



# How Marketers Can Avoid a Big Data Disaster

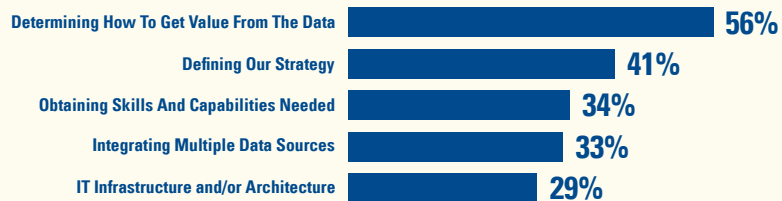
By Greg Smith

Turn back the clock five years. There was a great buzz about a new technology that was going to transform the business world. Social media was becoming mainstream and both Marketers and Brands wanted to take immediate advantage of it. Many stepped on the social media accelerator to begin their journey without a roadmap or destination, resulting in a number of accidents along the way.

Fast forward to 2013, and it seems as though history is repeating itself in the promises of the latest game-changing technology – Big Data. In its simplest form, Big Data is the capture, storage and analysis of large and complex data sets and according to a recent Gartner report, 64% of enterprises say they're deploying or planning a Big Data project. Yet, 56% of the same respondents say they don't know how to get value from this data. Do you see a trend here?

## What's the Problem

The most commonly cited challenges in working with big data.



Source: Gartner Inc. online survey of 720 IT and business leaders conducted in June 2013

In this EMI Technology Perspective, we highlight some fundamental questions that companies must answer in order to create a strategic plan for Big Data. Some of these questions may seem obvious but they're often overlooked because companies and individuals are so eager to get started.

## What problem is the business trying to solve?

This seems like the obvious place to start, but many companies race ahead without specifying the problems or opportunities in front of them. They feel the need to become more data driven, but underestimate the complexity, resources and time required to obtain valuable insights. In the beginning, a pilot project that targets a manageable objective (e.g., identify the activities that signal customer attrition) makes the most sense. Regardless of your objective, clarifying it and obtaining consensus among all involved is a critical first step. Without it, you're driving with your eyes closed.

## Who is leading the effort?

When it comes to Big Data initiatives, the tension between the roles of CMO and CIO appears to be growing. But instead of driving division, Big Data should be the glue that cements the relationship between the two as both are fundamentally interested in delivering deep insights to improve business results. In most initiatives, marketing and business-unit heads should lead team discussions regarding the business objective and information required, while IT should lead the exploration and recommendation of the appropriate technological solution. Successful initiatives require perspectives from multiple departments, so instead of exclusion, seek inclusion of the CMO, CIO and their staffs.

## What data is needed? Where does it reside?

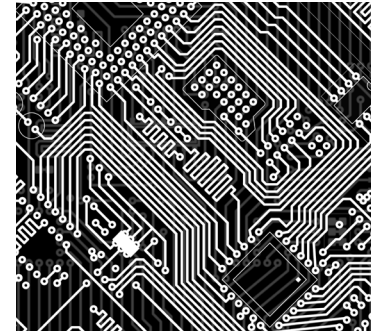
Once a business has identified the primary opportunity or challenge, it must determine where the data that will inform the solution is stored and how it can be consolidated for analysis. As the data may be structured or unstructured or reside internally or externally, the first step is to sit down with the CIO to understand what data exists and how it can be accessed. Once this is understood, a plan can also be developed for collecting the data that is needed but doesn't yet exist. In the beginning, most companies will benefit by analyzing data from a few of its most common sales and service interactions. Companies that try to analyze too much information in the early stages often get lost in all the noise and make poor decisions.

## Who will analyze the data?

Dire predictions abound regarding the lack of Data Scientists, but proper analysis is about asking the right questions and asking the right questions requires business context. For this reason, training an existing employee to perform initial data analytics is often easier and less time-consuming than hiring an outside Data Scientist and teaching them the business. Regardless of who you choose, be sure to hire someone with strong communication skills. This is because the value in Big Data is about understanding what the data represents and then converting it to information that can be easily consumed by the business leaders.

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The ability to collect, process and act on all forms of data can truly transform a business. It allows organizations to understand the world in a way they could only dream about in the past. This is the promise of Big Data and why it's so alluring. However, businesses can't overlook the importance of first establishing a sound strategic plan. This will not only make execution easier, but often be the determining factor between Big Data success or Big Data disaster.



## Key Takeaways

- Big Data projects will stumble without a strategic plan
- In the early stages, limit the amount of data you analyze
- Hiring a Data Scientist is not a necessity

## About the Author

Greg Smith is Managing Director of the Technology Practice at EMI Strategic Marketing.

Connect with Greg at

[www.linkedin.com/in/jgregorsmith](http://www.linkedin.com/in/jgregorsmith)  
or @jgregorsmith.

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