
Big Data vs. Don Draper



By Miklos Sarvary

Big consulting firms with Big Data are trying to muscle in on the advertising business. But do they have the creativity to compete with agencies?

With advertising dollars quickly migrating from traditional media to the digital world it is reasonable to expect that ad agencies will change as well.

Digital marketing is all about measurement, or so the newly discovered 'Big Data wisdom' goes, so ad agencies need to adapt and acquire serious analytic and data-mining skills. To be fair, they all have been doing this in the last years, acquiring small boutiques or developing in-house digital analytic capabilities.

For the industry it is more worrisome that, increasingly, large data-driven consulting firms seem to make a strong move in the digital advertising business. Deloitte, Accenture and Booz-Allen, the largest operations consultants have all developed capabilities in this area or picked up ad agencies specialised in digital marketing. The most recent such acquisitions are by Deloitte, which purchased a Seattle-based social media agency as well as another firm from Brisbane, specialized in Web development. Do consultants represent a threat to traditional ad agencies, given that they

naturally have strength in data analysis?

To some extent they always did. Professional services firms have invaded each other's territories before: accountants got into consulting, as did ad agencies themselves. Most consulting firms had marketing practices before and wouldn't shy away from 'strategic branding' projects. However, the current focus on data is missing the key issues in digital marketing: (i) creativity and (ii) integration. In a context when a large number of new tools are available for marketers, these aspects of value creation are far more important than analytics, much of which can be subcontracted to small data-mining boutiques.

The point is not to say that "analytic capabilities do not matter" - they do - but creativity and integration matter more than before with the proliferation of new media platforms and non-standard marketing vehicles. Do consulting firms have an advantage in these critical domains? Probably not.

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