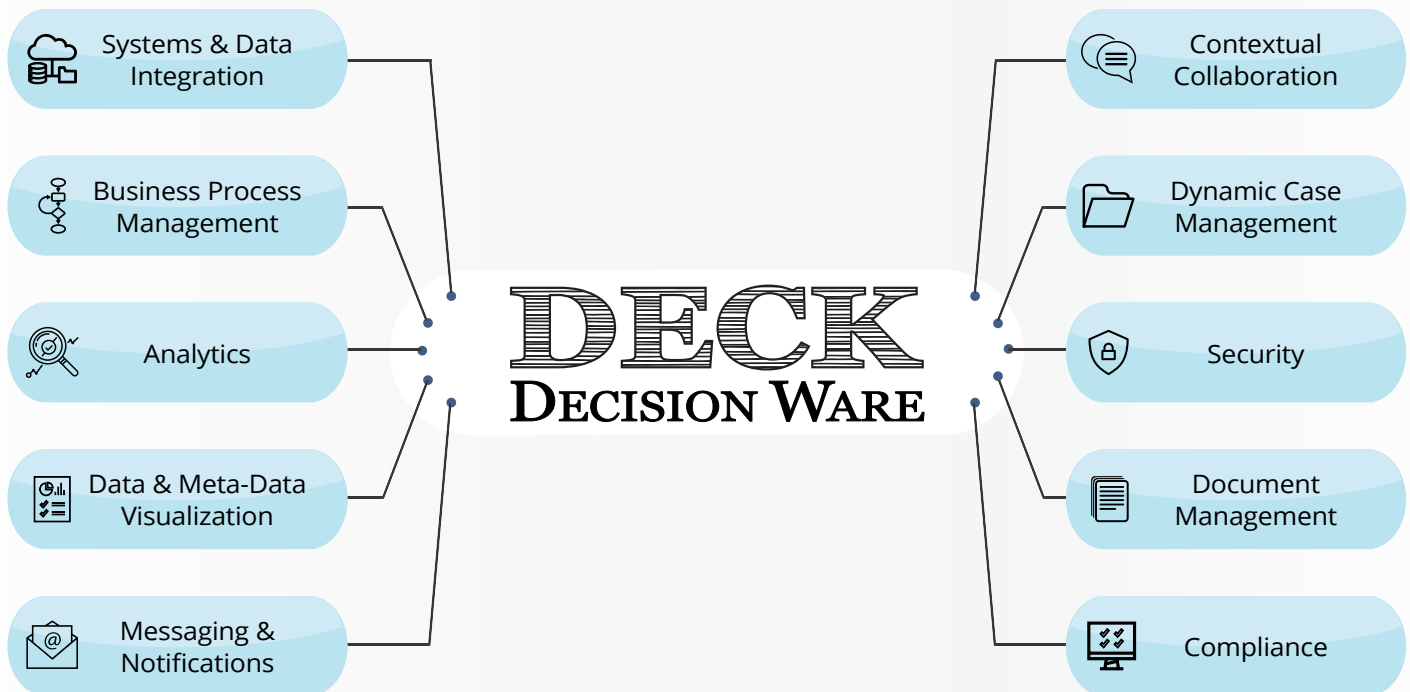
SH: There really are two distinct customer groups that we work with. Customers like MSH International and their product Aviator, who are larger companies that come to us for what we call our business management platform. But we also use our set of tools as a rapid web application development platform. In this case we are less likely to pull in the bigger Analytics, Process and Policy engines and focus more on the custom development of a specific customer module – one that houses the "secret sauce" for their product. It's the decoupled nature of **DDW** that makes it easy to only pull in the pieces needed for that specific product and get a bespoke developed piece of software off the ground at incredible speed.

For example, our latest project involved a re-write of Alberta Association of Registry Agents' Renewal Reminder Service as the original product they had commissioned had a host of issues. Our software platform is providing the stability, scalability, and reliable delivery service growing from 25,000 email and text messages a month for licence and registration reminder throughout the province of Alberta in Canada.

In both cases, the customer has a white-labelled product, something that they can brand and market as their own and then use in their operations, offer as a value-add, or re-sell it to other companies as a Software-as-a-Service **(SaaS)**.

3. DECK DecisionWare Modules

Systems & Data Integration · **Business Process Management** · **Analytics** · **Data & Meta-Data Visualization** · **Messaging & Notifications** — **DECK DecisionWare** — **Contextual Collaboration** · **Dynamic Case Management** · **Security** · **Document Management** · **Compliance**

GBV: *Greg and Sarah, is there anything else you would like to add?*

GC: Sure; we are starting on a few new contracts that are bringing us data feeds from sensor networks that are distributed at our customer site, and these pose a really interesting facilitation problem for us – to be able to collect all the sensor data from the IoT networks and display that back to the customer and their customers as well. I think that's a key part for us in the future as well.

GBV: *Isn't the risk management aspect vital as well – especially regulatory and compliance?*

GC: When we position **DECK DecisionWare** up against an **ERP** solution, often those **ERP** solutions are not tuned at all to address what the customer is looking for in terms of regulatory compliance. Not only can we come in and breathe life into the systems they already have and allow them to capitalize on the expenditure for those current systems into the future, it can also suddenly solve a lot of compliance issues for our customers – and that is huge for most of our customers.

GBV: *Thank you for sharing these insights with us.* ∞

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