

Is Your Company Ready For Big Data?

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For quite some time now, Big Data has been the next big thing in the world of analytics. Big Data deals with data sets that are so large, so complex, that traditional data processing applications are considered inadequate to perform the knowledge discovery analysis required. Such analysis would require access to those very large data sets, investment in some serious data processing hardware and new, sophisticated software technology, an architected hardware/software/analytical model, highly sophisticated IT talent and, last but not least, data scientists. This is a serious investment to make in a hunt for the unknown, with hope for an ROI.

And now Big Data has some serious competition. Among the competitors for a better analysis methodology are:

- Fast Data, the crunching of massive data in real time, looking for immediate trend awareness;
- Actionable Data, predictive and “what-if” analysis that will output actionable insights;
- Relevant Data, examining data relationships that, to the casual observer, appear to be unrelated; and
- Smart Data, a construct that filters out the noise and discovers the valuable data.

A recent article in *Forbes* magazine points out that the number of big data projects are increasing, but the author projects that easily 50 percent



of them will fail. As with any other project, the reasons for failure in data analysis are pretty straightforward: lack of clear objectives, lack of a solid business case, management team failure, poor organizational communication, and the wrong skills for the project.

So what does this mean for Hudson Valley businesses? Will this be a bridge too far for them? The risks are high; it's too easy to become enamored with the technology and forget that any project has to be driven by requirements. Technology may be a solution

enabler, but it's not a requirement.

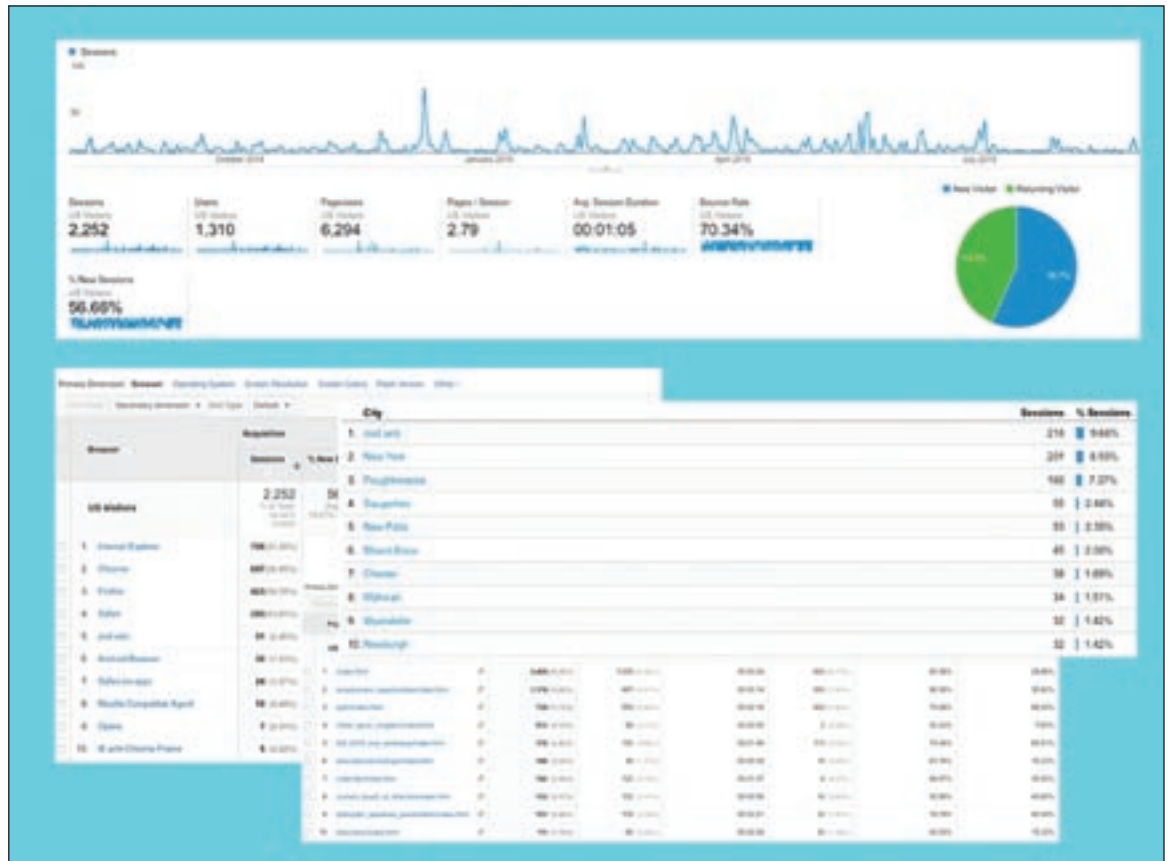
What Is It We Want To Do?

So, let's rethink this. Perhaps the question to be asked is, “What is it we intend to get out of Big Data?”

Let's start with two truths about data. The first is that data without context is meaningless. The second is that data has no value in and of itself; it's what a business does with the data that brings value to the table. Data is a strategic asset, but only if it's used constructively so that business results can be achieved.

This suggests that a business needs to accomplish a number of precursor activities to set the stage for any data analytics project's requirements. I submit that a company's website is a good place to start. All businesses have one, but how many have the tactical goal of collecting and analyzing information?

“A business needs to accomplish a number of precursor activities to set the stage for any data analytics project’s requirements. I submit that a company’s website is a good place to start. All businesses have one, but how many have the tactical goal of collecting and analyzing information?”



Analysis requires a website that is coded to collect visitor information using tracking codes to provide insight on the traffic pattern for individual webpages.

As an example, let’s look at a small sample of the basic analytical opportunities as it relates to visitors to a website:

- What’s the traffic volume?
- Are these new or returning visitors?
- Where did they come from?
- How long do they stay on the webpage looking at its content?
- What type of devices do they use to access the website?
- Are there ‘dead’ pages on the website?
- How do visitors find the website?

Analysis will yield a traffic volume number. If it’s too low, a program to drive more traffic to the website needs to be organized. Someone needs to own this work.

Suppose the analysis shows there are a significant number of visitors from countries where the company doesn’t do business? Is this a business opportunity someone within the marketing organization needs to own and drive?

What if, webpage by webpage, the amount of time visitors spend on those pages is found to be low? This would clearly mean that an effort needs to be organized to rewrite those webpages. Someone needs to own this work; funding will be needed since the website can’t be closed down until the time spent by visitors on each of the webpages has increased.

Identifying the type of devices used to access the site is important because the pages have to scale correctly. There is a difference in webpage layout for a desktop device versus a tablet device versus a smart phone. If the website is inflexible, it may be driving business opportunities away. Again, this is an area where a business may have to make an investment in a redesigned website.

If the website has webpages that are ‘dead,’ meaning without visitors, a decision is needed on whether to remove the webpages or rework them.

When it comes to how visitors found the website, the analysis will show how many came in directly, linked in from another website, came in via a search engine or came in via social media. This information presents some interesting opportunities. If a company has a field sales force, should that sales force work with potential customers to make sure they’ve bookmarked the website? Perhaps additional co-marketing efforts are needed to increase the number of websites with links to the business’s website. It may be worthwhile to increase the effectiveness of the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) effort. If there is a presence on social media, what can be done to improve its effectiveness?

Ready For Big Data?

Want to know if your company is ready for a Big Data project? A successful full-scale website analytical project will, besides yielding additional business, solidify data objectives, clarify the elements needed to build a solid business case for Big Data, assess whether the management team is up to the effort required, identify organizational communication weaknesses, and put to rest the question of whether your business has the right skills for the project. Then, maybe, just maybe, you’re ready for Big Data, Fast Data, Actionable Data, Relevant Data, or Smart Data. Then again, it may turn out that the business’s requirements have been met simply by using analytics and its website.

John H. Capron, CPIM is President of the Mid-Hudson Chapter of APICS. He speaks and writes about ERP, Process Analysis, Requirements Engineering and Production & Inventory Management. He’s also a part-time instructor in Mount Saint Mary College’s International Business Program.

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