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Q&A with Liran Zvibel, CEO and Co-Founder and Barbara Murphy, VP of Marketing of WekaIO the world's fastest, scalable Parallel File System providing the Storage Capacity needed to run AI, Machine Learning, Deep Learning and other Data Intensive Applications

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Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. Zvibel, what is the concept behind WekaIO?*
Mr. Zvibel: Weka is a numerical figure and stands for 10 to the power of 30, so it is a huge number. It is currently the largest unit recognized. The concept of the company tracks with the name, in that we have been doing storage as a group for a very long time.

Before we founded WekaIO, my co-founders and I were working at IBM after the acquisition of our startup. We saw firsthand what the likes of a giant such as IBM was doing in the file space, what they were doing with their own scale-up solution of GPFS and joint business with NETTA. This sparked our creative minds and we wanted to try and solve the major problem of this space by building one solution – one file system to answer every need. To achieve this, we decided to go with a file system that has extreme performance, unlike any other file system before it. WekaIO is more than an order of magnitude faster than anything else, we are also more scalable than any other file system on the market.

CEOCFO: *How are you able to reach this scale when others cannot?*
Mr. Zvibel: We have done two things very differently than other solutions. First, we have invented a file system that is controlled by many independent controllers. You could look at it as an infinite number of controllers, whereas a traditional file system may have only one or two. What this allows is scale, and scale at an immense rate. Secondly, we architected completely different data structures that are geared for flash. We are therefore the first solution to be invented and created from the point of flash and countless controllers, where all of the competing solutions were created from the mindset of a hard drive with very few controllers.

CEOCFO: *Do people that should understand WekaIO and what you are doing, truly understand or are they skeptical? What has been the response from potential users, as well as from the industry?*
Mr. Zvibel: Initially we experienced some skepticism, because we were going to customers and telling them that the problem, they have been having for the last 20 years no longer exists. To some, it came across as a fairytale story or science fiction, at least initially. Then, after they actually tested and used our system, they saw the truth in our claims.

Customers are used to vendors telling stories and then experiencing something very different in reality, but we actually do what we say we can do. So yes, initially we did have to prove it to customers, but that's happening less and less, since the word is out and we are building a very good name in the market.

In addition to word of mouth, the publication of our benchmark results, independent industry tests, highlight even further our claim to fame – i.e. the fastest file system in the world. Today, customers are more open to the idea of us actually delivering on our promise than they were a year ago.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the different verticals that you are working with and give us a couple of examples of how they are using the system to make a difference?*
Mr. Zvibel: We are now focusing on where it is most difficult for customers to actually achieve results. Our best performing vertical is AI (Artificial Intelligence) and machine learning; anything that has GPU compute in it. The reason is that the single GPU server replaces 10 or tens of traditional CPU servers. These CPU servers have almost enough performance in them. Up until now, when you aggregate the IO requirements of them in tens, which means you now need 10 times more performance, we are still the only solution that can actually do it. Another aspect of machine learning is deep learning, which has now become very popular, and with deep learning the more data you have, the better your results. It means that customers need to hold many, many terabytes of data, and it works very well for our solution, so machine learning, deep learning, and AI is probably our strongest vertical.

> **"Rather than needing the traditional three or four vendors to fit your current storage needs, WekaIO is able to solve this issue and deliver one seamless solution to our customers. Essentially, streamlining the industry and cutting out major overhead for companies across the board."- Liran Zvibel**

Barbara: Another strong vertical for us is life sciences and genomics, where people have very large files on the one hand, but a great deal of smaller files on the other hand. We are the only solution that provides a good enough mix. Therefore, we are starting to see many of the genomics processing and life sciences switching to WekaIO. These are probably the strongest two verticals where we present our solution to customers and they are very much compelled to get our system. Then, what we are seeing is that once our system is up and running with a customer, they then expand internally and take us to their other problems that we did not even tell them that we were going to solve.

CEOCFO: *How do you ease transition to your product? How do you overcome the fears of migrating a system?*
Mr. Zvibel: First, we support the same protocols they are accustomed to running, which allows them to just start transitioning in a process that is totally transparent. Another thing that really helps customers, is that we have built-in support or backup, which saves the initial state of the system, so they have the peace of mind of knowing that they can always go back and continue running from the previous point of what they had. Also, in the initial point of deployment, we give them a great deal of support, both from our pre-sales and sales and engineering, as well as from our customer success teams. We put a great deal of effort into every project, making sure that our customers are happy. We help them transition their monitoring fields, we help them transition the data, monitor and make sure they are working well, and that is why all of them feel comfortable in moving to our solution.

CEOCFO: *What has changed in your approach as more people are using your product? What have you learned from your customers?*
Mr. Zvibel: One very important thing is that we need to blend in with their current protocols. Initially we thought we would show them that coming to the new way of working right away is going to let them leverage our advantages earlier, so they would be happier. However, the biggest thing we have learned is that customers prefer to move as is and have small amounts of additional volume. Then once they are happy with that, they would kick-in all of the rest of our value proposition, and get the 10 or 100 gigs of performance scale.

Barbara: The big lesson learned from what we are seeing is that there is a general perception in the industry that a local disc, which is running a singular system, standing on its own with a local drive for the compute, is the fastest you can possibly go. Invariably, after they have used our product, we bust that myth for them. This is a myth in our customers' heads that goes back for as long as storage has been around. So, the big thing for them is realizing that there is a system that can break from the model that we all believed was the one true model. That has been the "wow" factor of our product when they use it, which is the fact that they can go faster than they could ever go when they were running it as a local system inside a single server. As a shared storage solution, no one else has ever shown or proven that can be done.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about being recognized with an Alconic Award from AI Business for the Best Innovation in Deep Learning for their parallel file system?*
Barbara: We have several customers in the machine learning space, specifically around autonomous vehicle driving, and the award was for the best innovation in deep learning. The innovation was the ability to be able to massively improve the

time-to-results for deep learning. The challenge that the autonomous vehicle space presents to car makers, is that it really is a race to be first, and as you just saw recently with the provision of licenses to actually have cars with no people in them, customers are desperately trying to run as many models as fast as they possibly can. We did a submission around our customer use case for this, showing how we had reduced the time to do a single e/pop, which is the time to do a single training run, from two weeks to less than half a day. This is a massive time savings for them, and it means they can now run 10 times as many models and get much better results and much finer granularity. We have a great customer, TuSimple that is a tremendous advocate for our product. Therefore, it is a combination of showing real life results, versus theoretical marketing; that has really been the differentiator for us against such great vendors as Pure Storage and NetApp.

CEOCFO: *What is your strategy for the next year or so?*
Mr. Zvibel: Our strategy for the next year is to vastly improve our ability to work well within enterprises, so it will be easier for customers to extend our product to future workloads, after they have adopted us for machine learning in genomics. This will make our product much more compelling for other use cases. Then we are also going to increase our commercial ability and expand to even more regions within the US as well as out to Europe.

CEOCFO: *Are you seeking partnerships and/or investment funding as you go forward?*
Mr. Zvibel: We are very much channel friendly and partner friendly. We already have Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE) reselling us. We have Penguin Computing, which is a smaller server vendor reselling us, as well as Super Micro Computer Inc. Our approach is that storage should be sold in the same manner as software, and we would strive to add more large server/vendors as partners, and then also more regional resellers to our channel. We are definitely looking for partners to help us scale, and part of the ability to scale is working well within the active channel system and with other large partners.

CEOCFO: *Final thoughts. What might a potential user or potential investor miss about WekaIO that should be understood?*
Barbara: We are already seeing it in just the 2017 results, but our rate of velocity of growth, when we compare ourselves to all of the cohorts that we see, that have done S1s in the past, is at an accelerated rate beyond anything that they would have seen before. There is such a huge concept demand for the problems that we are solving, to the extent that we are at a point where we literally have more opportunity than we have the ability to execute upon at this point in time. We really see this as a potential for a hyper growth type of company.

Mr. Zvibel: There are two things that I think are overlooked. One is we have a strong focus on the cloud and I think this is going to start playing a more significant role in the years to come. We are actually the only storage vendor that runs the exact same software stack on-premises and in the cloud, and we provide hybrid cloud solutions better than any other storage vendor on the market currently. Whereas, most other vendors cloud base solution was added on at a later stage. In the near future, when cloud starts to play a more significant role in large corporations, solutions with access to the cloud built in will become more significant. The second thing that differentiates us from others, is that we are changing how people use storage. Rather than needing the traditional three or four vendors to fit your current storage needs, WekaIO is able to solve this issue and deliver one seamless solution to our customers. Essentially, streamlining the industry and cutting out major overhead for companies across the board.