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Analysis Paralysis

Sometimes, "big data" feels too big. Teradata CIO Diana Bolden explains how an empowered and engaged IT department can help cure the bloat

By Matt Alderton

When Christopher Columbus sailed to the "New World" in 1492, he didn't know what he'd find. Back then, the earth was still a mystery, mostly unmapped, widely unexplored, and largely undiscovered. Crossing an ocean in search of new land demanded not only unwavering commitment and unflinching courage, but also tremendous support. Sure, Columbus was the captain; his discovery, however, was the product of an entire crew—nearly 90 men strong.

Today, there's little of the planet left unexplored. The advent of "big data," however, means there's a vast digital world that's yet to be discovered. Like the physical world before it, mapping it will require visionary captains supported by expert crews that can assist with navigation, provisioning, steering, and deck-swabbing. Unfortunately, businesses aren't structured like ships. In large companies especially, captain and crew are often siloed inside different departments, resulting in fractured communication that hinders collaboration and hampers progress.

Data analytics company **Teradata** recognizes the gap and wants to fill it, according to CIO **Diana Bolden**, who says the marketing department—the "captain"—typically drives data-based decision making, but often fails because it doesn't utilize its "crew": the IT department.

"There has been an explosion of data from digital channels," Bolden says. "As this data grows, so does the challenge of extracting insights that are important. The way to address this is for marketing and IT to work together, cutting across data silos to pull crucial information together, analyze it, and act on it."

Given the long-standing divide between marketing and IT, it's a tall order, to be sure. "Historically, there has been a gap between the marketing and IT organizations," Bolden continues. "Typically, it's not been an area with strong partnerships … A recent survey from Accenture found that only 1 in 10 CIOs and CMOs believe their companies currently have a good level of collaboration between the two organizations. A separate survey by Teradata found that only one in four marketing executives believe their marketing and IT departments are truly strategic partners."

To help its customers maximize big-data benefits, including new sources of differentiation and revenue, Teradata offers a suite of integrated marketing management solutions that allow marketing departments to collect, analyze, share, and apply data—including customer data, spending data, and performance data. Ultimately, though, it believes its software will deliver the greatest returns inside organizations where marketing and IT are better integrated and aligned. Perhaps its most valuable offering, therefore, isn't a product, but rather an example: Teradata has applied solutions internally to model for its customers what a successful marketing/IT marriage looks like.

"One of the key things that we've done to improve collaboration between marketing and IT is combine the two organizations under one senior leader," Bolden explains. "Typically, these have been very disparate organizations, which has made it difficult to work together. Now that we both work for the same senior leadership team member, there's a lot more visibility and sharing of information across groups."

Previously, the marketing department pursued its work independently, consulting IT only at the last minute when it needed an IT solution. Now, the two departments meet regularly and have a shared strategic plan against which they jointly execute. "Understanding where marketing is going and what their strategy is, and blending that into our IT road map, has been really beneficial," Bolden says.

Collaboration has proven so fruitful that the company has created a new tool that encourages it not just between marketing and IT, but across the entire organization. Called Teradata Connections, it allows employees to query one another in order to find and share internal resources. "Anyone can go in, ask questions, or post information that could be valuable to someone else," Bolden says. "It allows us to engage the wealth of knowledge that we have in the company and share it with employees who are new or who haven't had exposure to certain areas of the business. It's a very impactful tool."

The ship that is big data has only just set sail. However, by tearing down the walls that exist between departments and business functions—between captain and crew—organizations can ensure that it reaches its destination.

"Companies are constantly looking for new ways to integrate data analytics in order to remain competitive while also improving productivity, creating new revenue streams, and building better customer relationships," Bolden says. "What we're trying to demonstrate is the value of a collaborative approach and working closely together."

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