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Coverage Initiation: Harbr enables data marketplaces that are collaborative

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The London-based startup joins a growing data marketplace space that features a range of flavors in terms of go-to-market approaches. Harbr has a compelling ecosystem focus in an economy that is becoming not only more data-driven, but also more open to collaboration.

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Introduction

London-based Harbr joins a growing data marketplace space that features a range of flavors in terms of go-to-market approaches. According to our end-user research, about 90% of organizations make at least some of their strategic decisions based on data. The startup has a compelling ecosystem focus in an economy that is becoming not only more data-driven, but also more open to collaboration.

451 TAKE

Harbr's technology and fully managed offering power a special kind of data marketplace where participants – either employees within an organization or organizations within an ecosystem – can share, sell, consume and collaborate on data and models. The collaborative aspect of its ecosystem-focused and product-oriented data platform offering makes Harbr stand out. It fosters a business model where success is as much about enabling your partners and customers to gain more value and innovate as it is about gaining value and being innovative yourself. In this market, beyond fairly centralized offerings, we see potential demand for more decentralized approaches.

Strategy

Harbr was founded in 2017 in London by Anthony Cosgrove and Gary Butler. Both co-founders have strong track records in data analytics and building large-scale data systems. The startup emerged from stealth in May, after raising funds from investors including Acequia Capital, Backed, Boldstart Ventures, Chalfen Ventures, Charlie Songhurst, Crane Venture Partners and Seedcamp.

Harbr has built an ecosystem-focused data platform offering, where partners, suppliers and customers within an ecosystem can exchange, monetize and collaborate on data and models. The startup itself does not operate a marketplace; instead, it offers a cloud-native, white-label platform that its customers – the platform founders or owners – can brand and customize, invite organizations and start interacting.

Platform owners set the rules of engagement and decide which organizations can participate in the ecosystem. Large enterprises can also use the platform internally to bring together different departments and branches, so employees can share and collaborate on data.

The Harbr platform

Harbr uses an architectural approach that treats data as a product and allows it to be managed across distributed resources, both within and beyond organizational boundaries. Some have started to call this approach 'distributed data mesh.'

The Harbr platform has four primary features – Publish, Store, Export and Spaces – and was designed with security in mind. The platform is currently available on AWS, but the Harbr team is actively building on GCP too, with plans to support Azure as well.

'Publish' allows users to create data products, which can be a combination of data, models and documentation as well as code, which are made available in the 'Store.'

The Store is essentially an online catalog of data products, where each product has its visual identity and description. Data product owners can customize licensing terms and pricing, allow 'on-platform' use only in 'Spaces' or enable 'Export,' and manage products throughout their lifecycle.

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Export is a feature that is used to automate data pipelines with a few clicks and distribute data and models via mechanisms such as cloud syncing, downloading or SFTP, to a range of endpoints, including applications, data warehouses and desktops.

Spaces is where collaboration happens. Virtual, sandbox environments can be created where teams have access to data products and tools such as Apache Hive, Spark and Tableau, can work together and turn the outputs into new data products. According to Harbr, Spaces has been built to scale, which means that the number of products and collaborators do not impact performance.

In terms of security features, Harbr says that its offering is built on an air-gapped architecture, where Spaces has no direct access to the Internet or any data egress mechanisms. The platform also uses data encryption and multiple entitlement engines that restrict access based on privileges, as well as granular logging and monitoring.

Competition

The data marketplace competitive landscape currently features a number of emerging approaches.

The 3P data marketplaces include AWS Data Exchange (ADX), Dawex, DemystData, Openprise and the Snowflake Data Marketplace. There are also a number of commercial datasets on Google Cloud that can be analyzed using other GCP services. ADX, in particular, is a cloud-native service that data subscribers can use in conjunction with a range of AWS analytics services, and serves as an extension to data providers' sales force. DemystData is primarily focusing on serving financial and insurance markets, and Openprise provides 3P data to support companies' marketing and sales teams. Dawex not only operates a marketplace but also sells the underpinning technology to those customers that want to set up and run their own data ecosystems.

Data marketplaces powered by distributed ledger technology (DLT) include Datapace, Datum, the IOTA data marketplace, SettleMint's DataBroker and Streamr's Data Marketplace. Datapace and the IOTA data marketplace focus on IoT/sensor data. The IOTA data marketplace, in particular, was first launched as a proof of concept and open innovation ecosystem back in 2017. Any sensor with the ability to read and transmit data can be connected to the data marketplace, and organizations can create and run their own data marketplace by setting up a cloud back-end infrastructure and deploying the IOTA marketplace software. Decentralized and tokenized approaches to power data sharing and marketplaces also include Enigma and the Ocean Protocol.

At the intersection of AI and DLT, we can find early initiatives that aim at converging decentralized marketplaces and federated or collaborative learning, so participants can collectively train AI models over disparate data sets. It's an incentive-based system, where blockchain offers participants a level of trust and also encourages them to contribute good data that improves a model's performance. Microsoft, in particular, has developed a framework called Decentralized & Collaborative AI on Blockchain.

SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

The Harbr team seeks to solve problems that its founders had experienced first-hand. The startup has a compelling ecosystem-based value proposition in an economy that is increasingly data-driven.

WEAKNESSES

It's early yet for the concept of the data marketplaces and exchanges, so growth may be slower than anticipated. Also, potential internal champions may vary by organization.

OPPORTUNITIES

Organizations are increasingly making strategic decisions based on data in an economy that is becoming more open to collaboration. Harbr's offering is not tied to any specific industry, use case or data type, and scores high on usability.

THREATS

Harbr is up against other offerings provided by cloud providers with a compelling brand and strong customer base, and a number of startups with promising approaches.