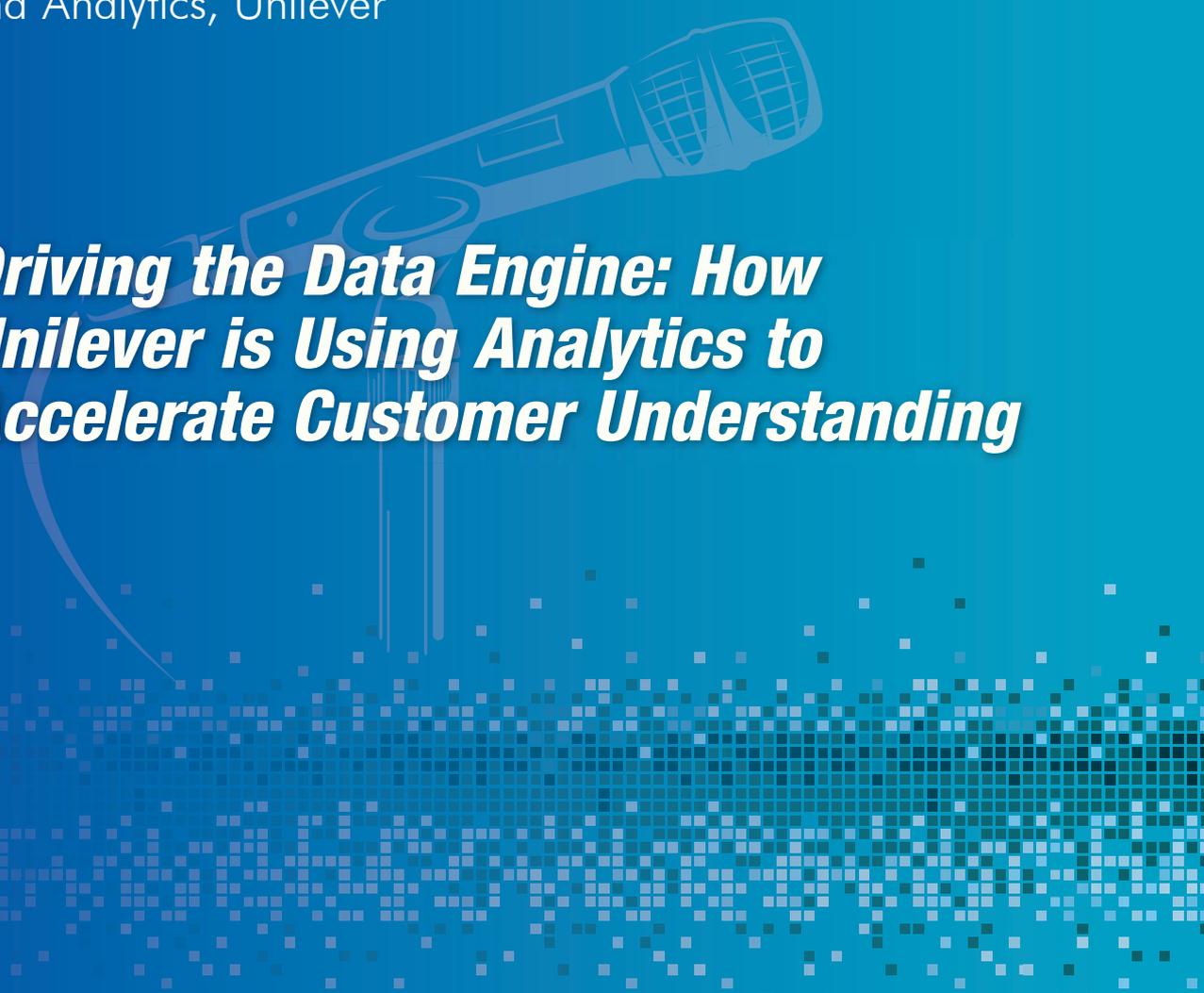


DIGITAL LEADERSHIP

An interview with

Shawn O'Neal

VP of Global Marketing Data
and Analytics, Unilever



***Driving the Data Engine: How
Unilever is Using Analytics to
Accelerate Customer Understanding***



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VP of Global Marketing Data and Analytics

Driving the Data Engine: How Unilever is Using Analytics to Accelerate Customer Understanding

Shawn O'Neal is VP of Global Marketing Data and Analytics at Unilever, part of the Consumer & Marketing Insights (CMI) team, and he leads the company's Global People Data Program. The ultimate objective of the program is to enable 1 billion relationships through digital data analysis and new ways of connecting with people. In his 12 years at Unilever, Shawn has worked across a range of roles in customer development and consumer & marketing insights, with a particular focus on strategy, analysis, and the optimal use of information for decision-making.

Using Data to Convert Business Needs into Action

What is the primary role of the CMI team?

The fundamental role of the CMI team is to understand people, their needs and wants, and their thought processes about brands. The team provides insights about consumers. This is not only on how they shop and how they interact with us, but also on how they live their lives. These are things that are going to be important in the future for us as a business.

As the use of analytics has evolved, what has been the impact on how the CMI team operates?

Previously, when the analytics team received a question and a brief on the problem, they went away for six weeks and then came back with an answer. You would then tinker with it for another three to four weeks. And then, finally, you have a sliver of usable information. This model is passé.

The future of analytics in our space is to ask the question once and get an answer if not within hours, then in days, and definitely not weeks.

Every day is a new answer, a new build, and a new tool. We use the knowledge gained from each of these to build our knowledge base. We seek to consolidate every piece of data, analytics, infrastructure and resources that we have available in one platform. We then industrialize this for the entire 2,100 cells of Unilever. By industrializing, we can ensure repeatability, lower costs, speed of response, and richer insights.

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What are some typical questions that brands bring to the CMI team?

Questions can be as straightforward as “Do people talk about packaging in social media commentary on Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream?” Or, brands might want to know how consumers talk about eating Ben & Jerry's. These might seem like very simple things, but they are the ones that drive purchase decisions. Do consumers talk about being with friends or watching a movie when eating Ben and Jerry's? Or do they talk about the weather — sunny or rainy — when they want to have it? Or are the conversations linked to their mood and tone? About 85% of all the conversations on Twitter are about stuff like this.

What use cases are there for analytics that show how the CMI team can help brands?

Within marketing, we have a range of use cases for analytics. These include innovation, forecasting, media optimization, pricing, trends (social or otherwise), and the value associated with them. Targeting and content creation is extremely important. When, where, and how to connect with consumers, what device, what time of day, what medium — is it Twitter, Facebook, email, SMS, or just traditional? These are questions that are top of mind for marketers.



We have also tried to build a service-oriented capability, by standardizing the information that is commonly used. So, when a media person or a brand person comes to us with questions, we direct them to this standardized repository, which we call the People Data Center (PDC). On top of the base information, they can create their own specific queries and requirements. We are trying to build more efficiency and transparency in all that.

Can you walk us through how you can identify precise insights for a brand such as Ben & Jerry's?

We've seen that about 80% of all Ben & Jerry's gets sold on Saturday. Week after week, we see a consistent spike on Saturday. However, we observed that most of the conversations on social media happen on Thursday and Friday, not on Saturday. Now, for the ice cream category, that is rather intriguing, because ice cream is typically a point of purchase sale. That is the preconceived notion on which brands and advertising usually works. But Ben & Jerry's appears to be a little different. People actually think about their Ben & Jerry's purchase a couple of days ahead on Thursday, which means they are open to digital influence on that day. Therefore, why run ads on a Monday or Tuesday, when probably 99% of impressions are wasted? But on Thursday and Friday, the value of impressions may go up 5% or 10%. That is a dramatic difference on the same level of advertising spend.

“By industrializing analytics, we can ensure repeatability, lower costs, speed of response, and richer insights.”

What kind of data sets do you look at in order to achieve this?

We combine three different data sets – weather, sales and social data. The first time we do this, it is done manually. However, as we go forward, the idea is to have weather data pumped into the system through an API with a weather channel.

“Our analysis found that people actually think about their ice cream purchase a couple of days ahead of purchase.”

What are the challenges in doing this at scale?

The challenge is not in getting the data or combining the multiple data sets. The automation tools that we use are increasingly getting better at A/B testing content in hundreds of positions. The challenge is further downstream for us. Our media teams are not prepared for a real-time feed of consumer insights. Our agencies that partner with us are not fully prepared to deliver us content for sunny days versus rainy days, for example. At this point, we are industrializing the back-end. Our creative agencies haven't yet warmed up to the idea that we would have a hundred different creatives and deliver those at the same day. There is not a mindset around that concept yet.

“We have a complete demand-driven model for social listening.”

Moving Analytics from 'Push' to 'Pull'

What is the operating model of the team?

We have a complete demand-driven model for social listening. While we have made the core investment in the technology, anyone that wants to participate in its findings needs to pay for resources. If people are not willing to pay for something, then it is not that important. This model ensures you create something that lives or dies on its merits, not on sponsorship or politics.

How did you manage the relationship between business and IT that is critical to analytics?

As with many large organizations, there was a gap in the business-IT relationship. And we solved the problem by turning it upside down. I come from the business; I am not an IT person. So, I constantly reached back into the IT organization to have them build things that were relevant directly to business questions. This approach creates pragmatic solutions that people use. If you let IT build solutions in silos, you can end up building a bridge that somebody may or may not use. Being demand-driven is the key – I have employed this concept in creating all our solutions.

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Sales is a Social Activity:

Targeted Social Media Drives Sales Over Other Media

Unilever found that, typically, only one-in-a-thousand TV ad impressions prompts a sale.

Yet, a major pet food brand generated sales from four-in-a-thousand digital ad impressions by targeting pet owners. This increased to forty-in-a-thousand digital impressions by targeting cat and dog owners specifically. This demonstrates the impact of social media's ability to target.

Source: Adage, "Unilever Finds Social-Media Buzz Really Does Drive Sales", September 2015

What is the revenue impact of each 'share' on major social networks? Estimates from Eventbrite

Pounds per share in th U.S.



Pounds per share in th U.K.



Source: Brandwatch, "Social Media ROI: Lessons from eBay, McKinsey and Unilever", September 2015

What are the key challenges you face in this journey to an insight-driven organization?

Given our size, our biggest challenges are speed and agility. Most people still do not understand analytics, and that hinders decision-making speed, because you don't have a consensus. Without a consensus, it is hard to allocate resources, and it is hard to move with precision or urgency.

In terms of demand, we are beginning to see the solution sell itself. There are brands that have bought our services and are doing well, brands that are planning to try our services because they are impressed by the success of others, and brands that haven't bought our services. Things are therefore a bit uncertain, but that is natural for a big company like Unilever.

“Most people still do not understand analytics, and that hinders decision-making speed, because you don't have a consensus.”

Are you concerned about a shortage of skills in analytics?

In our people data program, almost all of the team members have different skill-sets than CMI would have hired in the past. After they spend time with us, I expect them to go out to other teams and educate the rest of the world on the power and impact of analytics. Ultimately, that increases the demand back into our team! But yes, the skills shortage is a concern since more people are beginning to see the value of analytics now.

“Skills shortage is a concern since more people are beginning to see the value of analytics now”

Driving the Data Engine: How Unilever is Using Analytics to Accelerate Customer Understanding

What impact do Unilever's own forays into ecommerce have on its relationships with retailers?

To date, retailers know everything about a customer shopping in-store. At Unilever, e-commerce is limited to a handful of countries — the U.S., U.K., France, China, and a few others — and is not a big plan for us at present. But, ecommerce helps us understand what goes on outside the store. This ability balances the tables with retailers in terms of understanding consumer purchase cycles. Because when I understand that, I could theoretically drive consumers to one store or another. For instance, I can partner with specific retailers for a targeted promotion and drive consumers there directly. All of a sudden, the balance of power between us and the retailers is shifting. That is the impact of e-commerce — it introduces a whole new level of data and information that can be accessed and used by anyone.

How do you see new technologies impacting what CMI does?

I think cognitive computing will be one of the big areas. We are just beginning to experiment, but the possibilities are limitless. Take, for instance, personalization engines. Using them, I can watch everything that goes on in an environment, and in a machine-learning way, constantly adjust what is served, advertised and messaged inside that environment. And, all of it is highly customized to the individual, so they find it interesting.

As an example, take Google's site “All Things Hair”. When people search Google for hair, hairstyles or hair products, Google will put All Things Hair at the top. Inside the site there are blogs, e-commerce, special op-eds, sponsored areas — everything about hair. It is all presented to users in a very customized manner. Within this environment, we can log every click and understand how long consumers spend time on what asset. That gives us a comprehensive profile of the individual, how to connect to the person, what kind of ads to run and how we bring them back again.

“E-commerce introduces a whole new level of data and information that can be accessed and used by anyone”

What advice would you give to organizations that would like to become insight-driven companies?

The key advice is to stay demand-driven. You do have to guide some of that demand. You have to educate to create some of that demand, but you need to stay close to it. You won't get the underlying support to grow what you are doing in that space, unless you are meeting some fundamental need of the business.

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The second piece of advice is that 75% of what we are today will get changed in five years because of the extent of disruption in this whole space. If you are an internal research group, and you aren't adopting and exploring new techniques — or you don't have people on your team who have passion and capability — you are going to be a dinosaur in five years. Agencies will just start replacing you because their stuff will be so much better than what you are doing inside the organization.

A third point to bear in mind is the need to not commit to one technology or platform too early. In the past three years, Unilever hasn't signed a single contract with a new data or systems supplier that lasts longer than a year, because of the rapid pace of technology change. Don't let IT sell you a big data program that costs over \$1MM because it will be obsolete before it's built.

And, lastly, focus on the people factor. If you are not searching for new people, and if you are not growing your own people in this space, you are going to be massively disadvantaged three to five years from now. You will not be able to attract the talent that you need. You are not going to have people who have been through it for a few years, who can sell it to other people and bring them into this environment.

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