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DATA SCIENTIST

Librarians Are Becoming Big Data Experts



John Edwards, Technology Journalist & Author
8/9/2013
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With many libraries downsizing, slashing service hours, or, in some cases, permanently shutting their doors, one can't blame librarians for feeling nervous or for wishing to refocus their careers to reflect the realities of the digital revolution. For some librarians, the lure of big data is proving almost irresistible.

Transferable skills

Librarians have long been information management and organization experts. These skills lie at the heart of data science, since data curation is integral to big data. Librarians are also strong communicators, possessing the ability to fulfill users' often poorly presented information needs with efficient conduits to knowledge and understanding.

Besides helping people find and manage data, librarians routinely give users insightful guidance on analyzing, transforming, and visualizing information. Data scientists and other big data experts also regularly perform such tasks.

Few librarians are programming experts or database engineers. Yet, given their knowledge acquisition and management experience, most librarians can gain familiarity with key big data software tools in relatively little time and without a great deal of effort.

While a librarian can train to become a programmer, mathematician, or statistician, many of the skills such experts possess aren't essential to routine big data work. By focusing on big data-specific issues, virtually any librarian can quickly learn how descriptive summaries and basic tests of numeric data can be used and misused. Learning how to recognize the features of effective data visualization displays also doesn't necessarily require extensive training.

Filling a need

A wide range of businesses and other organizations should be grateful that librarians can be relatively easily converted into big data experts, since true data scientists are currently in very short supply. According to [McKinsey and Company](#), an international business consulting firm, the US alone faces a [shortage](#) of 140,000 to 190,000 people with analytical expertise and 1.5 million managers and analysts with the skills to understand and make decisions based on the analysis of big data.

Acquiring library-trained big data experts can also be a boon to businesses that are looking to add extra scope and depth to their data science ranks. Individuals schooled in the world of words and ideas can ideally complement current data scientists rooted in mathematical formulae and computer code.

Librarians, too, stand to benefit from acquiring data science skills. It's no secret that community, school, and corporate librarian positions are dwindling as governments continue reallocating scarce library funds to other services and as more people seek information on the web instead of from books. For many librarians, training to become a big data expert, perhaps even a full-fledged data scientist, beckons as a fresh and promising pathway toward creating a satisfying and potentially lucrative career.

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Saul Sherry, User Rank: Blogger
9/16/2013 | 4:03:48 AM

Data Science For All

Looping back around to this article, just found this online - some great resources for librarians looking to train in data science.

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Saul Sherry, User Rank: Blogger
8/13/2013 | 4:58:37 AM

Re: Another position morphing through technology

That's just what I was thinking @Sharco - can't underestimate the value of a juicy job title in attracting/retaining the talent you want.

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SharCo, User Rank: Petabyte Pathfinder
8/12/2013 | 1:25:33 PM

Re: Another position morphing through technology

I think positioning and placement would matter more than merely downsizing as well. If you can put people in positions where they would do the most good, then that's an increase in effectivity and efficiency of many sorts.

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SharCo, User Rank: Petabyte Pathfinder
8/12/2013 | 1:24:55 PM

Re: Another position morphing through technology

I agree. At this rate, they'll be known as All-Around Chiefs soon enough. CKO sort of has a nice ring to it, I should say.

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Saul Sherry, User Rank: Blogger
8/12/2013 | 11:52:57 AM

Re: Another position morphing through technology

Ah, sounds like a pretty good job title to have too!

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smkinoshita, User Rank: Exabyte Executive
8/12/2013 | 10:06:20 AM

Re: Another position morphing through technology

@a.saji: No, I don't think downsizing is necessarily the answer. I'm just glad to hear that a group of people with valuable skills are being transferred to areas where they are needed.

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legalcio, User Rank: Exabyte Executive
8/12/2013 | 8:57:44 AM

Re: Another position morphing through technology

Saul, I think the position in commercial environments will include something regarding knowledge management in the title. Chief Knowledge Officer, or something like that.

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Saul Sherry, User Rank: Blogger
8/12/2013 | 5:07:28 AM

Re: Another position morphing through technology

@Dcawrey, it's a different form of information they will be shepherding, that's for sure. Maybe that will be the new job title 'Data Shepherd'... I wonder what percentage of librarians will embrace that absolute change when books become less than 1% of their role.

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Saul Sherry, User Rank: Blogger
8/12/2013 | 5:04:14 AM

Re: Another position morphing through technology

Do you see that job title evolving @Legalcio - or does it still make sense in the new digital context?

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a.saji, User Rank: Megabyte Messenger
8/12/2013 | 2:19:13 AM

Re: Another position morphing through technology

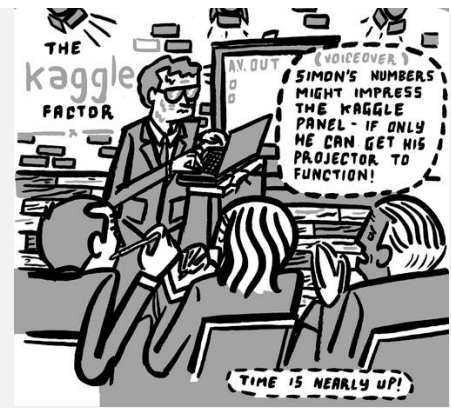
@smkinoshita: Do you think downsizing is the answer for this ?

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