Deep Analysis

Objective Corporation

Founded 1987 | HQ Sydney, Australia | 300 employees (approx.) | AU$ 65M revenue per annum

Objective's Trapeze is a good example of a content-oriented business application that has been designed as a solution to meet a specific problem. It effectively uses advanced technology in the background to add major productivity improvements for the user. If the firm can take this design ethos into other content applications, it has the potential to pivot successfully and grow substantially.

The Company

Objective Corporation was founded in 1987 and is headquartered in Sydney, Australia. The firm employs around 300 people and has revenues of approximately AU$ 65 million per annum. The majority of the firm's business is generated in Australia and the UK. Objective is best known for its enterprise content management (ECM) systems that are sold widely into Australian and UK government agencies. In 2016, Objective acquired a New Zealand company called Onstream Systems and its Trapeze products, the focus of this report.

The Technology

Objective sells a range of content-related products, most notably its flagship Objective ECM system. However, we noticed with interest the recent addition of AI in the firm's Trapeze products. Trapeze is an innovative system that was designed to support the process of reviewing building planning projects. Trapeze is something of a departure from Objective's core business, as it is a highly specialized business application designed to compare and review proposed building plans. The system was acquired in 2016 and underwent a substantial makeover and upgrade in 2019.

Trapeze was originally (prior to the Objective acquisition) positioned as a generic document viewing and imaging toolset. It provided an all-in-one document management system, designed to apply version control to, view, and archive documents and drawings. Objective has stripped back, refined, and improved Trapeze considerably.

First to note is that Trapeze is, thankfully, no longer tied into a core document repository system (in the past, this was typically HP Trim). Today, the focus is on refining the application itself, and now drawings and planning documents can be stored and managed in the buyer's choice of the document management system.

The second thing to note is that the previously dated user interface for Trapeze has been redesigned and now has a very intuitive and simple feel. We particularly like the fact that the viewer has as much space as possible to view drawings, and tools and toolbars have been minimized yet optimized. Objective has engaged closely with customers and leveraged its proprietary Objective Design Language (ODL) User Experience technology for this work, as it has across its portfolio of other products.

The third thing to note – and of most interest to Deep Analysis – is the addition of AI capabilities in the latest release of the system, called Trapeze Professional. The AI is used to automate, or at least augment, the comparison of drawings, and highlight changes between one drawing and another. The addition of this capability transforms Trapeze from a toolset to a true business application. It's an effective use of AI, as the technology (image processing algorithms) can immediately detect any changes in one version of a drawing compared with another through image analysis. The user can then assess the changes and act accordingly. It's a simple but highly effective use case for AI, as it essentially automates and improves the accuracy rate in much of the planning work processes. AI is also used effectively to find white space on drawings to apply stamps: a small task but, in real-world situations where hundreds of pages are being reviewed, a time-saver and efficiency gain.

Figure 1
Objective Corporation Assessment
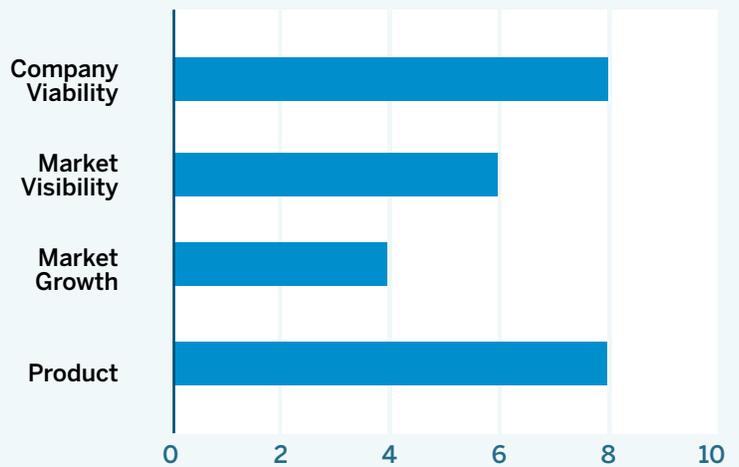
Objective has built the AI capabilities and training sets from past customer work, and by default, they are limited in scope to the typical council-planning-specific work Trapeze has been used for in the past. AI is a process of continuous learning, and good models are continuously reviewed and corrected. Hence, over time, as the use and scope of AI in Trapeze will be expanded, so too will the data sets that Objective can draw upon to create more task- and sector-specific AI tools.

In 2019, Objective also acquired AlphaOne, a product that provides building content (inspections/compliance, etc.) automation, and integrated this capability into Trapeze. Though it's not a part of the current release, we noted that Objective has plans to expand its use of AI to identify changes and defects captured in video and photographs from building inspections.

💬 Our Opinion

Trapeze is both practical and innovative. It is a good example of a content-oriented business application that has been designed as a solution to meet a specific problem. Further, it is a clean and simple-to-use system that subtly, though effectively, uses advanced technology in the background to add major productivity improvements for the user. It's an excellent example of the content applications we would like to see available in the market, but seldom do. That being said, Trapeze is only a small part of Objective's overall business, but there are few opportunities for new business in the ECM market. If the firm can take this design ethos into other content applications, it has the potential to pivot successfully and grow substantially, all while drawing upon its decades of experience in building software to manage enterprise content. Acquisitions, though, are always difficult, and ingesting Trapeze into Objective while resolving standing issues with customers, products, and staff that come as part of the deal is never easy. But it has been three years since the deal was closed, and this latest iteration of Trapeze, and the integration of the AlphaOne functionality, shows significant progress being made.

💡 Advice to Buyers

Trapeze is a highly specialized business application, so its value and applicability are limited. For those working in planning departments, Trapeze is clearly something to examine closely. However, it is worth noting that Trapeze's functionality has potential use beyond planning departments, in the much broader construction and engineering world. We can see it having a role to play in the oil & gas, utilities, and commercial construction sectors, for example. It is further worth noting that since Objective has uncoupled Trapeze from the HP Trim document management system, it can be used by a much wider audience.

🔍 SOAR Analysis

Strengths

→ Simple user experience
→ Effective leverage of machine learning

Aspirations

→ Become the global de facto building planning and content application of choice
→ Be a vehicle to new business growth for Objective

Opportunities

→ Global public planning departments
→ Expanded growth in broader engineering and construction sectors

Results

→ Over 2,000 worldwide customers of Trapeze
→ Widely used in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand

About Deep Analysis

Deep Analysis is an advisory firm that helps organizations understand and address the challenges of innovative and disruptive technologies in the enterprise software marketplace.

Its work is built on decades of experience in advising and consulting to global technology firms large and small, from IBM, Oracle, and HP to countless start-ups.

Led by Alan Pelz-Sharpe, the firm focuses on Information Management and the business application of Cloud, Artificial Intelligence, and Blockchain. Deep Analysis recently published the book "Practical Artificial Intelligence: An Enterprise Playbook," co-authored by Alan and Kashyap Kompella, outlining strategies for organizations to avoid pitfalls and successfully deploy AI.

Deep Analysis works with technology vendors to improve their understanding and provide actionable guidance on current and future market opportunities.

Yet, unlike traditional analyst firms, Deep Analysis takes a buyer-centric approach to its research and understands real-world buyer and market needs versus the "echo chamber" of the technology industry.

About the Author

Alan Pelz-Sharpe is the founder of Deep Analysis. He has over 25 years of experience in the IT industry, working with a wide variety of end-user organizations like FedEx, The Mayo Clinic, and Allstate, and vendors ranging from Oracle and IBM to start-ups around the world. Alan was formerly a Partner at The Real Story Group, Consulting Director at Indian Services firm Wipro, Research Director at 451, and VP for North America at industry analyst firm Ovum. He is regularly quoted in the press, including the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Guardian*, and has appeared on the BBC, CNBC, and ABC as an expert guest.

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