A Roundup of Observability Datastores

Josh Lee • Open Source Advocate @ Altinity • SCaLE23x

"A Developer will never ask you, 'Hey, what filesystem is that?'"

— Patrick McFadin

Josh Lee

Open Source Advocate

Altinity

Observability = Visibility + Understanding

50x

Observability data vs system data

What are we storing?

Metrics, Traces, Logs, Profiles, Events
Labels/Tags
Resource Metadata
Graphs & Topologies
Snapshots & Deltas
Configuration (e.g. alerts, users, dashboards)

What do we need for observability?

Fast streaming writes
Efficient compression & storage
Time-oriented management
“Real-time” analytics

"Anything you can do with a group by, that's what analytics is"

—Peter Marshall

More Requirements

Fast multi-row analytics
Full-text search
Tag/label search
Fast, frequent "last point" reads
Updates?

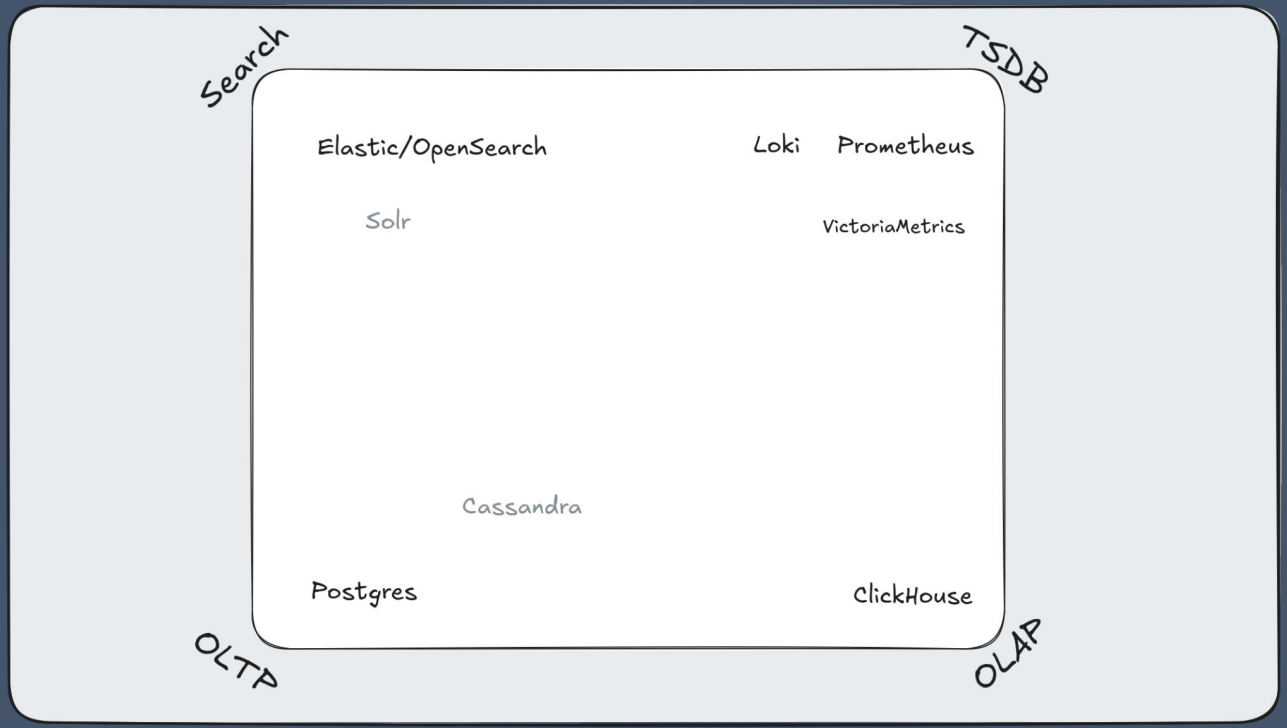
Database Archetypes

OLTP
OLAP
TSDB
Search/Analytics

Introducing the cast of characters

Postgres (OLTP)
Cassandra (OLTP)
Elastic/OpenSearch (Search & Analytics)
Prometheus (TSDB)
ClickHouse (OLAP)

Taxonomies are challenging



Storage on disk

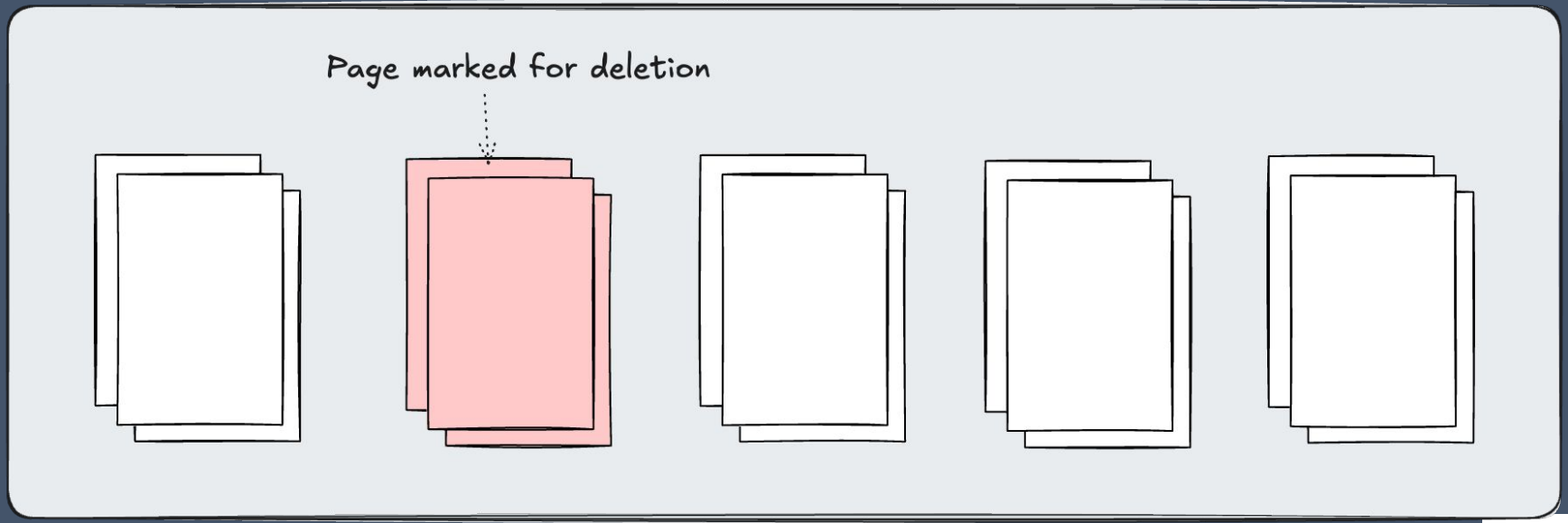
Database Storage Styles

Heap Pages + Commit Log
Time-series Blocks
Parts / Segments

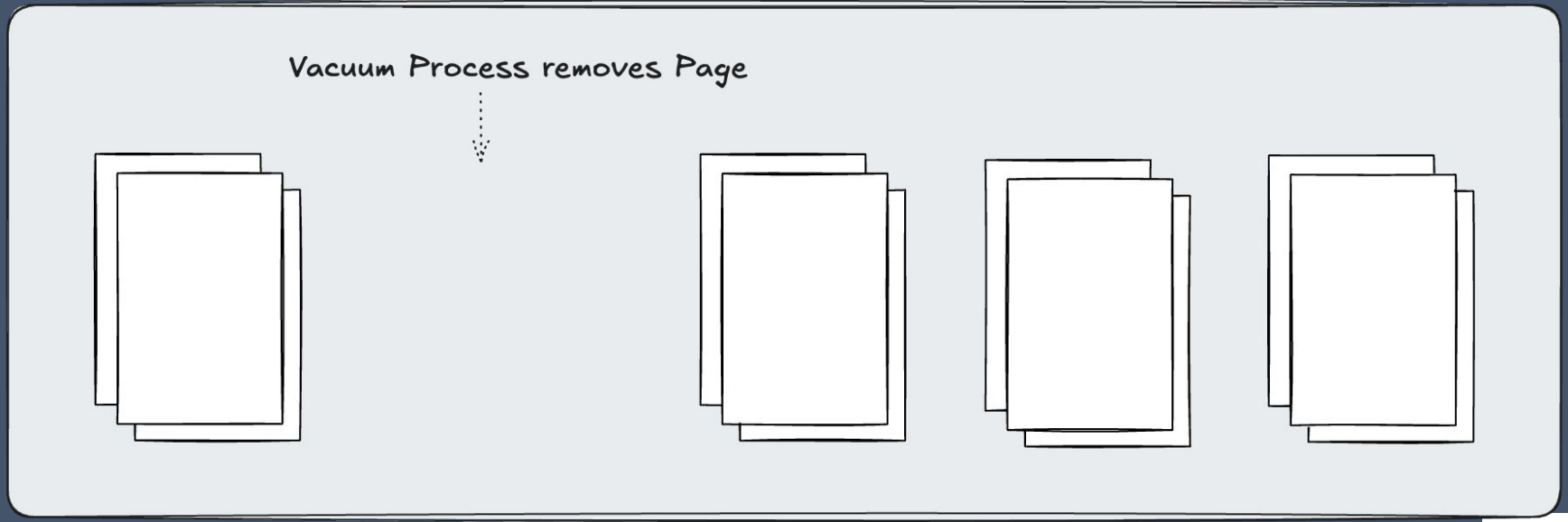
Heap Pages

* the JBOD of storage styles

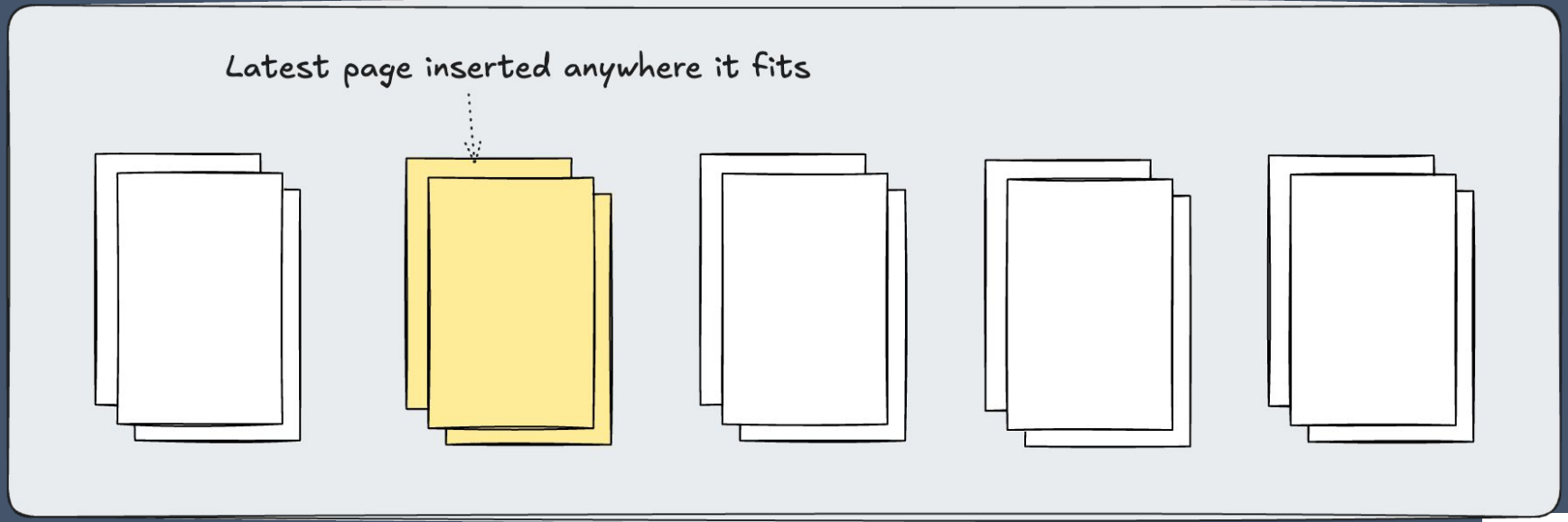
Heap Pages



Heap Pages



Heap Pages



How to make a Postgres

WAL
Heap Pages + MVCC (Multi-view Concurrency Control)
B-Tree Indexes

Josh Lee • https://joshuamlee.com/events/scale-23x

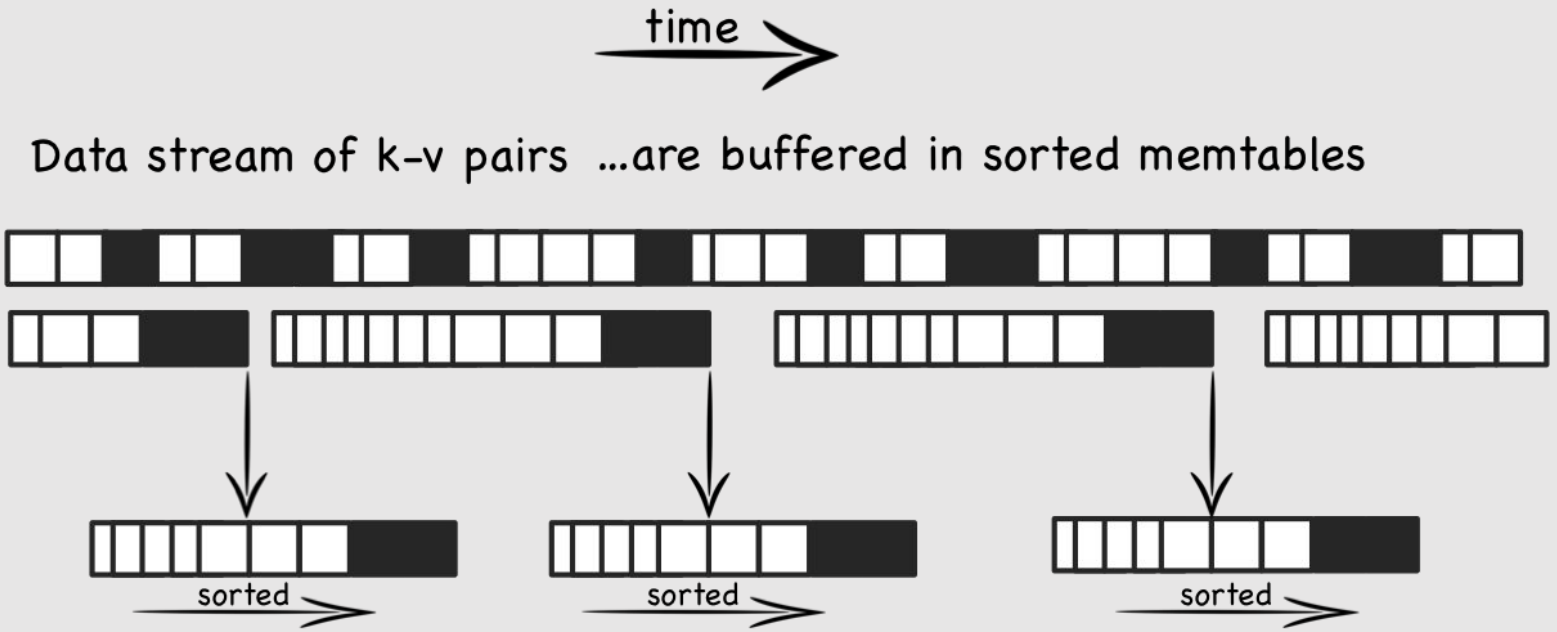
Postgres/MySQL/etc.

Optimized for updates/upserts and row-level reads
Strong ACID guarantees
Scaling horizontally is challenging

Analytics & Search Architecture

Log-Structured Merge Tree

http://www.benstopford.com/2015/02/14/log-structured-merge-trees/



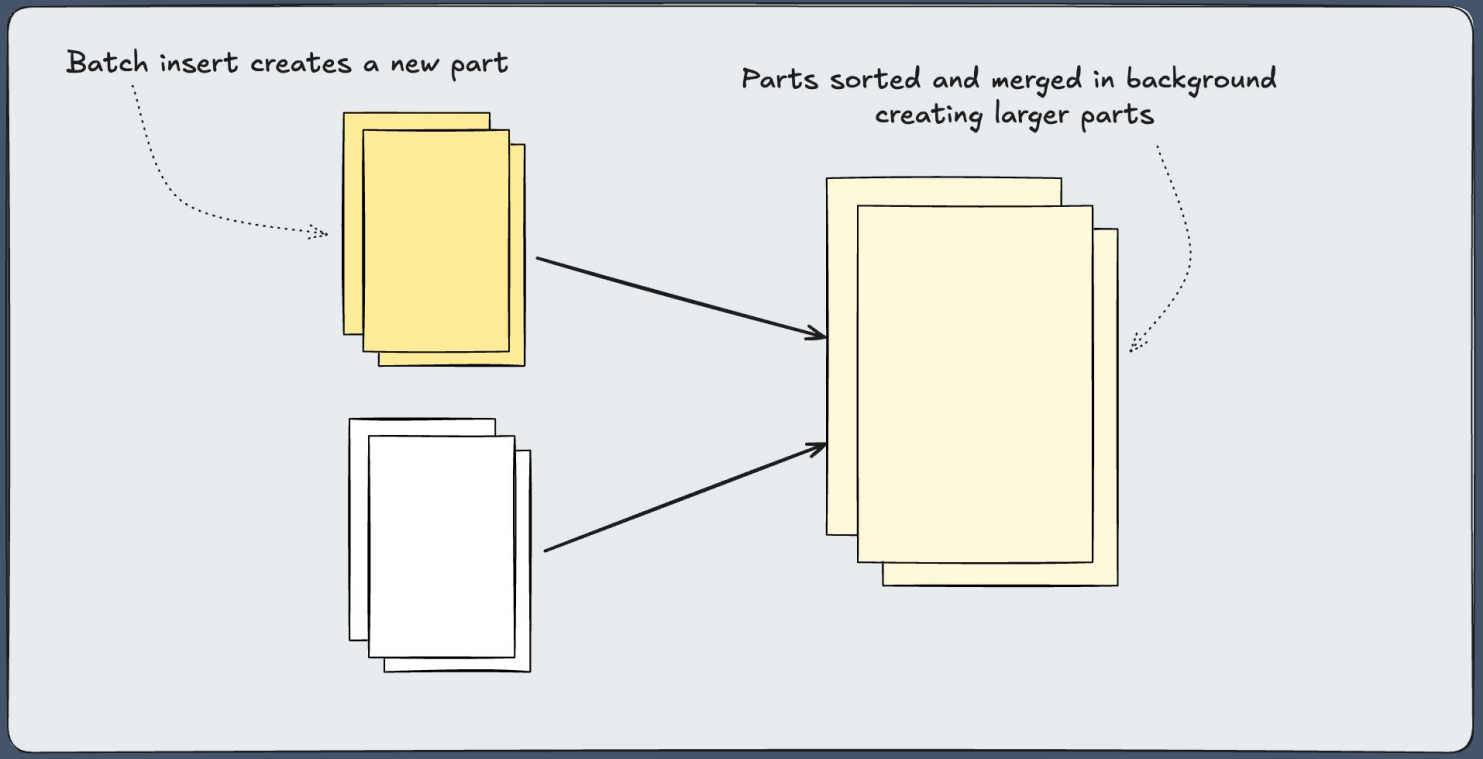
Lucene Family:

Cassandra, Elastic/OpenSearch, Apache Solr, Splunk, and more…

Immutable Parts / Segments

w/ Background Compaction

Immutable Parts / Segments



Cassandra

Wide-event Scalable OLTP

Vector Engines & Search

Inverted Indexes

Bloom Filters

Approximate Nearest Neighbor (ANN Graph)

Inverted Indexes

```
"cat" → [doc1, doc3, doc7]
"dog" → [doc2, doc5]
"parrot" → [doc1, doc4]
```

Bloom Filters - “so call me maybe”

No false negatives, but will result in mild overscans

```
"otel-collector-prod-01" → 31
"otel-collector-prod-10" → 31
```

Bloom Filters - “so call me maybe”

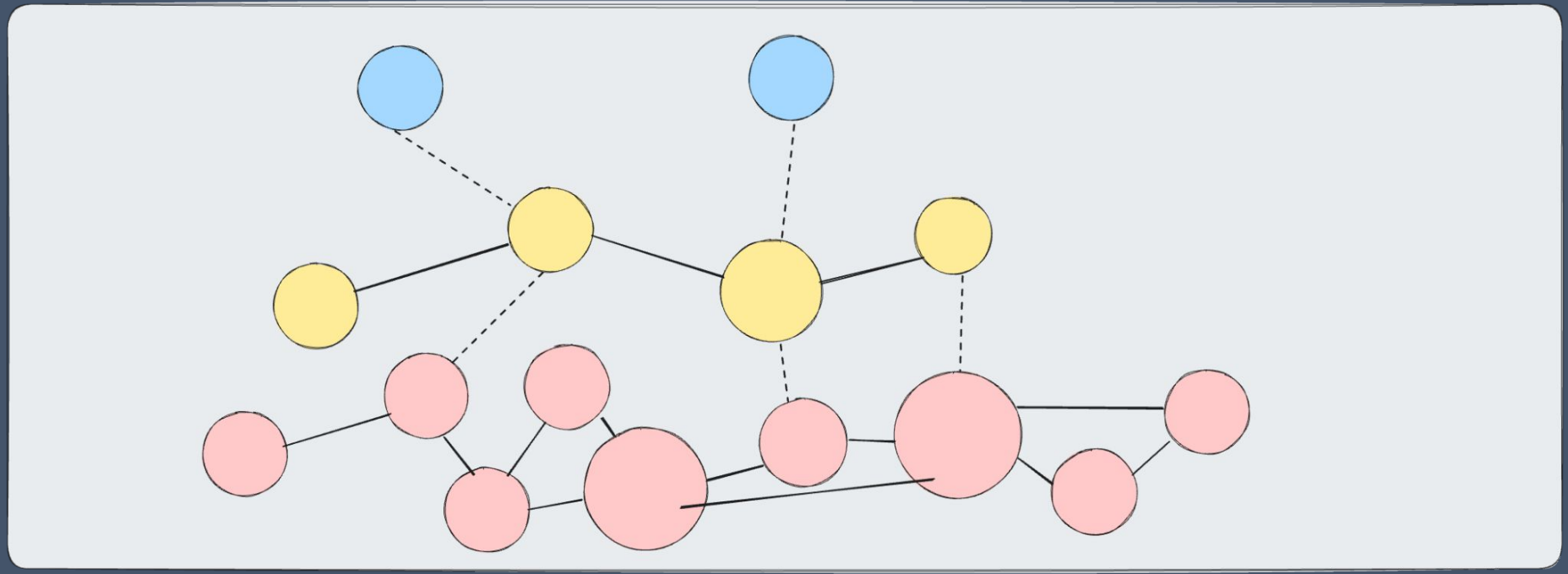
No false negatives, but will result in mild overscans

```
"otel-collector-prod-01" → 31
"otel-collector-prod-10" → 31
```

Much sparser than an inverted index - may fit entirely in memory

Approximate Nearest Neighbor (ANN)

A way to organize and filter vectors



Prometheus (& friends)

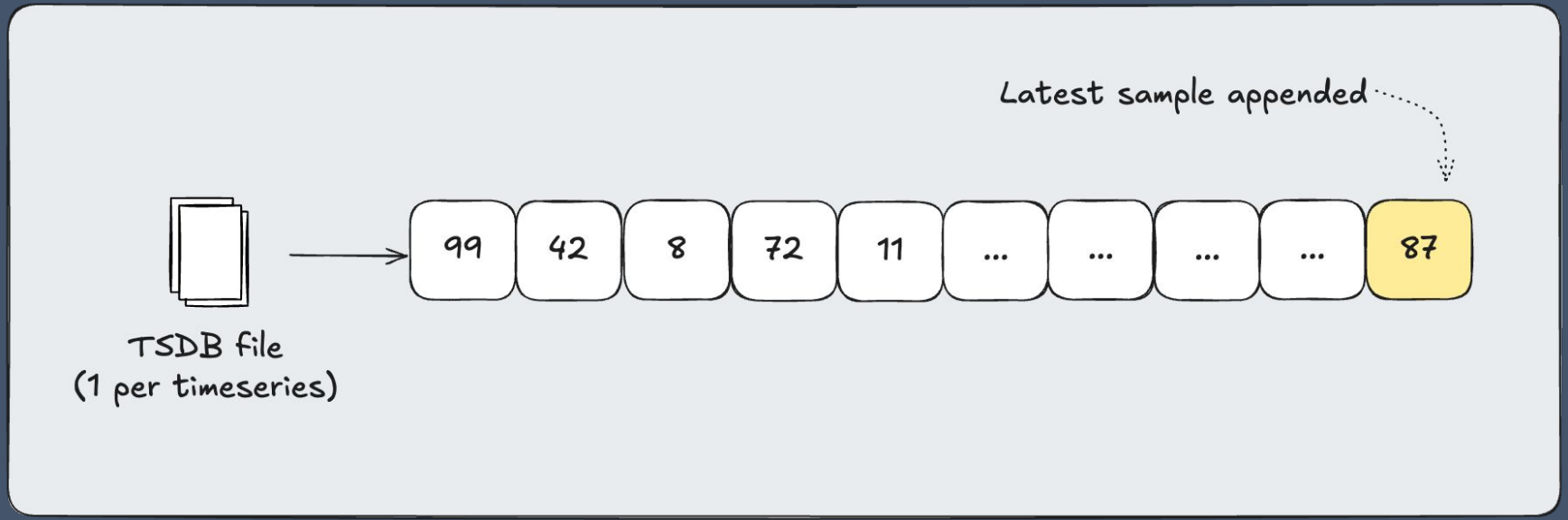
Time-series Database

TSDB Blocks

Append-only

TSDB: Data is naturally ordered by time

Excellent for frequent reads of last-sample



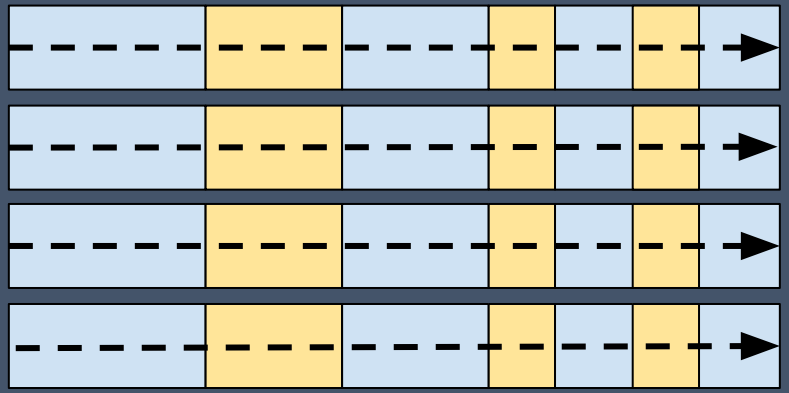
TSDB

No. of time series = cardinality^dimensionality

Row-oriented vs column-oriented storage

Row-oriented Storage

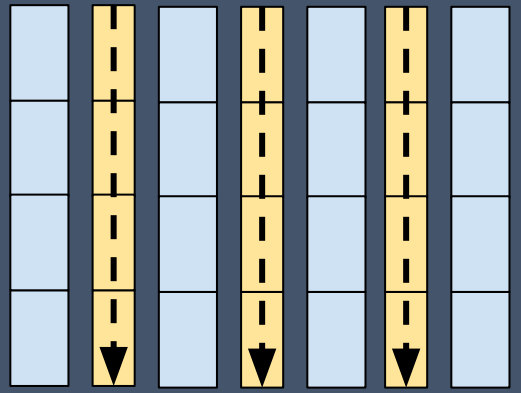
Read all columns in row



Rows compressed minimally or not at all

Column-oriented

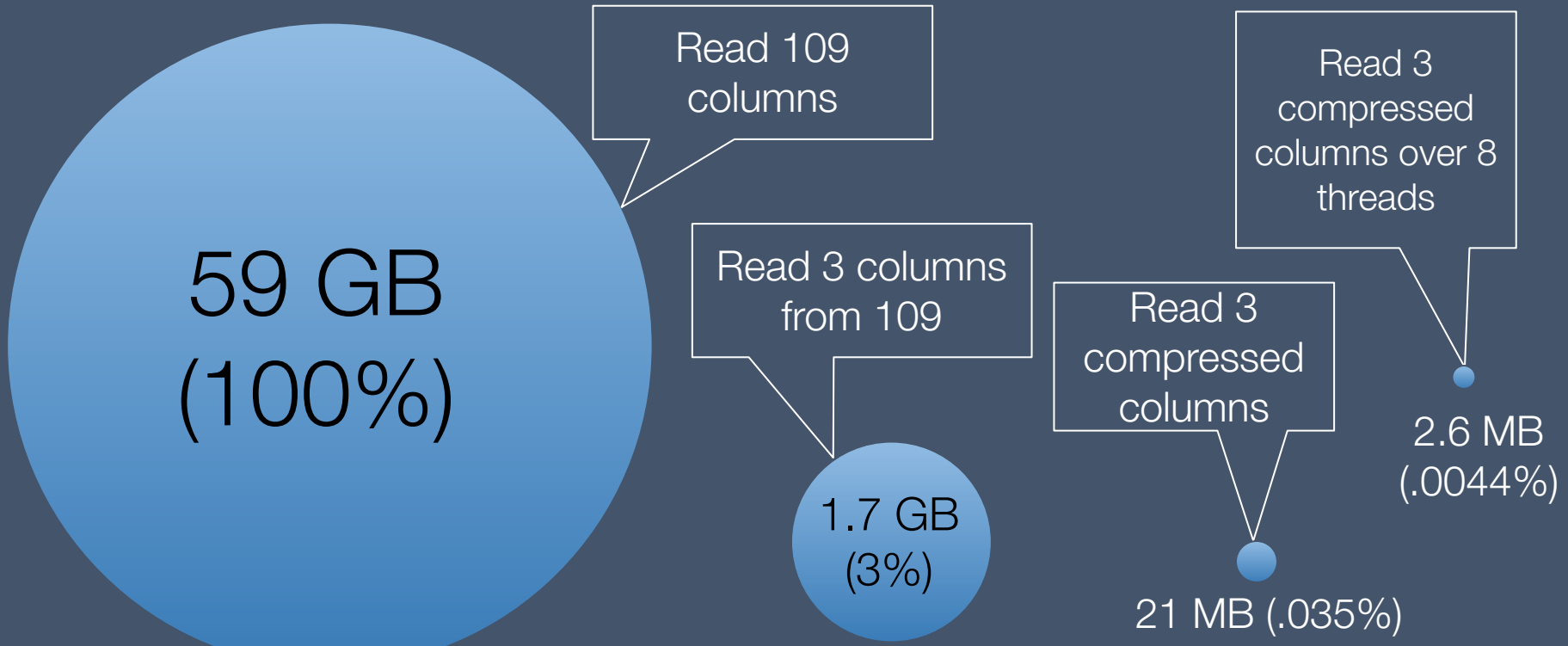
Read only selected columns

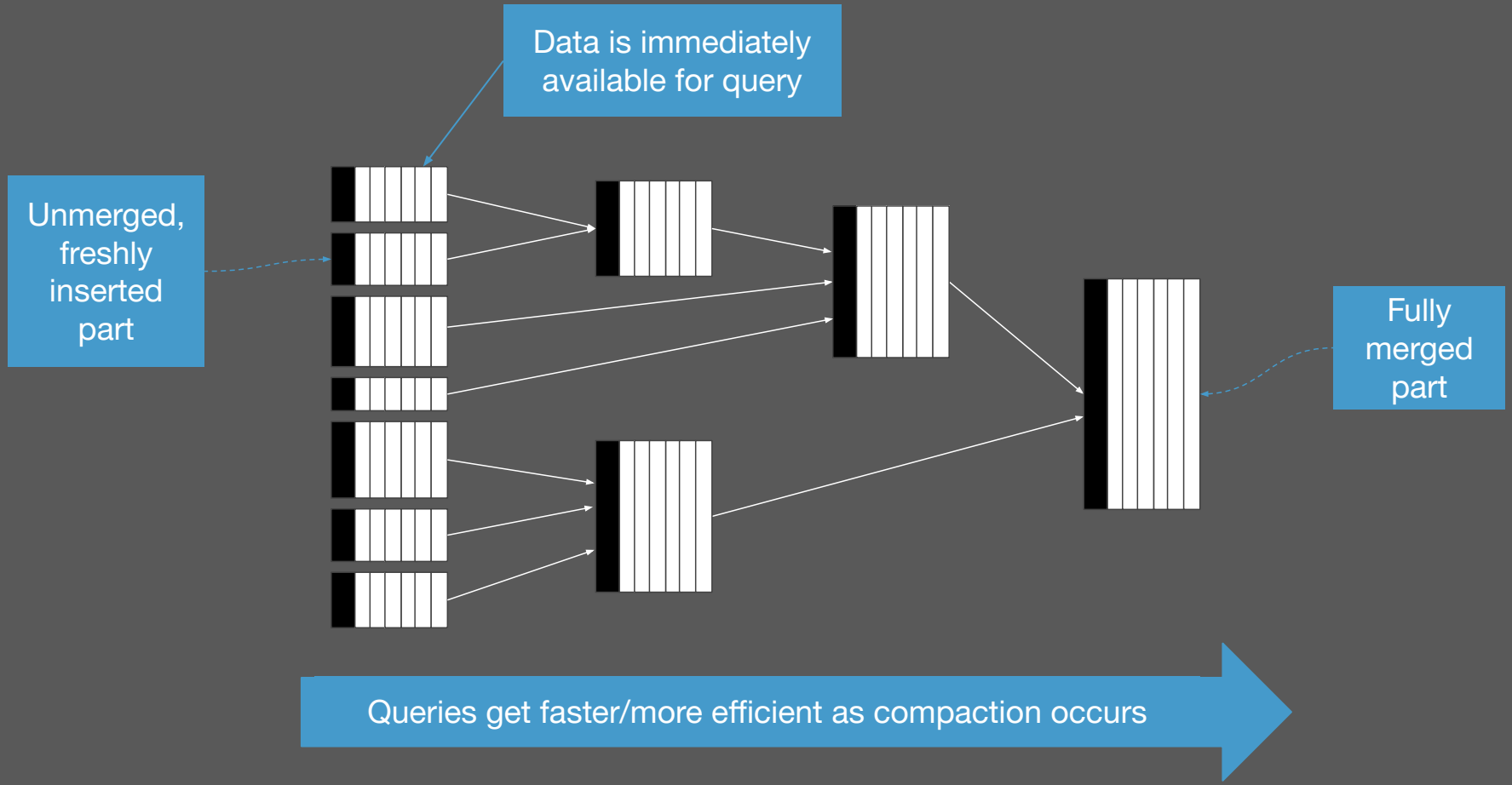


Columns highly compressed

ClickHouse

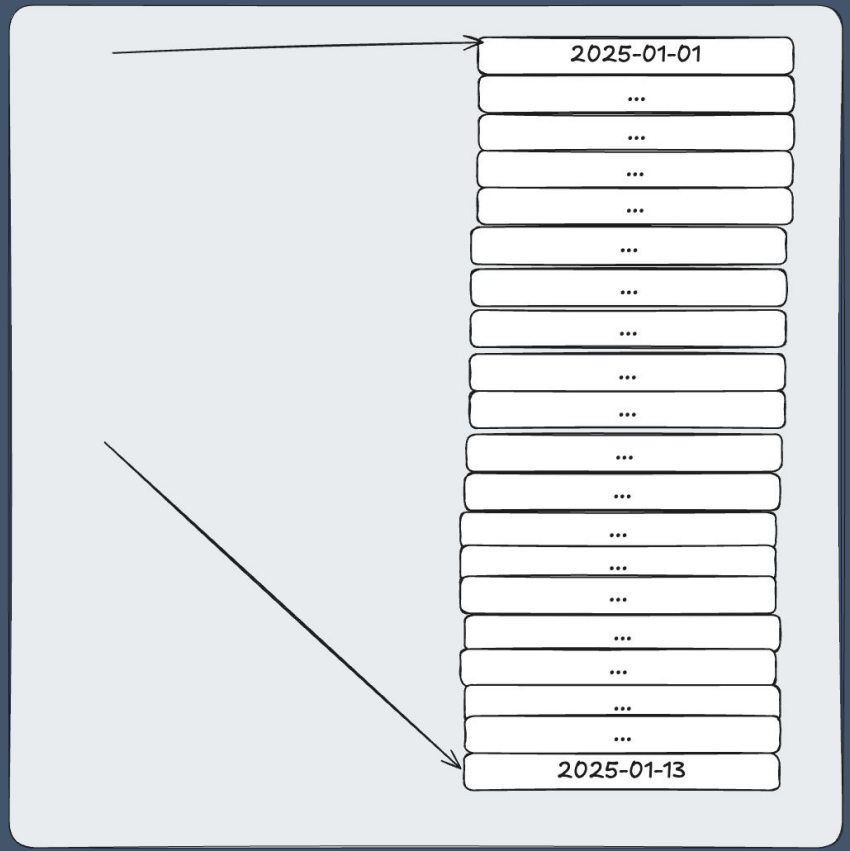
Column-oriented MergeTree


59 GB
(100%)
Read 109
columns
Read 3 columns
from 109
1.7 GB
(3%)
Read 3
compressed
columns
21 MB (.035%)
Read 3
compressed
columns over 8
threads
2.6 MB
(.0044%)

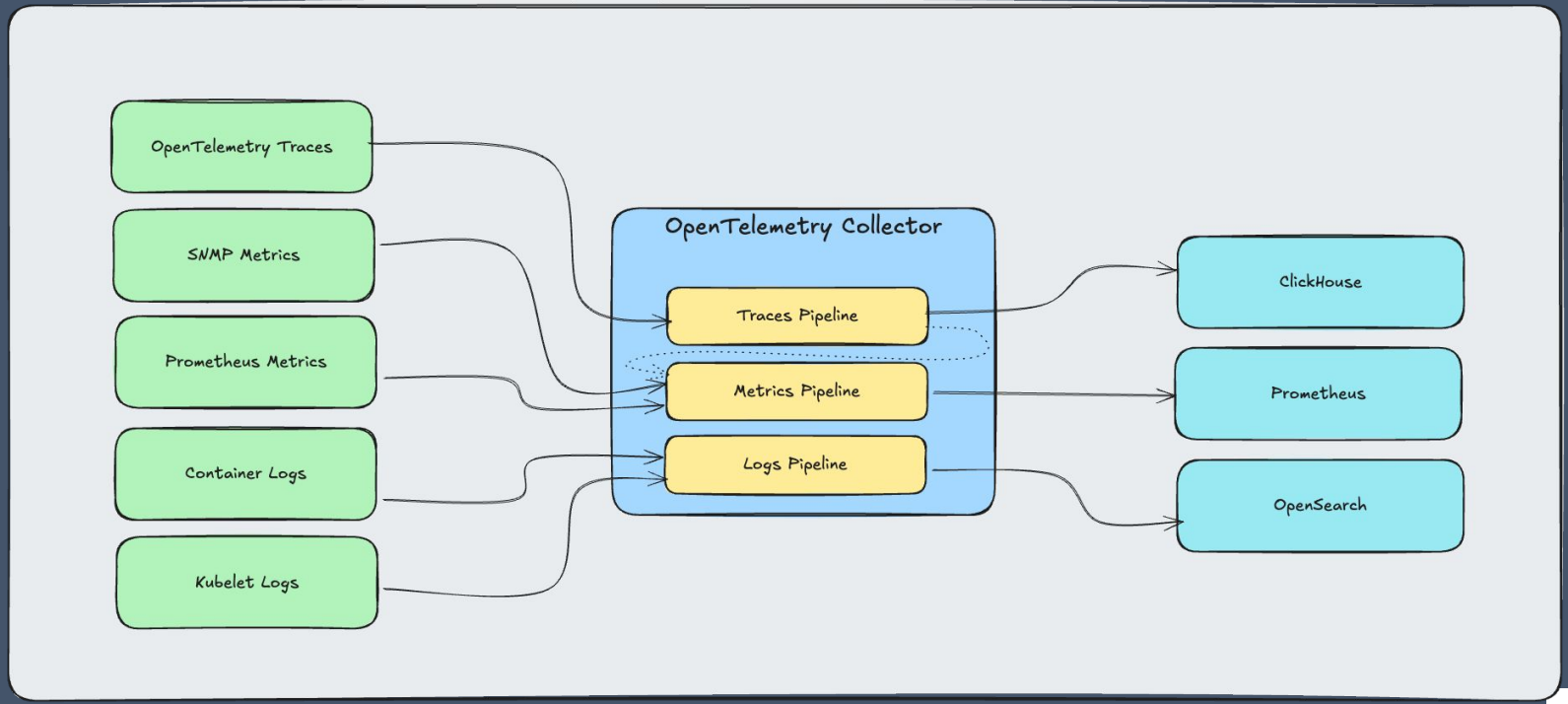

Data is immediately available for query
Unmerged, freshly inserted part
Fully merged part
Queries get faster/more efficient as compaction occurs

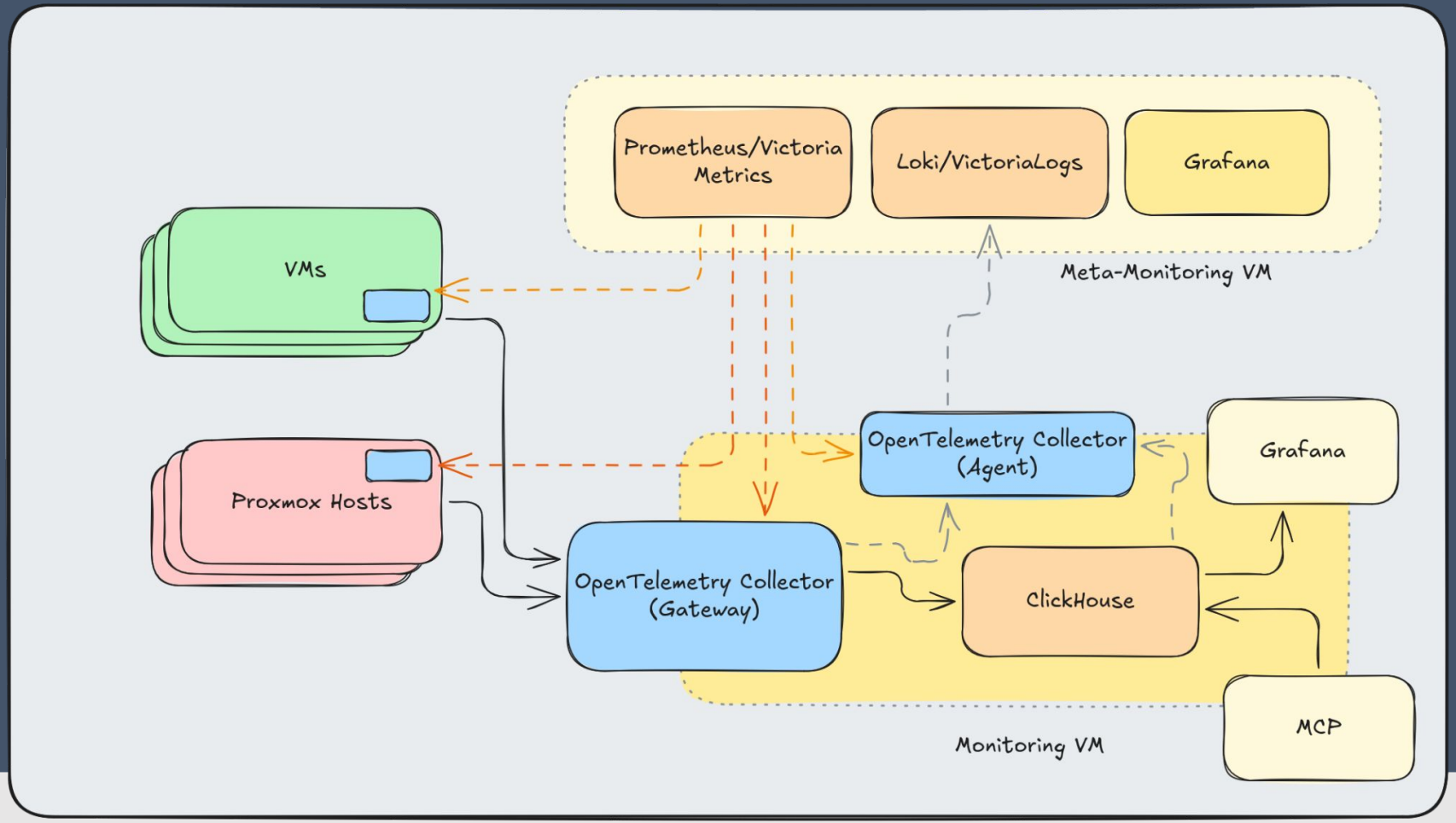
Sparse Indexes

Quickly & cheaply find data based on an ordered key



Which to choose?




Prometheus/Victoria Metrics
Loki/VictoriaLogs
Grafana
Meta-Monitoring VM
VMs
Proxmox Hosts
OpenTelemetry Collector (Agent)
Grafana
OpenTelemetry Collector (Gateway)
ClickHouse
MCP
Monitoring VM

VictoriaMetrics

TSDB meets MergeTree

Josh Lee • https://joshuamlee.com/events/scale-23x

Loki

Uncomplicated logging (with label indexes)

Josh Lee • https://joshuamlee.com/events/scale-23x

Honorable Mentions

Cortex, Thanos, Mimir, TimecaleDB, Solr, Druid...

At (very) small scale

Just use what you have until it breaks (Postgres)

Hooked-on full-text search

Elastic/OpenSearch has your back

Josh Lee • https://joshuamlee.com/events/scale-23x

One database for everything

ClickHouse is pretty cool

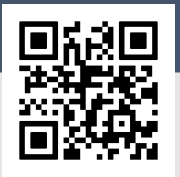
Wide-event analytics

ClickHouse is awesome

Lots of "last-sample" reads + alerts

Choose a TSDB like Prometheus or VictoriaMetrics

Database (Orientation)	**Style/QL**	**Storage**	**Indexes**	**Use Case**
Postgres (Row)	OLTP/SQL	Heap Pages	B-Tree	Update/upsert with guarantees
Cassandra (Document)	OLTP/CQL	Lucene Segments	Inverted	Scalable upserts
Prometheus (Columnar*)	TSDB/PromQL	TSDB files	By label	Time-series metrics, alerting
OpenSearch (Document)	Search/LuceneQL	Lucene Segments	Inverted, Bloom Filter, ANN	Full-text search
ClickHouse (Columnar)	OLAP/SQL	MergeTree Parts	Sparse, Inverted, and more…	Real-time analytics



Happy querying!

Download slides, connect with me ➡️