

November 2013

Mini Review

FirstRain

Introducing FirstRain

FirstRain is a big data analytics company that mines high-value content on business and industry from the web and social media, in order to deliver real-time intelligence to sales, marketing, C-levels, and other professionals. FirstRain specialises in delivering content directly into the workflow of busy business professionals via CRM or portal integration, mobile devices, and through the FirstRain web application. This Mini Review updates FreePint's previous coverage of FirstRain, which includes [FreePint Report: Product Review of FirstRain](#) and [FirstRain Launches the Performinator](#).

Value

Organisations that have deployed FirstRain have reported several benefits, including:

- **Productivity:** FirstRain users may be more efficient because they expend minimal effort on staying up to date on their customers and markets of interest. This is due in part to FirstRain's ability to deliver only high-value, trustworthy information while filtering out non-business content. This saves users time searching for information on the open web, and then evaluating their findings.

Productivity gains are also delivered by FirstRain's content delivery options. Content can be seamlessly integrated from familiar platforms such as Salesforce, SharePoint, Jive and Cisco WebEx Social, so FirstRain users do not have to spend time getting to know yet another platform. Finally, FirstRain delivers on productivity by being easy to set up and administer; no special technical skills or maintenance staff are required.

- **Improved performance:** FirstRain users may better understand their customers and industries and can react to important intelligence more quickly than workers who do not have access to the service. This is because of FirstRain's capacity for targeting company and industry news that is of strategic significance and delivering it to users in real-time. Sales and marketing employees who deeply understand their customers are better positioned to demonstrate expertise and deliver better customer service. This may ultimately lead to more sales and deal calls, increased revenue, and greater ROI.
- **Increased collaboration:** FirstRain makes it easy for account teams to efficiently share relevant information with each other and select individuals. Collaboration is often a challenge for busy professionals who spend much of their time on the road and out of the office. FirstRain offers organisations ways to share strategic information and insights that go beyond standard emails, which is fast becoming recognised as painful and inefficient.



Perrin Kerravala

[View Author Biography](#)

FirstRain is becoming increasingly well-known as a media content aggregator and is now deployed in a substantial number of Fortune 500 companies. Most of their clients hail from the financial services, technology, telecommunications, healthcare, and general industrial sectors.

FreePint's View

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Delivers targeted, high-value content from the web and Twitter in real-time, ensuring users are completely up to date on important events affecting their customers and industries</i> ✓ <i>Mobile apps and portal integration access options allow users to choose the method of content delivery that works best for them, with a very low administrative burden</i> ✓ <i>Forthcoming expanded language capabilities in Mandarin and Portuguese will give subscribers even more insight into important events in key emerging markets (China and Brazil)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ <i>Users will be unavoidably alerted to premium content that is locked behind paywalls, so must obtain separate subscriptions to websites like WSJ.com and FT.com to access them via the platform</i> ✗ <i>Compact archive of 90-days only limits use of First Rain as a current awareness tool only, so users must have a different solution to satisfy their historical research requirements.</i>
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Sources, Content and Coverage

FirstRain employs patented search technology to crawl the web and extract only high-value business events (news, blog posts, press releases, company and people information, government filings, commentary and more). FirstRain examines millions of webpages every day in real-time to identify valuable content in a three-step process:

1. Crawlers use patented algorithms to continuously identify only business-related content from the open web and Twitter, in order to add them to FirstRain
2. Another set of unique, semantic analytics algorithms then determines the "aboutness" of any piece of content to a very specific degree (including companies and many thousands of industries, topics, regions and even business lines or products)
3. Content is automatically tagged with the appropriate business categories in real-time, creating a live and always-current graph of interconnected business concepts, companies, industries, and business lines.

FirstRain's crawler picks up stories from subscription-based providers, such as The Wall Street Journal and Financial Times. Fee-based content is clearly marked by FirstRain, but users may be annoyed to encounter paywalls from time to time. Organisations will require separate subscriptions to access full-text content from such sites.

Currently FirstRain only captures English-language content, but the company has exciting plans to add Mandarin and Portuguese content soon, and possibly other languages in the future. These languages were targeted based on customer feedback, which drives many of FirstRain's development ideas.

Search, Outputs, Reports and Alerts

Readers can consult our previous articles for a detailed look at the FirstRain web application's search and reporting capabilities (see [FreePint Report: Product Review of FirstRain](#) and [FirstRain Launches the Performinator](#)). While all customers are provided with access to FirstRain through www.firstrain.com, less than 5% of subscribers use the website as the main content delivery platform. Rather, the web application is most frequently used as an administrative tool to set up or manage the integration features, which will be discussed next.

User Interface and Special Software Functionality

FirstRain is optimised for consumption through social platforms and workflow software, such as Salesforce.com, Microsoft SharePoint, Jive and Cisco WebEx Social, and also through apps for iPhone, iPad, and Android mobile devices.

The company has recently rolled out two solutions and licensing models:

Customer Insights

Customer Insights is a solution for organisations that want to leverage FirstRain to gain insights on key customers and their competitors, as well as any developments affecting their industries. It is licensed on a per-user basis, with typical installations in the hundreds to thousands of employees. Easily integrated into customer relationship management and other workflow and social systems, Customer Insights gives subscribers access to the following features:

1. A drop-in component that gives an individual user a summary of emerging developments, visualisations, Twitter activities, trends and more on all their desired companies and topics of interests. This view is completely customisable at an individual level, so users can easily monitor their entire sales territories or go-to-market areas of interest. Like other FirstRain components, information on each company and topic of interest is updated in real-time, making it easy for users to stay up to date. This is accomplished through both top articles found ("FirstReads") and a series of data visualisations, including:
 - Heat maps that display the volume and recency of web news on competitors, other entities of influence, as well as market drivers such as trends
 - Business Twitter Trends gauge, which indicates how "hot" the company/issue is on Twitter
 - Regional maps, which show the geographic markets where intelligence is trending.
2. Account Snapshot: another drop-in component, which lives within the "Account" or "Opportunity" pages for any company within the user's CRM system. This provides a summary of real-time intelligence on a particular company, such as performance news, management changes, industry trends, business-focused Twitter activity and articles on industry drivers and challenges. Account Snapshots are dynamically generated, so users will immediately receive the most up-to-date intelligence available. See *Figure 1* for an example in Salesforce.
3. Market Landscape: this component provides an organisation with a deeper and more detailed view of the business influencers and market drivers affecting companies of interest, within its own tab inside the CRM.

The screenshot displays the Salesforce FirstRain interface for the account 'Safeway'. At the top, the Salesforce logo and navigation tabs (Home, Libraries, Leads, Contacts, Accounts, Opportunities, Reports, Dashboards, Activity Dashboard (VPNI), Monitor Logics, POPs, Customer Projects) are visible. The user 'Jane Salesstar' is logged in. The account details section includes fields for Account Name (Safeway), Account Owner (John Smith), Parent Account, Website (http://www.safeway.com/), Ticker Symbol (SWY), Ownership (Public), Fiscal Year End (Jan), Renewal Owner (SDR), Phone ((555)-123-4567), Channel Owner (Accumsan), and Group ID.

The 'FirstRain Snapshot' section features a 'Safeway Inc.' header with a 'Got a meeting? Go to Company Brief' link. Below this are three main content areas:

- FIRSTREADS:** A list of news items such as 'Retail Vacancies Rise in Third Quarter' and 'Empire CEO Sobeys Retiring, Poulin New Chief'.
- MANAGEMENT CHANGES:** A timeline of executive changes, including 'David T Ching, Chief Information Officer LEFT' and 'Barry Libenson JOINED as Chief Information Officer'.
- TRENDING TOPICS:** A list of industry trends like 'Food & Drug Stores', 'Grocery Stores Industry Trends', and 'Retail Industry - Consumer Spending Trends'.

At the bottom, the 'Address & Notes' section provides background information and the physical address: '5918 Stoneridge Mall Road, Pleasanton, California 94588, United States'. The footer contains copyright information and a 'Chat' button.

Figure 1: Account Snapshot

Market Insights

Market Insights is the latest solution from FirstRain. This option provides chief marketing officers and strategic leaders with a deep and real-time view of the developments affecting a company's target markets, competitors, strategies, products, and key customers. It is intended to provide continuous intelligence that can enable companies to make strategic decisions.

For example, a technology company that specialises in healthcare verticals could deploy Market Insights to monitor intelligence on emerging trends, competitor developments, and regulatory news, with a focus on news in the company's growth markets; see *Figure 2*.

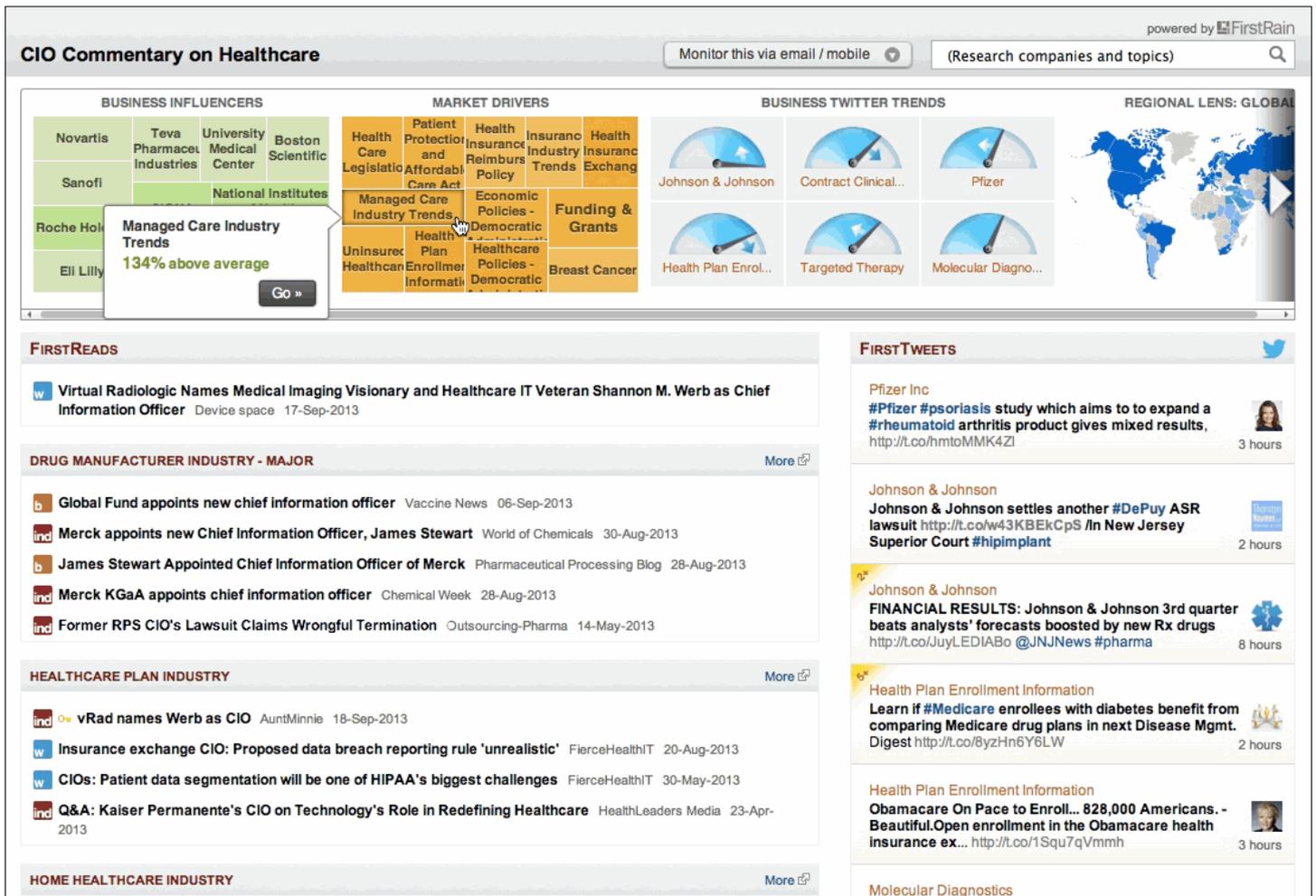


Figure 2: Market Insights

Market Insights is licensed at the organisation level. Two drop-in components are available:

1. Markets: a real-time visualisation of company, strategy and industry trends and developments. Clients inform FirstRain of their target markets, key product lines, products lines and top buyers and customers. FirstRain returns an iframe-based component that can be dropped into any social enterprise platform.
2. Comparisons: a side-by-side presentation of a company's top competitors or partners for a given product line. FirstRain ranks which entities are leading the media discussion for any given month, quarter or half-year, and even reports how that ranking has changed over time. See Figure 3 for an example.

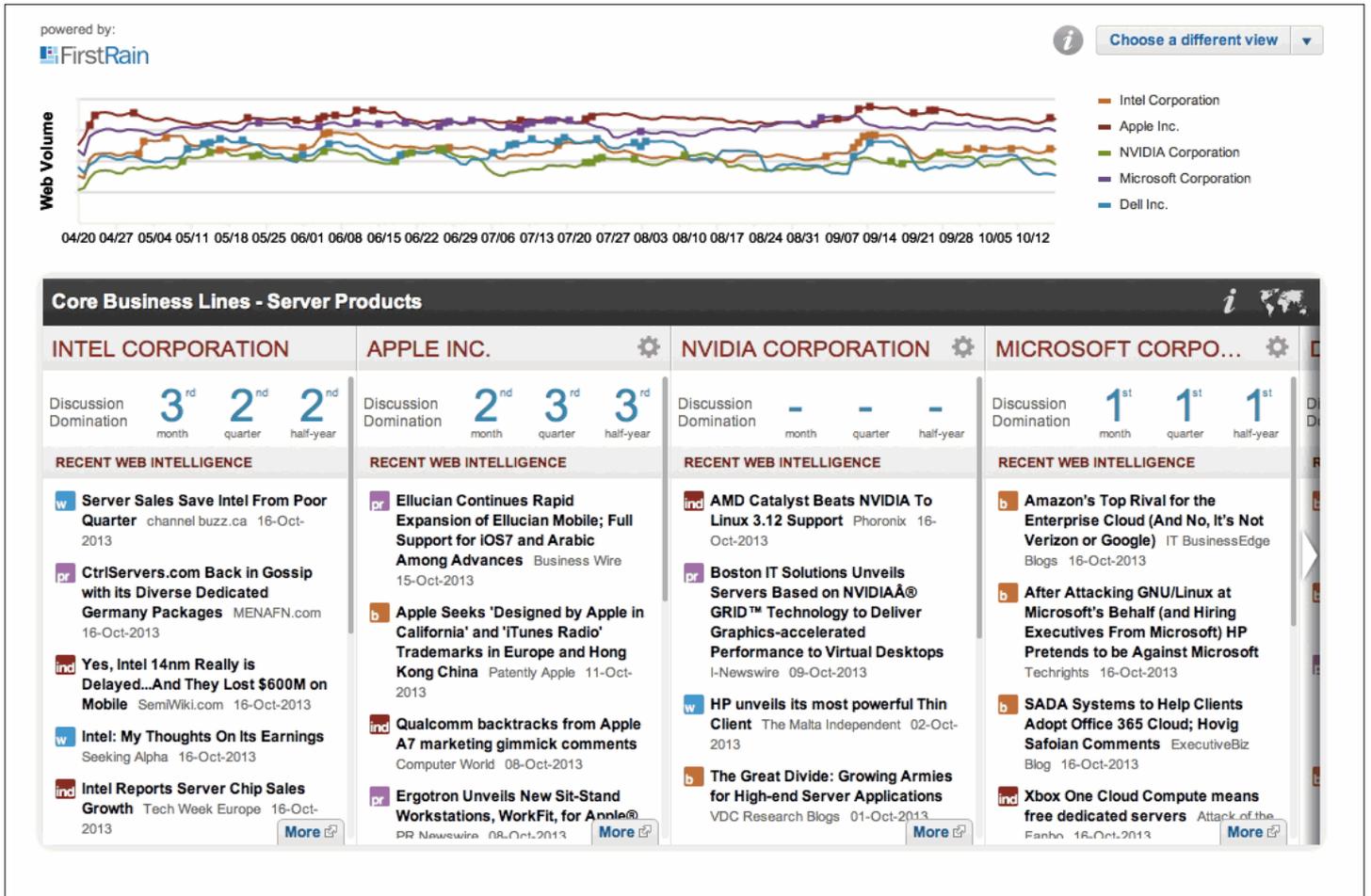


Figure 3: Comparisons

Custom Solutions

FirstRain also creates a range of custom solutions for customers, including executive dashboards for C-level executives and custom touch-based intelligence solutions for a company's internally-developed tablet apps for their sales and marketing teams.

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