How would you describe Acxiom?

Tim Suther: It’s an enterprise data, analytics and software as a service (SaaS) company that provides data-driven results to strengthen customer connections. We provide products and services for marketing and IT professionals and work with about 7,000 brands globally. We have insights on 700 million people around the world—their real interests, purchasing behavior and life stages.

We serve as the engine inside brands’ own marketing efforts, so we help big marketers understand their customers better—who they really are and what their value is. Then we work with them to connect to places where people like to be. So, for example, we have relationships with Facebook, Apple, Yahoo!, Microsoft, AT&T, Comcast and Cablevision.

“The idea is that a major advertiser that has spent hundreds of millions of dollars understanding customers, oftentimes with our help, will want to connect those insights with its publishing partners—the Facebooks, Apples and Yahoo’s of the world that, in turn, have also spent hundreds of millions of dollars understanding their own visitors. Acxiom stands in the middle and enables precision in selecting audiences and measurements to determine whether or not the marketing actually worked.”
Your company deals with a lot of data. What does Big Data mean to you?

**Suther:** There are a lot of people who say Big Data is overhyped. I would say possibly it’s underhyped in the sense that it enables marketers to describe everything. What’s particularly exciting is that most of the data that’s being used right now is used to benefit the marketing function, and it certainly needs it.

There’s something on the order of $200 billion in advertising spend that’s wasted every year. The real opportunity is going to be in leveraging data as part of the product itself. If you think about data and marketing, it’s external to the product. It just helps me reach my desired audience in a more efficient way and helps me measure if my marketing is working. But when data becomes internal to the product, it really does exciting things.

“**eMarketer touches all the bases—digital, mobile, social and ecommerce—and also has great research about various geographies.**”

What’s the biggest challenge around Big Data?

**Suther:** The industry’s challenge is to be able to create insight around data. In the digital advertising world, most ad spending is placed based on navigational patterns across the internet. You go from site to site, a cookie tracks you and it makes certain inferences about who you really are. I would say that model has failed. Our hypothesis is that the secret to making Big Data perform is to have more information about real people and not merely navigational patterns on the internet.

Big Data is not about being one of the chosen few 25,000 people on the Nielsen panel, but rather information about individuals responsibly collected, used and transparently presented. That’s the mission that we’re on.

How do you use eMarketer to inform your strategic thinking?

**Suther:** In my role as chief strategy officer, industry research is important in multiple ways. For example, we just went through a refresh of the company strategy, presented it to the board and got it approved. As part of that process, we reached out to lots of places to get intelligence on where the industry is going. eMarketer touches all the bases—digital, mobile, social and ecommerce—and also has great research about various geographies. Providing perspective on the development of various new media, technology and data sources is extremely meaningful because it provides a proper foundation for dialogue with our board. The research that eMarketer provides offers very useful datapoints for getting everyone on common ground for what’s happening in the industry. It’s the foundation for deciding what we do with that insight. The distilled information that eMarketer provides is useful to our product managers and in preparing for board meetings.

I probably speak about 30 to 40 times a year at industry events. I’ve always felt that when you’re out speaking, no one really wants to hear about any one company. They want to hear about ideas that they can take back to their businesses and act on. To get to that point, sometimes you have to draw upon a macro view of what’s going on in the business. Having access to eMarketer’s red and black charts—which are borderline ubiquitous—and the associated research is useful background in developing commentary that I can use. I find the charts pretty valuable, and I know that if there’s an industry stat I need, you probably have it.

What eMarketer subject areas have been of most interest to you?

**Suther:** There’s a whole bunch: worldwide internet user numbers, B2B content marketing and related content marketing best practices, mobile and digital video spending projections, and RTB [real-time bidding data].