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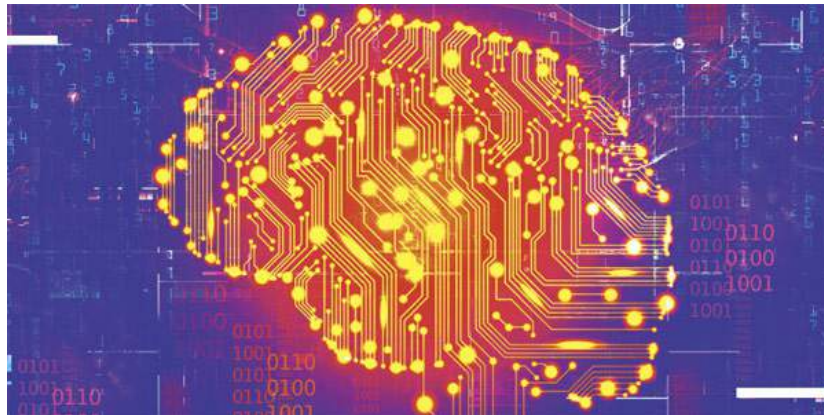**BIG DATA: SPECIAL REPORT** 15 Apr, 2014 15:01 IST

Making Sense Of Big Data

Firms are employing Big Data analytics to bring in efficiency and gain an edge over peers

Vishal Krishna

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Error-Free Products...

Automaker Daimler uses diagnostic handhelds at its plants around the world to detect errors in manufacturing and track customer complaints to their root cause. "We are still trying to tap into unstructured data in workshops across the world on a real-time basis," says Michael Gorriz, CIO, Daimler. A few years ago, such efforts were unimaginable.

Daimler is also working on collecting data from connected cars and capturing customer behaviour and then finding patterns that can help data teams develop cars customised to the needs of buyers. "By the end of 2014, we want to drive revenues of ¤100 million from these mega trends," says Gorriz. The next wave, he adds, will be using data to prevent accidents on a real-time basis — connected cars and connected services will make data usage dynamic.
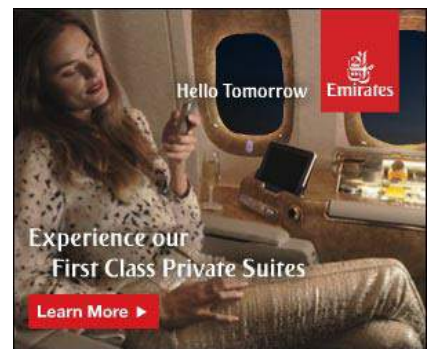
Back-end Boon

The back-end of an organisation is where some of the most fascinating experiments in Big Data are at play. For instance, cost leakage in supply chain is the biggest headache for large organisations. They find it hard to move goods efficiently through various points in the supply chain.
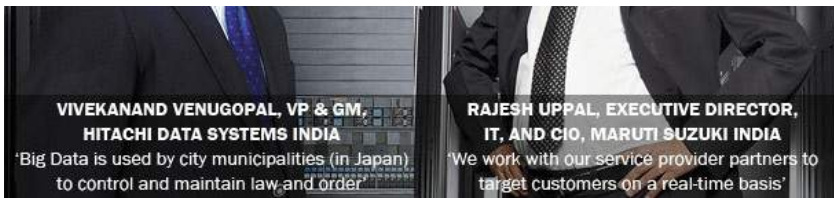
When Procter & Gamble was faced with this challenge, it turned to Infosys to build a platform to connect the supply chain and track distributors, small retailers or kirana stores and sales teams through the use of data and mobility to enhance supply chain margins. The two-year pilot has borne fruit. P&G has rolled it out across 70 countries. "This platform allows central teams of brands to understand what they have to sell and allows them to make campaigns stronger because they know what their retailers want on a real-time basis," says Girish A. Ramachandran, VP, Product, Platforms and Services, Infosys.

Even the not-for-profit sector is embracing Big Data analytics in a big way to understand issues that can substantially improve policy-making. Akshara Foundation in Bangalore has experimented with Hadoop and Hive clusters to help elected representatives understand the penetration of education in their respective constituencies. "As an NGO, we have terabytes of data and we work with other non-profits to collect data on junior school students," says Ashok Kamath, chairman, Akshara Foundation.

VIVEKANAND VENUGOPAL, VP & GM, HITACHI DATA SYSTEMS INDIA
'Big Data is used by city municipalities (in Japan) to control and maintain law and order'

RAJESH UPPAL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IT, AND CIO, MARUTI SUZUKI INDIA
'We work with our service provider partners to target customers on a real-time basis'

Akshara works with Akshaya Patra, a mid-day meal scheme. Its data suggests that one of the schools it caters to has 150 students, but Akshaya Patra has been asked by the school to send only 81 meals. While the absence of students is obvious, this data can be shared with other government organisations to ascertain whether there is delinquency in a particular geography or there is some other reason why the children are not at school.

Such fundamental questions led Akshara to build an open source data platform called the Karnataka Learning Partnership, where data from all non-profit and government entities can be keyed in and statistical models built to understand patterns. "The goal is to allow this platform on a private cloud to be used by every company and non-profit seeking details," says Kamath.

Telecom operators that lord over some of the largest data sets in the world are also beginning to put them to optimum use. Armed with communication records, Internet sessions, social media information, sensors and weblogs, telcos are entering a new world. They are looking to predict consumer behaviour, perhaps even make targeted offers based on usage patterns.

Vodafone India — with a subscriber base of 162 million — is at the forefront in India. "With petabytes of data being generated from 23 different circles, commonly used software tools cannot capture, manage and process their sheer volume and variety," says Anthony Thomas, CIO, Vodafone India. Over the past two years, Vodafone India has used Big Data to improve decision cycle times to respond to business and customer queries. The innovation team in India is actively trying to enhance customer experience through network analytics and creating real-time marketing campaigns.

Today, it uses structured data, divided into categories such as affluent customers and influencers, and customer satisfaction scores, to market services. It aims to combine these with usage patterns in the network to target customers. For instance, if a Mumbaikar visiting Delhi, the telco can monetise data based on where he is driving — a highway or a market — and whether he is accessing Facebook, Twitter or a game. The telco can ping you offering free data and bandwidth usage on a particular app for a specific period of time. Vodafone India, which currently spends 10 per cent of its total IT budget on this mega trend, says it will spend 40 per cent or more in the years to come.

ASHOK KAMATH, CHAIRMAN, AKSHARA FOUNDATION
'We have terabytes of data and we work with other non-profits to collect data on students'

Similar to telcos, some of the earliest adopters of Big Data are e-commerce firms. MakeMyTrip, the $200-million online travel company, is a case in point. Over the past three years, it has realised the benefits of tracking customer behaviour to enhance their travel experience. It says this has a direct correlation with margins and better internal operations. MakeMyTrip's hotel and packages business grew 36 per cent year on year in December 2013 while the overall business grew 42 per cent.

"The purpose is to allow personalisation to the customer by using all business insights with unstructured data from social media," says Sanket Atal, chief technology officer, MakeMyTrip. Its Big Data technology project was kicked off by using tools such as MapReduce to crunch data from sources such as apps, social media and weblogs. This raw data is partitioned and processed for insights. "We have given teeth to the sales teams," says Atal.

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