OP-ED:
The **democratization** of **advanced analytics** and the **end** of **dark data**

FROM THE SOURCE gives readers a chance to hear from the people behind the products. Each installment will connect with a different business leader at Zoho, asking them what they see for the future of their industry.

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Sailas Sundaram is the Senior Product Manager at Zoho Analytics. During his decade-long journey with Zoho, Sailas has overseen product management, taking solutions from concept to launch. As an expert in aligning advanced technologies with key business objectives, he also oversees the BI Technology & Consulting Partners Network and Professional Services program.

f the information economy has taught us anything, it's that data is valuable. Search engines and social media companies have earned trillions of dollars off the data they collect, the analyses they perform, and the access they sell. After all, what is digital marketing if not the strategic leveraging of data at scale?

Beyond the household names of the information economy, there are also thousands of brokers whose entire business model is built on profiting from the transfer of data. They help data flow from the "mines" where it is collected to the strategists who can refine it into insights that fuel business decision-making: which customers to target, what they want to buy, how to influence them, where to invest, or what's coming next.

If so much money has been made off data, why aren't companies treating the data they already have as the valuable asset that it is?

Historically, the most powerful insights were only available to the largest companies with the deepest pockets. With enough money, entrenched industry incumbents could purchase a competitive edge—large teams of data scientists, running expensive software on top of massive data lakes—which newer or smaller players couldn't hope to match. Growing organizations could extract some amount of value from their data, but truly transformative insights were too time-consuming, labor intensive, or technically challenging to generate at scale, let alone sustain for the long term.

That era is coming to an end.

In the coming years, we at Zoho Analytics are confident that the pace of adoption for advanced business intelligence will only increase as data storage costs drop and AI technology improves. With the rise of affordable, scalable, AI-enabled business intelligence platforms—like Zoho Analytics—more and more companies will be able to leverage the data they collect to get a deep and meaningful understanding of their own operations, processes, customers, and performance—

across and between departments and from the front lines to the board room.

But how can business leaders join this new era? By working to shed light on the dark data that exists across their organizations.

Dark data is underutilized data. For mature, BI-first organizations, the only truly dark data may be unstructured or difficult to parse, such as call center transcripts or footage from security cameras. However, most companies that haven't yet embraced a fully data-driven culture still harbor vast amounts of dark data that's not being leveraged to its full potential. Whether that's customer data siloed in the CRM or machine sensor logs pulled from a factory floor, our mission is to help business leaders actively and diligently examine their digital business environment in search of novel ways to center data in their strategic thinking.

With the right tools and the right mindset, the insights pulled from dark data can drive innovation, optimization, and growth. There are three key ways that Zoho Analytics can help with this leap forward. First, we have automated and streamlined data preparation to make it easier to ingest and normalize massive data streams from a wide range of sources and data lakes. Second, we have built out a suite of intuitive AI tools that can empower employees at all levels to unearth critical business insights quickly and easily. Third, we have launched advanced data visualization and sharing functionality to make those insights meaningful and accessible to key stakeholders across the organization. With the upcoming release of Analytics 6.0, we've strengthened these offerings across the journey of your data.

Generating insights no longer requires sophisticated technical fluency, developer skills, or familiarity with data architecture. Instead, our modern BI platform helps business leaders realize the promise of truly contextual intelligence: analytics and insights that allow every employee to understand the problem, consider the solutions, and make decisions driven by data. This way, every company—not just the big players in the information economy—can reap the benefits of advanced, integrated, and accessible insights built from the data generated by their own business operations.