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## Brainiac

By **BILL SAPORITO** Monday, Aug. 03, 2009



QlikTech CEO Lars Bjork, in a photo simulation, at a typical QlikView screen

Photo-illustration for TIME by Bill Cramer / Wonderful Machine

When it comes to search engines, your brain has it all over Yahoo! and Google. If you think of the word *airline*, your brain makes connections in all kinds of directions: planes, places, faces, food, money — and even airline companies. Plug *airline* into a search engine and the first thing you get is a list of airlines. Not bad, but it's limited and not necessarily informative. "Your brain is associative," says Lars Bjork, CEO of QlikTech. "Think of trying to remember the name of someone you met 20 years ago. You don't drill down. You probably try to remember a situation, someone else who was there."

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Making search much more like your brain — and applying it to business analysis — is what has transformed QlikTech into one of the hotter business-intelligence-software companies around. The firm's QlikView program lets users search intuitively across databases and quickly displays information in charts

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and graphs designed for it. Last year, not exactly a joyride for most companies, QlikTech's revenues grew 50%, to \$120 million, and it expects similar growth in 2009. And while most businesses have been shedding workers to reduce costs, the Radnor, Pa., firm added 160 new employees in 2008, a 50% increase from the previous year.

**(See pictures of vintage computers.)**

It's almost as if QlikTech is living in a different economy — indeed, in a different tech sector. And in a way, it is.

The world of enterprise software has been dominated by big-cap companies such as Oracle and SAP. Commanding stacks of servers and squadrons of data wranglers, they work with their customers to develop customized sales and other vital business-reporting systems that are made available in formats like Excel. The downside is that it's time-consuming to get such projects up, and there's a cost to maintaining the system. QlikTech offers none of that: it drops off the product and collects a monthly fee per user.

QlikTech has almost reversed the process. The QlikView software lets users decide what data they want to collect, rather than sort through an information hierarchy. Want to know what sales were on Presidents' Day? Who sold the most? In states west of the Mississippi? Where the temperature was above 50° F? Click, click, click, click. No computer would organize data this way, explains Bjork, because most software was developed from hardware, meaning that it's a slave to linear application. However, your brain doesn't function like that. The idea is that by replicating some of the ways your brain works, the QlikView software can help users find what they need more quickly. "The time to value is extremely fast," says Bjork. "It's what people focus on."

**(See more the brain.)**

It took a while for QlikTech to figure that out. The company was born in Sweden in 1993 as a programming consultancy. An assignment to develop a better way to present multidimensional data led to the realization that such a tool could be valuable in lots of places.

One of QlikTech's early test cases was at a Swedish hospital, where a trauma team used QlikView to figure out treatment for a man severely injured by a streetcar. By using the program to quickly tap into 17 different data systems (X-rays, labs, insurance, etc.), doctors were able to make a decision far more quickly than they could have in the past.

Most of QlikTech's customers are after more prosaic information: What's the state of my firm's sales? Where are the best prospects? Are we making budget? You could even use QlikView to manage your fantasy-football team.

It also turns out that because of QlikView's brainlike design, learning the program requires practically no training. Users figure it out themselves. They simply use their own brains.

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