Outlier ai tells data rank and quality stories to reinforce automated business analysis

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The purveyor of a self-styled automated business analysis platform is using data storytelling as a lynchpin in its strategy and has unleashed stories to communicate the ranked insights its offering generates as well as issues with 'dirty data' as part of an on-going objective to use storytelling to communicate the anomalies it detects, and the reasons for them.

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Introduction

Data storytelling is a longtime Outlier feature. It's all about enabling the vendor to communicate to individuals without data science and analytics smarts – in a clear and easy-to-understand way – the unexpected insights and root causes that its offering is designed to seek out. Outlier has introduced three new types of stories as part of an ongoing strategy to improve the user experience it delivers for automated business analytics to senior executives, as well as to other groups that require what is now often called automated decision intelligence (or augmented analytics), such as operational data teams.

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Our research indicates that most individuals would prefer to use something other than a dashboard for self-service analytics. Real-time alerts driven by automated anomaly detection are currently piquing the most interest, according to 451 Research's VotE Data and Analytics 1H 2019 survey: 33% of survey respondents said they were most attracted to this form of analysis when asked which BI interface technology (if any) they were interested in using. Real-time alerts driven by automated anomaly detection also scored highest – at 22% – when those surveyed were asked which they thought might be the most beneficial to their organization, regardless of personal interest. Outlier is therefore tapping into a sizzling market full of growth potential. However, the firm is not alone in doing so, as more specialists including the likes of diwo, Nodin.ai, Anodot, Codepan (Stream.ai) and Unsupervised have entered this sector. Outlier is therefore likely to face a tougher competitive environment than when it entered the automated decision intelligence sector two years as an early category pioneer.

Details

Outlier has introduced three new story types to the firm's self-styled automated business analysis platform. At its name implies, Outlier is all about making business analytics automatic, which the vendor enables by drawing on its smarts in AI and machine learning, including natural language generation (NLG). Outlier's stories rely on NLG for machine-generated explanations, which are designed to complement the visualizations and numeric information in reports that are automatically generated by the offering, to communicate unexpected insights when crunching through large volumes of corporate data to find outliers – and the reason for them.

The company plans to add new types of stories each quarter to double down on data literacy, which is often in short supply among its target audience of line-of-business managers, who have traditionally relied on data analysts to carry out anomaly detection and root cause analysis, which Outlier seeks to automate at scale. The new stories, which went live earlier in October, take three forms: rank story, data quality story and missing data story. In line with the rest of the stories Outlier delivers, they are all are about telling stories with data, in the most comprehensible way, when something unexpected occurs in a company's data.

The rank story is served up when a great many changes to the data and some kind of organization to communicate the most important ones to the end user is necessary. Furthermore, the rank is designed to shine when identifying changes in the data that offset each other, which wouldn't necessarily be obvious in a traditional BI dashboard, because when one segment increases and another decreases, these changes cancel themselves out when viewed through top-level metrics. The rank will show absolute values, as well as the effects of jostling in the rankings. It will also allow the user to drill down into the dimensions for further analysis.

Data quality stories are about surfacing 'dirty data,' which Outlier has always provided to a certain degree to enable individuals to trust the insights presented them. However, with the debut of the data quality story, Outlier is doubling down on this area. A data quality story essentially surfaces corrupted data and data values that are no longer valid by hooking Outlier into a database or another type of data store, where it will sift through hundreds of columns and millions of rows to find them – without requiring configuration. This type of story could depict an ETL failure, for example, which would show up as a big spike in a line graph, with some text and other relevant data to explain the likely root cause.

Stories about missing data are the third type Outlier has added to its arsenal. Although related to a data quality story owing to a high-level focus on dirty data, a missing data story is intended to show the user data that should be there – and is not. The aim here – as with the data quality story – is to proactively identify this information to prevent it from corrupting reports in Excel or analytical dashboards. That means operational data teams are a target market for it. Outlier's latest stories are included in the subscription price.

Finally, over on the business front, it is worth noting that Outlier has secured fresh investment of late, and has continued on a recruitment drive, so it's larger than it was last year. Outlier landed a strategic financial investment from Capital One Growth Ventures in August. The company's customers have traditionally been in retail and e-commerce, but with Capital One on board, the vendor anticipates building a customer base in financial services. The firm's other new backer is In-Q-Tel, which became a strategic investor, as well as a partner, in May.

Outlier has more than 25 employees and is expected to continue growing as the vendor keeps on hiring. Outlier had eight employees in April 2018 when we started tracking the company, which had been in the market for about a year at that time.