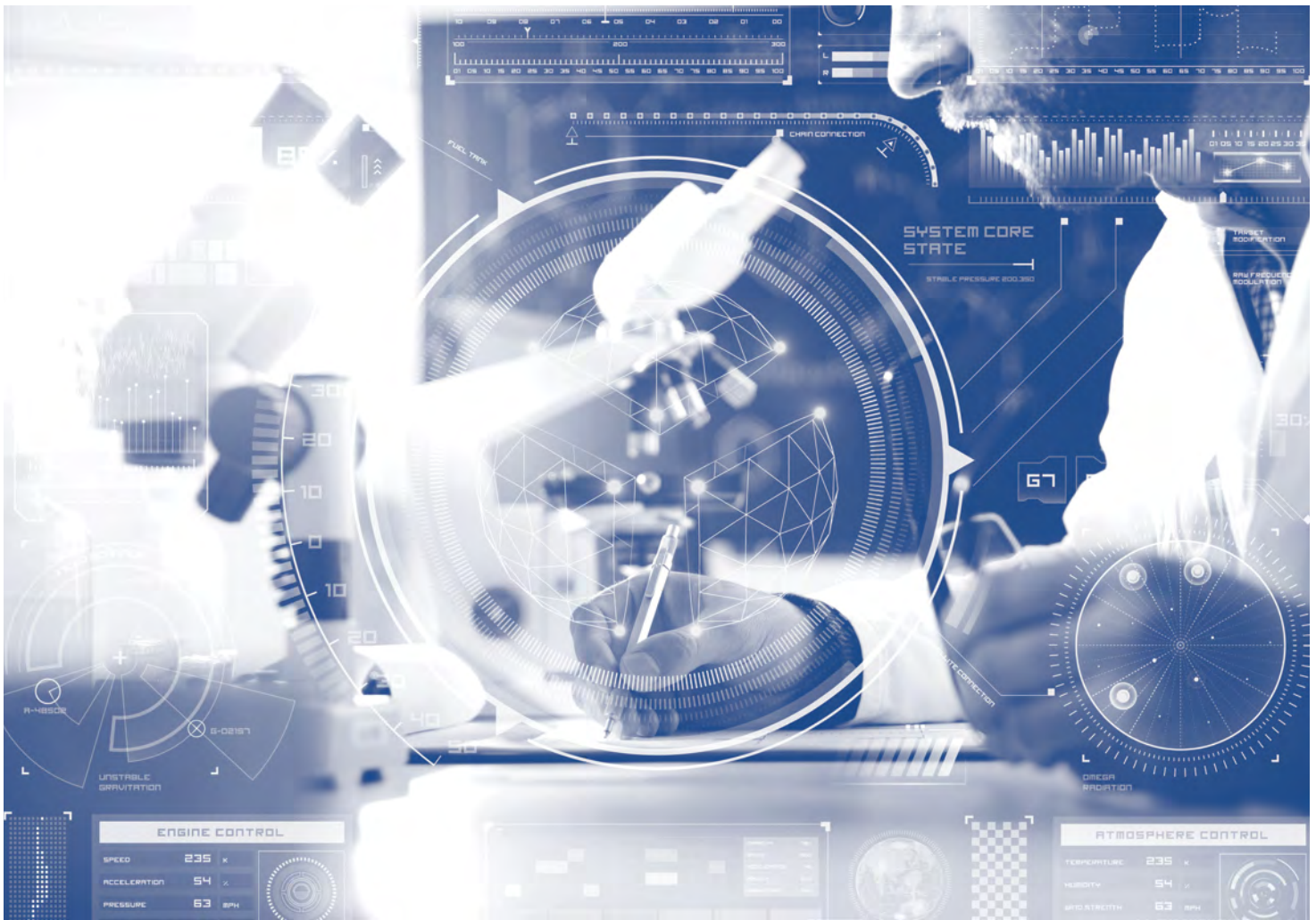


THEIR TIME IS NOW



Will Green investigates why it's time for data scientists to join the B2B party – and explores why marketers should be excited about the value they can bring



Back in October 2012, the *Harvard Business Review* described the data scientist role as the ‘sexiest job of the 21st century’. Now this was probably overstating the case. Frankly, Hollywood actor, rock star and pilot are still more likely to get pulses racing. But the article did hit upon a truth – all of a sudden people were waking up to the potential of a maths qualification once again. In a business context at least, data science was the new sexy.

And that has been reflected in the jobs market. As Jen Brett, head of EMEA insight, LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, says: “Research from leading global executive search firm Spencer Stuart shows data analysis is one of the most sought after skills by marketing teams today.”

But while the data scientist role has recently rocketed into relevance, it has thus far been mostly in a B2C context. In B2B,

data science is talked about a lot, but there remains a lack of understanding of what the job actually is and, more importantly, what it can achieve.

SO, WHAT DOES A DATA SCIENTIST DO?

The aforementioned *Harvard Business Review* put it like this: data scientists are people who “make discoveries while swimming in data”. If that’s a little too abstract, Judith Niederschelp, MD, Aberdeen Group Europe, has a more prosaic (and useful) definition: “Data scientists dive straight into the big data that so many organisations are wrestling with today. Then they extract relevant knowledge and insight, before interpreting it and presenting it in a way that’s meaningful and useful to their organisation.”

Essentially, the role of a data scientist falls into two broad categories: identifying

previously unknown relationships in a data set, and building predictive models. The role is rooted in data mining and analytics, but its goal is the really exciting bit: data science enables marketers to provide the most relevant content for a customer or prospect to view, give customers individually tailored journeys and experiences with their brand and, ultimately, ensure the right products are being delivered at the right time via the right channels.

WHY B2B MARKETERS NEED TO CARE

B2B marketers have always understood the power of data – and in many ways B2B has led the way in terms of harnessing customer and prospect data to identify and target the right audience. While increases in computing power have significantly lowered the cost of data collection, management and analysis, the proliferation of digital channels – not to mention the rapid rise of the Internet of Things (IoT) – means the sheer volume of data marketers have access to has become mind-boggling.

Garnering genuine, useful insight from this mass of data is the defining challenge for B2B marketers – and is where data scientists ride in on their white chargers to save the day. Rob Heerdegen, manager, marketing cloud success program, EMEA and APAC, Oracle Marketing Cloud, puts it like this: “Data scientists marry science and art. They’re able to take raw data and apply it, in a creative way, to make the data more valuable and accessible for an organisation.”

It’s a fairly simple equation: if you’re not letting a data scientist loose on your data, you’re almost certainly failing to maximise its value.

IT’S NOT JUST A NUMBERS GAME

Speaking to data scientists about why some B2B marketers aren’t yet embracing the power of data science, a common theme emerges: a failure to communicate. As Coralie Petermann, director of data science, Sublime Skinz, explains: “There’s a common misconception that B2B marketers will be unable to understand the work of data scientists.” And this works both ways. As Davide Anastasia, data engineer, Blis, says: “It’s sometimes hard for us [data scientists] to explain what’s possible and what’s not possible, what’s feasible in a given timeframe, and what’s not.”

Improved communication between marketers and data scientists is vital –

Data science enables marketers to give customers individually tailored journeys and experiences with their brand

because it’s not all about the numbers. The way data science can really change marketers’ worlds is by integrating with the business as a whole and speaking its language. Steve Grout, consultant director, Plus Two, underscores the core business role that data scientists can play: “Businesses can now use big data to connect areas of their business in real time that previously were only loosely joined. Manufacture, stocking, distribution and so on can all be connected to increase revenues and profits. Data scientists will only be able to manipulate and unlock the power of data if they really understand the business, the strategy and how data can run the business better.”

Jen Brett at LinkedIn describes how marketing benefits from data science insights: “Our first party logged-in data from our 20 million strong audience of UK professionals offers marketers a unique targeting capability. By using this data, marketers can easily identify, and engage in conversation with distinctive groups of professionals on the right platform at the right time.”

Jerome Hancock, UK head of marketing science, Millward Brown, also speaks of the benefits data science can bring to helping marketers achieve their goal: “The specific remit of a data scientist at Millward Brown is to support the wider business in helping clients grow great brands; this can range from informing the design of a winning brand growth strategy, to targeting the right customers, and to optimising marketing effectiveness and ROI.

“Our data scientists analyse brand tracking surveys, the client’s business performance (sales and shares, for example) and other relevant data sets – including segmentation studies, media investment and category reviews – to identify the strategic brand and business levers that drive brand equity growth. By synthesising knowledge from different, multiple data sources we produce more meaningful insights that lead to competitive advantage for the client.”

MAKING DATA COUNT

When the work of the data scientist is closely aligned to the goals and ambitions of the business, they can take a holistic view to drive change. This involves examining all data-related matters in terms of availability, quality and applicability and aligning it to relevant business problems and priorities. This is what shakes things up. As Heerdegen



If B2B marketers don't have a data scientist on their team, they have to ask themselves: 'Why not?'

argues: “[Data scientists] are first and foremost there to question the status quo and challenge the existing marketing paradigms with regard to segmentation, customer insight and performance analysis to ensure improved results can be achieved in a continuous cycle.”

This is the beauty of data science, properly applied. Data scientists are not constrained by top-down strategic

plans – they ask new questions and tackle segmentation from the data upwards. This improves marketing campaigns by making them more relevant to the audience being targeted, and ultimately leads to more effective marketing.

If B2B marketers don't have a data scientist on their team – or access to data science input – they have to ask themselves: 'Why not?' The data scientist's time is now.

MEET THE DATA SCIENTISTS

**CORALIE PETERMANN,
DIRECTOR OF
DATA SCIENCE,
SUBLIME SKINZ**



**JEN BRETT,
HEAD OF EMEA INSIGHTS,
LINKEDIN MARKETING
SOLUTIONS**



**RACHEL ENG,
LEAD DATA ANALYST,
BAZAARVOICE**



**DAVIDE ANASTASIA,
DATA ENGINEER,
BLIS**



CORALIE PETERMANN

"I have a degree in mathematics, mechanics and computer science, a masters in science and information technology and communication, another masters in the development of distributed applications, and a PhD in computer science. Working in a marketing context was a natural step for me. When I was 17 I launched my own website and became very involved with SEO, website optimisation, community management and customer loyalty."

RACHEL ENG

"I come from a management information systems (MIS) background and started using my data analytics skills in my marketing analyst job at Bazaarvoice. We focus on customer-generated content (CGC), so naturally our clients wanted to know how to use their CGC to better understand their customers' behaviour and what they liked and disliked about their products. Over time, the volume and complexity of the data increased and the questions got harder. In order to extract any insight from our data, I had to learn to use data science tools."

JEN BRETT

"I definitely wasn't someone who at 14 was thinking: 'I want to work in data when I grow up.' I'm a naturally curious person and, having studied politics at university, had an opportunity to do a PhD and entered the world of research just as 'big data' was emerging. I developed something of a penchant for research at a time when data analysis was on the rise."

DAVIDE ANASTASIA

"I moved from software development in a variety of programming languages to data and time-series analysis, with the main aim being to find patterns, create advanced analytics and build products around the relationship between location and audience. Prior to joining Blis, I worked as an analyst for Quality Capital Management, where I helped to design and develop a high-frequency trading platform, and as a consultant for ION Trading, where I worked on the analysis of the hardware/performance trade-off in the infrastructure for electronic trading."