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BIG-DATA PLATFORMS & TOOLS

Small Towns & Big Data



John Edwards, Technology Journalist & Author
1/29/2013
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Big data analytics has already helped transform national, state, and provincial government operations, allowing agencies to uncover areas of waste as well as hidden revenue opportunities lurking inside budgets, tax documents, contracts, deeds, and various other types of files. Many large cities, such as New York and Chicago, are also using data technologies for everything from optimizing employee schedules to fighting crime.

But what about smaller communities? Can big data analytics help the tens of thousands of towns and villages scattered across rural and suburban areas operate more insightfully and efficiently? The answer, of course, is yes.

Big data goes small

Compared to their larger counterparts, local governments have been generally slower to embrace important technology trends such as cloud computing and big data analytics. Yet, [Pike Research](#), a market research and consulting firm, recently issued a study showing that both of these technologies could soon play mainstream roles at local city halls, police departments, and other agencies.

The Pike report analyzed the global market for smart government technologies. According to the report, annual investment in smart government technology in North America will surpass \$1 billion in 2017. In that same year, the report projects that \$1.4 billion will be spent on worldwide cloud services for smart

cities.

While standard business intelligence requires carefully collected samples from particular types of structured data, big data analytics processes make no such demands. This means that local government offices, with relative ease, can take advantage of virtually all of the structured and unstructured data streaming into their systems, and incorporate that information into their decision-making processes.

The Pike study also observed that local leaders aren't just focused on deploying innovative technologies like the cloud and big data analytics for the sake of improving government operations. Many adopters also hope to position their communities as technology innovators, enhancing long-term economic prospects by showing the world that they are trailblazers in the use of sophisticated new systems.

Big city inspiration

While most small governments have yet to even consider big data analytics, much less launch any initiatives, they can look to larger cities for both ideas and inspiration.

The Memphis Police Department, for instance, launched an [initiative](#) in 2006 that uses big data-driven predictive analytics technology to compare crime data over time. Meanwhile, the New York Police Department (NYPD) joined with Microsoft last year in a [project](#) that takes advantage of big data analytics to identify and shut down criminal activity on the city's streets.



How can big data help small towns?

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More from John Edwards



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analysis to identify and start down criminal activity on the city's streets.

Such programs can be easily applied to smaller communities, particularly as big data hardware and software costs continue to fall.

Just as big data analytics is beginning to trickle down to smaller businesses, a growing number of local governments are beginning to wake up to, and take advantage of, the technology's potential.

Related posts:

- [Why Open-Source Is Making Waves in the UK Public Sector](#)
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— John Edwards, *Technology Journalist*

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SharCo, User Rank: Petabyte Pathfinder
2/3/2013 | 12:46:43 PM

Re: Financing

It is unfortunate how city hall—or rather, institutions that can exert a great deal of influence or shut down a project because of the power instituted in them by the government—can hold back the thinkers and the innovators.

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smkinoshita, User Rank: Exabyte Executive
2/2/2013 | 7:51:25 PM

Re: Financing

I think it's just general resistance to change. London is a city of extremes; people are either very progressive or very conservative, and our local politicians are generally very conservative except for a notable 3 or 4.

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Saul Sherry, User Rank: Blogger
2/1/2013 | 4:28:19 AM

Re: Financing

@smkinoshita - great to see these guys taking a proactive approach - but I wonder where that fear comes from? Fear of being exposed as doing a bad job? A need to hang on to centralized knowledge bases?

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smkinoshita, User Rank: Exabyte Executive
1/31/2013 | 11:01:49 PM

Re: Financing

I know in London Ontario -- not exactly a small town but it's not a big city by American standards - there are lots of small groups who just want to innovate and don't care about profit. They include a lot of students. They've already done some pretty cool things utilizing city data -- their only blockade seems to be fear of the new from some members of city hall.

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technetronic, User Rank: Blogger
1/31/2013 | 4:28:38 PM

Re: Lots of small data

things like [Code for America](#) and [OpenNY](#) show that the best way to apply big data to civic situations is to open the doors to data first. well-written APIs give the community a chance to roll its own solutions at no financial cost.

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netcrawl, User Rank: Petabyte Pathfinder
1/30/2013 | 5:52:19 PM

Re: Lots of small data

The question here is What Exactly Big Data can do to small towns? Are you willing to invest a huge amount of money just for this? for the small town? what benefits small town can get? and who's running the big data stuff?

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netcrawl, User Rank: Petabyte Pathfinder
1/30/2013 | 5:41:53 PM

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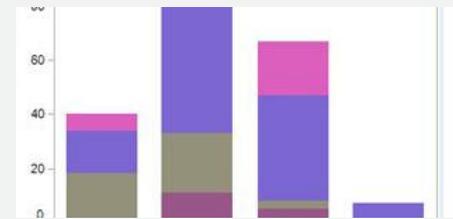
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Re: Lots of small data

Interesting topic, I agree! what exactly Big data can do with small towns or communities? and where can they get the funding to invest with those huge expensive IT infrastructure and software. I believe there's a slight different between smaller towns and bigger towns, funding is one thing only, the size is another.

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sabbate, User Rank: Bit Player
1/30/2013 | 4:24:52 PM

Re: Lots of small data

@Saul, I think that what you are suggesting (aggregating lots of small data to have a big picture) can be considered as a "side effect" of having already a Big Data infrastructure in small towns. In my opinion, once you get innovative people governing, it is not difficult to exploit Big Data to make the town more efficient and effective, especially for the citizens. Living in a small town with all the (technological) services available will make people think twice before leaving it and give up to move to a bigger city.

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TW @stefanoabbate

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Anna Young, User Rank: Exabyte Executive
1/30/2013 | 8:11:09 AM

Re: Lots of small data

What small towns and communities can do with Big Data isn't that different from what bigger towns and companies do with it now. The studies that have been done so far can be tapped by smaller communities to gain whatever leverage they need. The challenge comes in implementation, which will require funds they don't have.

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Anna Young, User Rank: Exabyte Executive
1/30/2013 | 8:07:37 AM

Financing

With all the budget contractions going on all over the world and hurting especially towns and cities, how will they finance the exploration of big data?

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