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Our industry has to get much more analytical in how we make decisions about the analytic tool sets and techniques we deploy. I recently pinged 2,500 senior decision-makers to ask how their organizations made decisions about analytics investments. I was surprised that for more than 60% of the respondents, decision-making about analytic strategy, architecture, tool sets, base platforms, techniques and capability development is basically ad hoc — they've been winging it. I needn't point out the deep irony in that. The transcendent importance of analytics has been clear for some time. In my book *The New Know: Innovation Powered by Analytics* (Wiley, 2009), I argued that analytics was emerging as an affordable and accessible source of competitive advantage. In the seven years since then, almost a thousand books and tens of thousands of blog posts, articles and webinars have piled on the proposition that analytics is a good thing, Washington insiders take it as fact that investment in analytics — or lack of investment — was the difference maker in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. Enough already. I don't think we need any more surveys documenting "analytics, good; no analytics, bad." It is time we added a little more nuance to the discussion.Let's start with the basics, though. Analytics is a big sandbox that encompasses the entire decision spectrum — from operational decisions to tactical decisions to strategic decisions (those with huge impact but low frequency). But analytics is a heavily modified term. "Descriptive analytics" is for understanding what happened in the past. "Diagnostic analytics" is for unearthing why something happened. "Predictive analytics" follows linear extrapolations to forecast what will happen in the future. And "prescriptive analytics" considers what we should do next. To all of this I throw in big data and data science as part of the analytics superset. Big data, of course, is a big part of why analytics has become essential. The existence of big data is not something we have a choice about. It simply is. Our choice is between ordering and exploiting it, on the one hand, and being overwhelmed by it, on the other. In the next four years, something in the neighborhood of 60 zettabytes of new digital information will be created. That is a number so big, it might require explication, even for the readers of Computerworld. The prefix zetta indicates multiplication by the seventh power of 1,000 [10²¹]. For perspective, consider that half a zettabyte is thought to approximate the entire World Wide Web in 2009. When information is being created at a rate of 15 zettabytes per year, being overwhelmed can seem like the only option, especially given the fact that the digital storage industry manufactures about half a zettabyte of storage capacity a year. What do we do when we are creating more digital data than we have places to store it? Which data has what value? Organizations need to analyze what they want to know before investing in analytic platforms, tool sets and techniques.The first step on the path to analytic mastery is to become street smart about data resources — you have to know what data you are collecting, what data you can safely allow to slip away, how you are using the captured data, and how do your collection and use practices compare with others in your industry. The second step is to decide who in your organization should be charged with rethinking existing business processes based on the new analytic tool sets. You don't want a pure number-cruncher for this. You want someone who can think entrepreneurially about creating new revenue streams based on the new analytic tool sets. For example, in the retailing vertical market, analytics has historically been applied to physical products — forecasting which products on the shelves might be approaching out-of-stock situations, for instance. But in the new world of analytics, savvy retailers will use ever more data to move from being shelf-centric to shopper-centric as they learn to assess what shoppers' true and recurring needs and wants are. What items, and in what quantities, do shoppers typically buy? Do they prefer self-service checkout lanes or human-assisted transactions? What time of day do they shop? Are they brand loyalists or price-sensitive bargain shoppers? Do they prefer to pay in cash, by debit card or by credit card with a reward incentive? It can take a subtle mind to see what kind of data has real value. An illustration of this can be drawn from the Age of Sail. In the 19th century, Matthew Maury used "dusty old ship logs" (a data source previously thought to be useless) to plot the ocean's currents. Maury was a pioneer of datafication (see: *Big Data: A Revolution That Will Transform How We Live, Work, and Think*, by Kenneth Cukier and Viktor Mayer-Schönberger). Today, some of the hardest-working analysts in the world build on his legacy. They labor in a little-known branch of the U.S. Navy, the Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command, using oceanographic and atmospheric data to create info products to improve mission performance and marine safety. Futurist Thornton A. May is a speaker, educator and adviser and the author of *The New Know: Innovation Powered by Analytics*. Visit his website at thorntonamay.com, and contact him at thornton@thorntonamay.com. Copyright © 2016 IDC Communications, Inc. If you're traveling during the winter time, there's a good chance that your flight may be delayed because the plane needs deicing. Why do they wait until the last minute to do this? By Karen Kirkpatrick We know how drone strikes are supposed to work: After careful monitoring, the bad guy is targeted and taken out. The reality is often much hazier — and deadlier. By Clint Pumphrey Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called on NATO to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, but so far NATO has refused. Could a no-fly zone bring Putin's invasion to an end? How would it be enforced? By Patrick J. Kiger Jets are one of the best tools that a military has at its disposal. They're fast, fierce and effective. From reconnaissance to target engagement, these aircraft are 10 sophisticated assets. The thrilling roar of fighter jets performing a military flyover is now a common experience at many big events. In fact, the military approves most of the 850 or so flyover requests submitted annually. What does it take to arrange a flyover? By Jacob Silverman Early unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) primarily carried out reconnaissance missions in war zones, but the Reaper packs some serious heat. Is there anything more foreboding than a drone with a Hellfire missile? By Tom Scheve As the newest fighter in the U.S. Air Force's aerial arsenal, the *F/A-22 Raptor* incorporates the latest stealth technology along with a mind-boggling array of weapons and computer systems. Learn about this dual-purpose fighter jet and attack aircraft and see what sets it apart from the F-15. By Gary Wollenhaupt *F/A-18s* are now the go-to jet for the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. The reason? They're plenty fast, they can carry a dizzying array of bombs and missiles, they have amazing onboard electronics and they can be reconfigured to accomplish a range of missions. Check out these amazing military machines. By Robert Valdes The Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle exemplifies the military trend toward high-tech, low-risk equipment. This remotely-operated spy plane offers the most bang for the human-safety buck. By Robert Valdes With outstanding speed and maneuverability, the Black Hawk helicopter is used to transport troops and supplies to and from active battlefields. Find out all about the Black Hawk. By Kevin Bonsor Floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee -- the F-15 is the Muhammad Ali of the skies. The military has been using this fighter jet since the '70s, and it still outmaneuvers the competition. Find out why this plane has a perfect combat record. By Tom Harris At EDENS, a developer, owner and operator of community shopping centers on the East Coast, blending geographic information systems (GIS) and business analytics has enabled a competitive advantage in a fast-paced, crowded market. The Columbia, S.C.-based company coupled Microsoft SQL Server with Esri's ArcGIS Server and Spatial Database Engine (SDE) to display and analyze its current portfolio of more than a hundred properties and 4,000 other relevant shopping center property locations. EDENS' GIS director, David Beitz, integrates demographic data such as average household income, competition and traffic counts with select map criteria to paint a clear picture for both internal teams and leasing agents to use with potential retailers. We are able to really hone our presentations and give customers one or two great options," says David Beitz, GIS director of EDENS, an operator of shopping centers. "They can tell we've done our homework." For example, grocery store chains have to closely study trade areas for new development. "They have found that some people just won't cross certain railroad tracks, impacting the site's overall draw," he says. With GIS-enhanced analytics, the development team can quickly rule out some sites -- even if they otherwise appear ideal -- that don't meet specific criteria. "We are able to really hone our presentations and give customers one or two great options. They can tell we've done our homework," he says. While it's difficult to quantify the impact of GIS data, success is measured by being able to quickly respond to retailers' requests for location and market data to help leasing agents "move a deal forward," Beitz explains. "If you make a retailer wait or provide out-of-date information, then they are more likely to land at another site." EDENS finds that success is a matter of the quality and quantity of data fed into the analytics system. For instance, though relatively few data points are shared with customers, all information, including confidential prospectus data, is mapped and stored for later use. If the team wants to buy a property down the street from one it looked at in the past, all relevant data is at the ready, avoiding the need to reassemble all the past shopping center and market data. Rapid access makes determination of the soundness of the deal faster and more efficient, Beitz says.Helping collaborationIn Las Vegas, engineers at VTN Consulting, a civil engineering and land planning firm, are beginning to use GIS and analytics to bolster communication and collaboration among project stakeholders. Their pilot project, based on Autodesk's AutoCAD Map 3D and Autodesk Infrastructure Modeler software, interweaves civil, geospatial and building data. Planners, GIS analysts, project managers, architects, city leaders and other stakeholders can visualize projects in context and with existing parameters, such as underground utility lines, traffic patterns and surrounding buildings. "Traditionally, engineers have to work with multiple two-dimensional paper plans that are tucked away in different silos," says Keith Warren, VTN's Building Information Manager. VTN's project comprises a central database that serves as a storehouse for survey and architecture plans, infrastructure specs and more. Pinpoints include water and sewer pipes, utilities, street signs, parcels, roadways and structures. Information is rendered in 3-D so that users can visually analyze the impact of new construction or renovations based on site requirements. The striking models can help planners decide the number and location of street lamps to place outside a new building based on a light and shadow assessment of the structure and its environment. Or they can clearly illustrate utility thresholds for various proposed projects -- for instance, a library would probably consume less energy than a casino. Warren says the database was built using standard GIS fields so that clients will be able to hook into their own analytics engines. For instance, if a building's air conditioner goes out, repairmen would not only be able to call up its exact location but whether nearby air conditioners also are in need of service based on their maintenance records.Saving animals' livesFor the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), stepping up business analytics to include GIS data is literally a matter of life and death.Millions of cats and dogs enter animal shelters annually, and more than half are euthanized due to non-health-related issues such as overcrowding. The ASPCA battles this overpopulation crisis with low-cost or free services, including spay/neuter clinics and outreach programs that teach responsible pet ownership.

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