Career Guidance for Digital Analytics Professionals

INTRODUCTION

Digital analytics is a relatively new field and growing rapidly, both in scope of work, and in industry size. While our field originally started with a focus on the professionals analyzing web site traffic and behavior, today's digital analysts are often responsible for site analytics, mobile and social, search, email, online media and other acquisition channels, not to mention drawing connections between customers offline and online. Reference to web analytics in this document is not intended to limit the scope of this information, as we find similar patterns whether a company hires a "Web Analyst", "Digital Analyst" or "Business Analyst" (whose responsibilities are related to business outcome analysis of site and other revenue streams.)

New entrants to the field may wonder what options are available to them, and experienced analysts may ask how they can continue to move forward in their career. This document is intended, as much as is possible, to provide insight into the career options as well as an indication of a "typical" career path for a digital analyst.

But it is important to advise – there is tremendous variation in the positions available, and the skills required to move from one level to the next. To provide information of some use, some generalizations may be made.

The information in this document is compiled via interviews with the generous members of the analytics community, in an attempt to comprise a representative sample of the types of roles available. Interviewees come from a wide range of environments: large, medium and small client-side analytics, agency side, consultant side and vendor side.

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WHAT KIND OF COMPANIES EMPLOY DIGITAL ANALYSTS?

Generally speaking, most web analytics industry practitioners tend to work in one of the following types of organizations:

1. Digital analytics solution vendor

- For example, a vendor-side role might be with a platform and/or software providers or a variety of other solutions, including specialized analytics vendors devoted to mobile, social and more.
  - o Benefits: Deep knowledge of a toolset, varied and dynamic experience spanning clients across multiple sectors.
  - o Limitations: Knowledge may not be as deep as when working on the client-side. Additionally, vendors may be involved with helping clients to start initiatives, with the client then being responsible for the follow-through. This may not suit those who enjoy seeing a project through from beginning to end. Some may also find vendor-side a "blinkered" view of the market, since you are focusing on one product and how they tackle analytics challenges.

2. Client-side, working within one organization

- There can be a tremendous amount of variation in these roles. Companies may be large, multi-billion dollar organizations with large analytics teams, or small companies (or even non-profits) with one resource, for who only part of their role involves web analytics.
  - o Benefits: Deep knowledge of a company and a business model. Opportunity to really contribute to and drive analytics in an organization, and to build and develop a team.
  - o Limitations: Experience may be narrower – one business model, and perhaps one analytics tool.

3. Agency-side

- A web analytics role within an agency tends to deal with a wider range of clients and businesses models. Agencies may have large or small teams of analysts depending on client need.
  - o Benefits: Wide variety of experience with different clients, channels, tools and business models. Can be a fast-paced environment, which many thrive on.
  - o Limitations: Business knowledge may not be as deep as it would be working client-side, since attention is often split across multiple clients.

4. Consultancy

- Like agencies, consultants may have a wide variety of clients and businesses they deal with. However, the difference between agency and consultancy tends to be specialization: an agency may have a team of web analysts in addition to a wide range of other offerings (for example, media buying, search engine optimization or creative), whereas a consultancy is more likely to be a focused offering of analytics skills.

Consultants may work as a part of a consultancy group or company, or be a freelance consultant, working independently.

- o Benefits and limitations: Similar to agency.

WHAT TYPE OF EXPERTISE IS NEEDED TO WORK AS A WEB ANALYST?

Web analytics practitioners may have a wide range of skills, including (but not limited to)

- **Business/digital analytics** - these practitioners are using the tools day-to-day providing business reports and analysis. In larger companies, responsibilities for report generation and the analysis delivery of insights may be split into separate roles, reporting into either analytical or business-side teams.

- **Implementation/technical expertise** - some practitioners focus almost exclusively on implementation: how to configure data capture and the web analytics tool to deliver necessary data back to the business, or how to integrate multiple data and analytics systems.

- **Testing** – some roles or even entire teams focus on the business optimization of digital assets. For example, in some organizations, A/B and Multivariate testing of interfaces may be conducted by the same people doing the analysis. In larger teams, one analyst or more may hold responsibility purely for testing.

- **Big data/data warehousing/database query and management** - an understanding of or experience with merging data sets can be helpful to analysts as connectivity across data sources can be critical to a business.

- **Data science/statistics/business intelligence** - a growing number of companies are starting to leverage the skills of advanced modeling and traditional statistical analysis on digital data. Companies are merging their digital and CRM data, or online and offline sales data, and leveraging specialized tools for analysis.

- **Qualitative analysis** - great value can be found by merging qualitative data collected for surveys, social commentary, or other sources. The value of this analysis is enhanced significantly by connecting it to quantitative data of actual behavior at the visitor or customer level to find out if people actually behave like they say they will and how this behavior can be influenced.

- **Research skills** – with the rapid expansion of new platforms and data sources, the introduction of new standards and processes has accelerated and teams need to be kept informed of the latest advances. Some companies also seek advantage by keeping informed on the latest research in areas providing additional insight into digital analytics such as consumer behavior and psychology.

Many, if not all, digital analytics practitioners tend to have a variety of skill sets. There is a tendency for more specialization in companies with larger analytics teams, and a "jack of all trades" analyst at smaller companies.

CAREER LEVELS

The career levels in digital analytics are outlined hierarchically within the DAA's Digital Analyst Job Descriptions. The design is intended to acknowledge how knowledge and skill sets increase from entry-level positions to executive-level positions. However, the positions within each level are not arranged in any hierarchy.

Each organization, considers their structure and goals when determining the career pathway for analysts with their organization.

Digital Analyst Job Titles

Level 1
- Digital Analyst, Customer Experience
- Digital Analyst, Marketing Optimization
- Technical Analytics Implementation Specialist
- Statistical Analyst
- Social Media Analyst

Level 2
- Sr. Analyst, Analytical
- Sr. Analyst, Technical
- Sr. Statistical Analyst
- Manager, Analytics

Level 3
- Specialized Analytics Advisor/SME
- Director, Analytics Technology
- Director, Analytics

Level 4
- Chief Analytics Officer
- Vice President, Analytics Technology
- Vice President, Analytics

Within a vendor organization with client services roles, you may find titles like Account Manager, Technical Support, Product Management / Development, Sales Manager, Sales Engineer, Consultant and Partnership Manager. Similarly, roles in the consulting world reflect the business: Consultant, Senior Consultant and Principal Consultant, with Director, Senior Director and VP levels in place above to manage teams.

TYPICAL DIGITAL ANALYTICS ROLES

The descriptions below are meant to paint a general picture of "what life is like" at each level of within Digital Analytics work. For more detailed information about the experience levels within the digital analytics profession, see the DAA's Digital Analyst Competency Framework.

Entry-Level

Entry-level analysts are not uncommon, though companies do vary in their willingness to take on completely "green" analysts. Large client-side organizations, as well as agencies and consultancies tend to be less likely to take on entry-level analysts, simply because of the need for a new hire to quickly ramp up and contribute. At these organizations, even the most junior hire may have a minimum of a few years' experience. On the agency and consulting side, the same often applies: new hires need to be able to quickly ramp up to contribute billable work, so entry-level hires are rarer.

However, due to the lack of digital analysts available, many organizations are creating internship initiatives, focused on allowing talented individuals who are looking for ways to break into the implementation, analysis, data integration, and optimization roles a paid means to do so. With valuable and relevant training specific to a variety of roles, as well as client face time, internships allow a more direct path to the digital analytics industry without the need for promotion through related jobs. In fact, many companies are focusing more on the "way you think" (analytical? problem solver?) and potential to grow than experience. These companies are willing to bring in smart people without previous experience and give them the best training and development support, though it's common to prefer internal employee hires who come from a compatible role and already understand the business. This is because the learning curve required to learn both the digital analytics world *and* the business tends to be steep, and results in some time before an entry-level new hire is truly able to contribute.

Individual Contributor Roles: Analyst, Senior Analyst

Digital Analyst is a role with tremendous variation in the requirements and responsibilities. Some analyst roles are more rooted in the business side, tying analysis to the business outcomes and making recommendations to improve these. Other roles may be focused more on the implementation side, with individuals devoted to optimizing data capture, tool implementation and data integration. The following will deal a little more on the business side, but keep in mind there are a growing number of implementation specialists in the industry. For now, a general theme of progressive increases in the complexity of work applies to both business and implementation analysts.

Typically, the growth between a Digital Analyst and Senior Digital Analyst position tends to involve increased analysis (vs. reporting) skills and autonomy to tackle larger projects. Some would say an Analyst is often more of a "tool jockey" whereas a Senior Analyst is expected not only to know the tools, but also understand the business and tie the data to business objectives.

In large companies, there could be multiple "Analyst" levels: Analyst (Level 1), Analyst (Level 2), Senior Analyst, Associate Director and Director. A Level 1 Analyst is expected to be able to execute the basics: campaign tracking, simple website tagging, ad hoc targeted queries, and deliver recurring reports, and will likely

have oversight from other analysts on a good chunk of their projects. A Level 2 Analyst is expected to be able to independently develop dashboards and reporting, identify and complete necessary analyses, tagging sites and also develop measurement plans for redesigns, Facebook pages, Mobile applications, etc.

A Senior Web Analyst, however, needs to be able to "figure out" measurement and analysis strategies for unique situations, as well as developing re-usable processes. As a general rule, once an Analyst gets to a senior-level they tend to be recognized as an internal expert in one or two different analytics tools. At an agency, increased seniority also tends to also involve increased client interaction. On the client side, developing from a more junior web analyst to a senior-level can be less about the number of years spent in the role and more about the ability to influence stakeholders and drive a strategic roadmap independently.

On the vendor side, junior account management roles tend to handle smaller accounts with less complex requirements. More senior account managers would take ownership of enterprise-level accounts, manage multiple clients and may deal with very unique requirements for data capture, reporting and analysis, including integration of multi-channel data sources. Previous enterprise-level experience is typically required to deal with the complexity of these accounts. Increasing seniority tends to be a combination of background, skill-set and customer delivery experience, with more senior team members working on projects with greater scope and scale. Moreover, it is expected that more senior individuals would have a balance of good customer reputation and peer respect. In consulting, the titles may be slightly different but the progression from Consultant to Senior to Principal Consultant tends to be based on experience and ability to contribute insights, and more senior team members tend to have the elusive quality of solving highly complex problems, while making it appear seamless and trivial to others.

Management Level Roles

An important first prerequisite for management-level roles is you should *want to* manage people. While this may sound logical, some practitioners follow a management career path because it's what they think they need to do to continue to grow in seniority, or to be successful. However, not everyone can be an effective manager, nor cope with the stress of being responsible for the work of everyone who reports to you. In the digital measurement industry, typically Manager and Director level roles do have responsibility for a team and people development. However, the word Manager (or even Director) in a title does not always mean that a person is responsible for people management or team development, depending on the area of work. Consultancy is often an option for individuals with senior skills who aren't focused on team building.

At a Manager or Director level with direct reports, the ability to build and run teams, especially multi-disciplinary teams, becomes important, as does the ability to manage clients, including internal clients. At this level, the role becomes about what the analytics team can do to help the business grow, and selling the capabilities of the team. There is also tendency for Manager or Director-level to be less "hands on" in data, and instead have presentation skills and tell more of the story with data. This is something which causes some practitioners

concern, as they debate the shift to people management. The reality is, most practitioners are in this industry because they enjoy the working directly with the data.

VP-level digital analytics roles tend to be more in the agency or consulting world, or tend to be broader than just digital analytics, for example, managing all the analytical resources. As businesses grow more rooted in data and analysis, we expect more analytics-focused professionals to move into business leadership positions.

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Educational requirements vary greatly by company or hiring manager. A candidate with a graduate degree (for example, a Masters or MBA), or a degree in a discipline such as mathematics, statistics, economics, finance, marketing or technology will certainly be at an advantage when looking for opportunities. However, while there are certainly preferences, at this time companies do not yet appear to have rigid rules, and will hire a candidate for the right experience and skills, even if those come without a specific degree.

SPECIFIC TOOL EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS

Many analytics job postings typically cite experience with the tools currently being used. But in reality, how important is specific tool experience? If you know one, you can adapt to any, right? Or can not knowing a specific tool used by an organization be a barrier to entry?

At a minimum, lack of experience with the most common tools can be considered a barrier to entry. However, for companies hiring analysts for (and using) an enterprise-level solution, often Google Analytics skills alone are not considered sufficient experience. Often previous experience with an enterprise tool is required for more experienced analysts, since paying big dollars for a tool makes it more likely the company depends on it versus making do with a free solution. However, many prefer to hire a great analyst over a tool "expert" with very little understanding of how digital data ties to business objectives.

Bottom line, if you have general analytics experience and perhaps more importantly, a strong comprehension of marketing in general, it's not that difficult to become comfortable with any of the major analytics tools. However, that does not mean companies do not prefer to hire people who are expert users of their tools. Expert users of the tools required are simply viewed as "safer" hires.

EMERGING SKILL SETS

A definite trend in the industry is the realization that digital analytics is not, and should not be, a silo. Analysis of digital data needs to be tied back to broader business objectives, whether that is traditional media, social media, offline or in-store behavior and more. Business-minded individuals with knowledge of how to make recommendations and decisions from *all* available data sources will be in high demand. As such, there is huge

value in more broad skill sets, with employers looking for both digital and offline analytics, or digital analytics tool experience coupled with experience using business intelligence tools, or with SAS, SPSS, or SQL skills.

LOOKING TO GET INTO DIGITAL ANALYTICS?

Our interviewees contributed a wealth of ideas about how to get into Digital Analytics:

1. Determine your direction

Figure out what you're interested in! What's best for your career is to do what motivates you. If you're interested in analysis but not technically inclined or an implementation whiz, that's okay. Love "making it work" but don't care what the numbers say? There's a role with your name on it.

2. Education and training

Get a degree that is related to the industry and focuses on what you want to do. Become familiar with concepts in marketing, economics, mathematics, statistics, finance, business or IT. If you have already graduated, consider a coursework in an area that will broaden your skills. For example, the DAA's courses with University of British Columbia offer broad-spectrum training on the business side of the digital analytics industry.

3. Read and learn

There's a huge amount of info on the digital analytics industry available, including tons of vendors, consultancies, and practitioners who publishing information regularly through whitepapers and blogs. Looks for "Top 10" or similar lists of resources to get you started, and start discovering where your interests lie.

4. Get hands on experience

Join the Analysis Exchange, a program that offers hands-on experience to new (even brand new!) analysts in analyzing non-profit sites. Or volunteer your services to a local non-profit or a small business. Install Google Analytics for them and help them analyze their site for opportunities. Help with some basic tests or surveys using Google Website Optimizer or iPerceptions 4Q. Or, build your own site and set to work analyzing it. Spend a couple of bucks on AdWords to check out how it works. You never know what will come in handy.

5. Join the Digital Analytics Association

The DAA's online Community can be a great way to meet people in the business. Larger cities in your area may have local DAA chapters, and inexpensive educational opportunities. The DAA is always looking for volunteers to contribute to building the industry, and volunteering is a great way to meet people, network, and build relationships.

6. Communicate

Start attending (or hosting!) local meetups of analysts. Web Analytics Wednesday started this movement and such groups are active in many different cities. Check out what's going on in the community via Twitter using the #measure hashtag or on Google Plus and Quora. But don't just get out there and listen – ask questions. You'll be surprised who will happily reply.

7. Get business context

So you've learned the theory, tools and techniques. But the application of these skills in real-world business situations is often full of surprises and can be challenging. If you can, try to attend a conference or a local DAA Symposium. Find one that is reasonably priced and preferably local (to keep the costs down) or think about combining the event with a vacation! If that approach is not in the cards for you, you can view videos of Symposia and other DAA educational events online.

LOOKING TO BE PROMOTED?

The DAA interviewed many digital analytics managers as part of this research, and they had lots of interesting advice for those looking to climb the ladder. Below are some of their comments.

Continue to explore and be curious - don't stop with your current responsibilities, or rest with "well that's not my role." As one manager said, "Curiosity didn't kill the cat - it got you a promotion." Other managers echoed this same idea - the non-negotiables for her team are curiosity and passion. She looks to hire people who will say, "Wow, we're up X%, what happened?"

Another manager highlighted the need to go above and beyond: "Deliver something unexpected and of real value to the people who will influence your promotion. Then, do it again. And again. And again. If you don't get promoted in a year, either you're not really adding something of value, or you need to find a new organization. (And if it's the latter, you've got some great examples to share in a behavioral interview!)" Whatever you do, don't sit back and wait to be told what is needed. Understand what your manager is doing, and how your work can make him or her look good.

"When I talk to people who whine and cry about being in the same role, I ask whether they're even passionate. The people I promote are the most enthusiastic and jump in with both feet. More than anything, learn to be proactive. Don't go to your boss saying, 'Here's the problem.' Deliver the problem *and* the six ways you've come up with to solve it. What is the level of effort of each, the cost to the company, and which do you recommend? If you are proactive, you won't stay in the same place."

Many talked about educating others about roles and what goes into the job of a digital analyst, as well as promoting the capabilities and value of analytics. Tie your contributions to the business and to the bottom line, to ensure the importance is recognized. Since many analysts tend to keep their heads down and work hard, it

is important to make sure your organization understands that data does not simply show up in reports without strategy, solid implementation, time and effort put into creating useful reports and dashboards.

Don't forget the need to translate analytics to the business user or executive. Managers often recommend public speaking and presentation classes, to ensure you're able to articulate and deliver a story from data.

LOOKING FOR YOUR NEXT OPPORTUNITY?

There are some additional considerations if you're looking for a new opportunity in another organization.

One is building your skills – obviously this is crucial if you want to keep moving forward. Keep in mind that the time for your skill development may be on your own time. (And if you're not willing to put in that time – knowing you ultimately benefit! – are you even that interested?) Many managers also highlight the importance of building your personal brand. When you get to a more senior level (Senior Manager, Director) typically companies hire brands, not just skills. They want to bring in someone who will bring internal and external credibility to their analytics practice. They want to be able to say, "We have this expert in- house."

The same applies in reverse, too. Think about the employment choices you make. How does it reflect on you and your personal brand? The assumption is often that bigger companies are doing more advanced things, and this may reflect favorably on you – even though joining a large team perhaps means your role was narrower or more focused than it might have been at a smaller, unknown company.

However, don't be in too big a rush to move on. Due to the demand for skilled analysts, approximately 50% of professionals in the space have actually moved in the last year, according to industry research. Do take the time to make sure you've gotten all the valuable experience out of each role.

Credit

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