Grooper

Founded 1986 | HQ Edmond, OK | 90 employees (approx.) | $30M revenue (est.)

Grooper represents one of the more remarkable corporate and technology pivots we have seen. A company that was well known and long established in the capture/scanning market reinvents itself as a data integration platform vendor. What it has done so far – and it has taken seven years of development work – it has done well.

The Company

Grooper emerged in 2015 from a reinvention/pivot of privately held BIS (Business Imaging Systems). BIS has been around since 1986, remains based in Edmond, Oklahoma, and continues to be led by its founder and CEO, Dan Rotelli. With around 90 employees, the BIS business has historically been focused on forging reseller partnerships with scanner hardware companies and implementing document capture software.

The Technology

Grooper describes itself as a data science and data integration platform that comes with pre-installed machine learning capabilities. At first glance that would seem to put Grooper in competition with the likes of Boomi, Informatica, and MuleSoft. But a second look at the Grooper offering reveals something quite different. For where traditional data integration platforms focus on structured data, Grooper's approach is to recognize, capture, and analyze both structured and unstructured data in documents and forms. That is ambitious for a small company, and positions it, in theory at least, into some of the most complex data collection and integration challenges imaginable. In other words, it is easy to dismiss Grooper, a firm with no outside investment to support such a mammoth task, from the get-go. However, looking more closely at the Grooper technology, a semblance of nuance and much needed industry innovation emerges.

Grooper, as the name is designed to suggest, groups data. It takes lexicons, machine learning models, natural language processing, classification techniques, sophisticated text pattern recognition, image processing, and OCR, and blends them together within a single platform. The company does this with the stated goal of providing a mechanism to model data and to provide a single view of information within an enterprise.

In developing the platform, Grooper started from a position of trying to understand and


model the cognitive experience of reading business documents; for example, the weighting of common phrases, the breaking of documents, mail, and beyond into relevant pieces, etc. In doing so, it engineered a new approach to data modeling, collecting data from common sources and providing bi-directional, federated integration and data management for business applications.

To its credit, Grooper has developed much of the underlying technology itself, even taking the highly unusual step of building its own Computer Vision capabilities. It has also developed a new approach to OCR and designed the platform for massive scalability. This is complex stuff, and hard for data professionals to get their heads around, let alone enterprise buyers. However, it is, in our analysis, technically impressive.

What is important to glean from this are the practical situations where such a new approach to data management may make sense. Grooper itself has rightly identified industry sectors like healthcare, oil and gas, government, and financial services as prime targets. All rely heavily on the information captured and often trapped within traditional documents to operate effectively. Till now, capturing mission critical information and leveraging it in the business has been limited by traditional OCR, and often by simplistic autoclassification. An approach that can effectively leverage that information across business units makes good sense.

In July 2020, the firm released an update to Grooper, v2.9 (see Figure 1). Among other improvements, this enhanced the system's ability to support data annotation in the review process, complex content filtering, and document separation. Perhaps most importantly, it provided a new Document Viewer to look at different document renditions.

Grooper Screenshot: Mortgage Classification Process
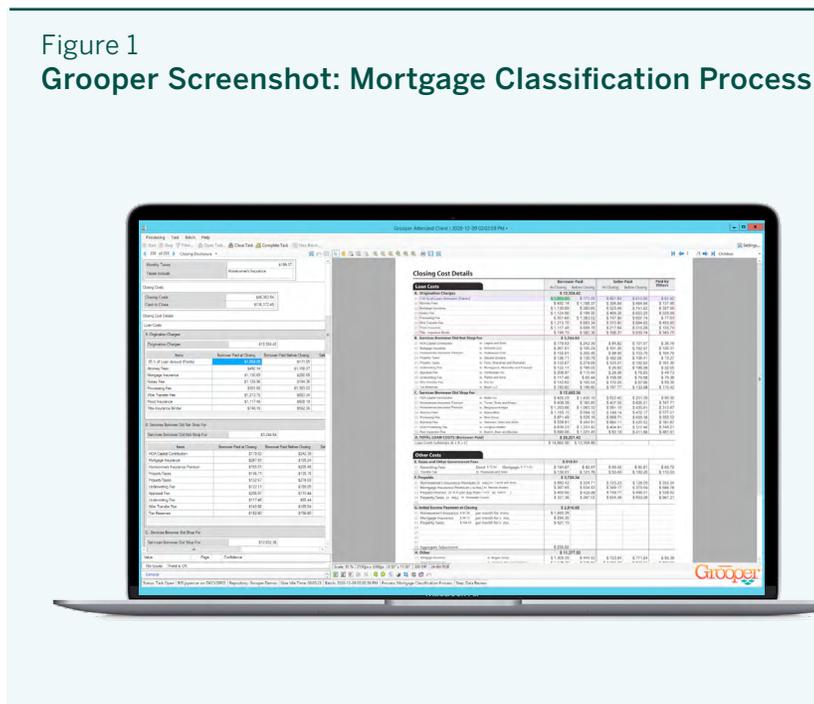
To put it into the simplest of terms: to date, getting something of value beyond raw data from documents has been an uphill struggle, so much so that the capture industry has changed very little over the past couple of decades. Mainstream IT vendors go as far as to ignore this data altogether and focus their efforts on easier-to-manage structured data. Grooper suggests there is a better way, one that deals with this "difficult" data by providing a platform that has next-gen capture tools, image processing, classification, machine reading, data extraction, and code-free integration capabilities.

Our Opinion

Grooper represents one of the more remarkable corporate and technology pivots we have seen. A company that was well known and long established in the capture/scanning market reinvents itself as a data integration platform vendor. What it has done so far – and it has taken seven years of development work – it has done well. The vision and recognition of the need for a system such as Grooper that embraces rather than tries to ignore the tricky topic of unstructured information is well founded. But a long-established company is shifting dramatically into new waters and although that is risky, the early indications are that the move was the right one. That being said, Grooper is a difficult concept to grasp, and over time its capabilities and applicability will need to be more simply articulated.

Advice to Buyers

If you are a midsize to large organization that relies heavily on unstructured data for your business, you may want to take a look at Grooper – not so much as an alternative to traditional capture technologies, but rather as a platform to re-engineer and digitally transform your business operations. There is little doubt that any such undertaking would be major. But Grooper offers a highly innovative and scalable alternative to finally be able to make that shift. If that aligns with your strategy, then you have an admirable appetite for change, and you'll need to be sure that you can work closely with the Grooper team from the earliest steps of your transformation project.

SOAR Analysis

Strengths
- Highly innovative new approach to document capture
- Scalable and extensive platform architecture

Aspirations
- Become a leading data integration company
- Redefine the content services sector

Opportunities
- Re-architect traditional information flows
- Disrupt the traditional capture market

Results
- First major clients on board and deployed
- Platform built and tested

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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