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Time Inc. Pins Turnaround on Big Data, Specialty Content

Facing declining print subscription and advertising revenue, Time Inc., the publisher of iconic print magazines like Sports Illustrated and People, is betting on Big Data to help transform itself into a technology company.

Chief Technology Officer Colin Bodell, who joined Time in February 2014 after eight years at Amazon.com Inc., has been investing in data scientists as the company tries to identify high-growth markets and deliver more targeted advertising.



Brendan McDermid/Reuters

“We’ve only been scratching the surface of the utility of the data,” Mr. Bodell told CIO Journal. In his year at the company, he has been bulking up on data scientists and getting disparate databases to speak to one another. Time brought on Linda Apsley to lead Big Data initiatives, joining the company after a number of program management jobs at Microsoft Corp. and Amazon. The company has also hired engineers and data scientists from companies like Expedia Inc. and Nokia Oyj., among others. The “Big Data” team now comprises about 25 staff across New York and Bangalore, India.

Time has also been using a range of Big Data analysis tools including Hadoop, and is trying to put more tools in the hands of business divisions. The company is in the early stages of developing a platform that will allow staff who may not be skilled in business intelligence to quickly run reports and query datasets. Before, they would have to request a report be run for them.

Mr. Bodell hopes predictive analytics will ultimately lead to targeted content and advertisements. If the numbers show markets such as women’s issues or lifestyle brands are underserved, for example, Time can quickly build out technology and platforms to serve it.

The company said it expects [revenue to drop 3% to 6% for the full year](#) amid falling newsstand revenues and circulation. Like many traditional media companies, Time is broadening digital operations in an effort to offset declining newsstand revenue and boost advertising. Time Inc. was spun off from Time Warner Inc. last June and is now a standalone public company.

Mr. Bodell is betting he can build out better technology get content into consumers' hands faster than upstart media companies like BuzzFeed or Vox can build their own content and advertising infrastructures. "Where I can make the change is making sure we have the best channels to deliver content to consumers," he said.

Potential new revenue streams at Time, and other traditional media companies, include online content subscriptions, metered paywalls, native advertising and e-commerce.

Time this year launched The Snug, a site that aggregates home décor and do-it-yourself content from across Time's properties. The goal is to court the coveted Millennial demographic, and opens the door to potentially lucrative native advertising. Time is also building technology internally that will allow Time and a sponsor to create co-branded mobile apps. Doing that faster than traditional advertising agencies could shift more revenue to Time.

E-commerce could also be a revenue stream for Time, Mr. Bodell says. The company this year invested in Keaton Row, an online fashion marketplace that connects users with personal stylists and lets them buy items from major brands. Tying in content from its fashion brands and other properties could pave the way to online transactions. E-commerce "is going to be a growth opportunity for us," Mr. Bodell said.

Time is also amid a move to the cloud, and de-commissioning a data center that takes up the 21st floor of the Time & Life building in midtown Manhattan. Mr. Bodell's goal is to have everything save for a few servers moved to a cloud provider, mostly Amazon Web Services, by the end of the year. That's when Time is slated to move out of midtown into newer, less expensive headquarters in Liberty Plaza.

"We're a media content company, we're not a data center company," he said. "So we're going to exit that business."

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