

# Insight Platforms Accelerate Digital Transformation

A New Class Of Software Makes It Easier To Turn Big Data Into Action

by Brian Hopkins

April 27, 2016 | Updated: May 2, 2016

## Why Read This Report

All of your business' digital ambitions involve better analytics, but the complexity of managing big data and advanced analytics is driving down satisfaction, despite investment. Read this report to understand how an emerging class of software — insight platforms — can better connect data to action, which is what your business really wants. You likely already have several or perhaps many of these platforms. This report will help enterprise architecture (EA) pros and their peers identify them all, fill critical gaps, and assign different insight platforms to strategic or tactical roles.

## Key Takeaways

### Your Business Is Increasingly Dissatisfied With Big Data Analytics

Despite increasing investment in big data analytics, business satisfaction is declining. The problem is that neither big data nor analytics technology guarantees action. And it is action your business is after. Enterprise architects must reverse this trend by incorporating technology that connects data to insight and insight to action.

### Insight Platforms Connect Data, Insight, And Action

Insight platforms converge data management, analytics, and insight execution technology. These integrated or possibly packaged technologies overcome problems with complexity, integration, analytic automation, testing, and execution. Start investigating insight platform options by first understanding how different vendors package and sell them.

### Connect Different Platforms With An Information Fabric

You likely have many of these already under different names: big data predictive analytics suites, advanced analytics platforms, cloud data analytic services, and system integrator leave-behinds, just to name a few. Enterprise architects must rationalize them according to strategic and tactical roles and merge them into an efficient information fabric.

# Insight Platforms Accelerate Digital Transformation

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### Notes & Resources

Forrester analyzed dozens of briefings from software vendors and considered its experiences working with over 100 clients through consulting and inquiry calls.

### Related Research Documents

[Digital Insights Are The New Currency Of Business](#)

[Insights Services Disrupt The Data And Analytics Market](#)

[The Platform Explosion: Harness It Or Lose Agility](#)

[A Technology Guide To Turn Data Into Customer-Obsessed Action](#)

[TechRadar™: Big Data, Q1 2016](#)

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## Better, Bigger Data Analytics Is Not Enough

Digital is putting pressure on your business. Almost two-thirds of decision-makers at enterprises say addressing rising customer expectations is a high or critical priority, while half report that creating a comprehensive strategy for implementing technologies critical to digital transformation is a high or critical business priority.<sup>1</sup> The investments that enterprise architects and their firms need to meet these demands — mobile, real-time marketing, digital experience improvement, etc. — all have an analytics need beyond just basic business intelligence (BI).<sup>2</sup> But don't think that simply furnishing better analytics technology on newer, bigger, or faster data will satisfy these needs. Despite heavy investment in advanced analytics and emerging big data technology since 2012, business satisfaction with analytics is still going down (see Figure 1).

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**FIGURE 1** Despite Increased Investment, Analytics Satisfaction Is Going Down

**1-1 | Analytics investment is increasing**

**Firms are on a shopping spree . . .**



**39%\*** of decision-makers have a data and analytics budget of at least \$10 million

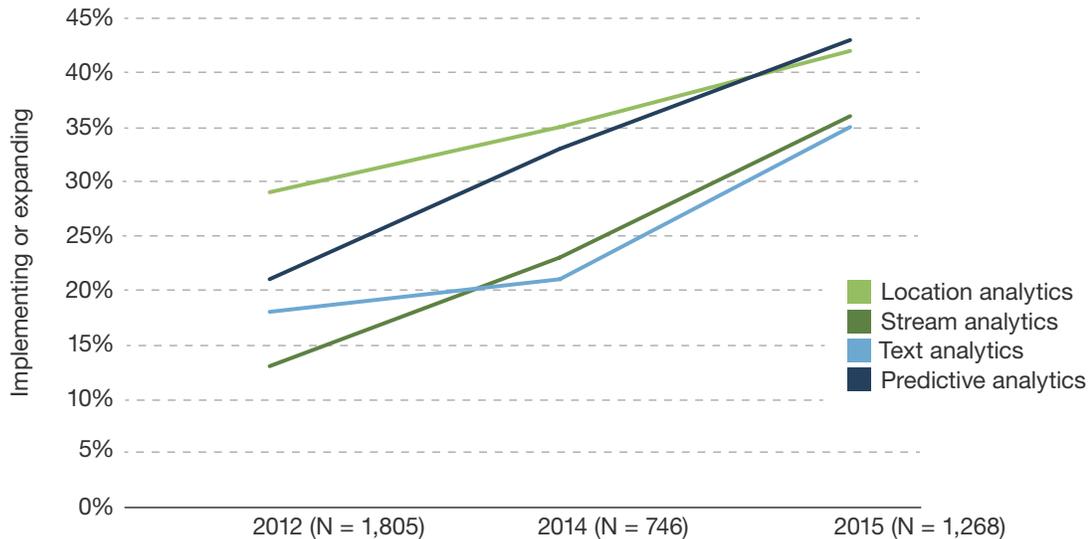


**52%** of firms are spending at least 5% more on advanced analytics technologies than last year

Base: 3,005 global data and analytics decision-makers and \*2,053 who know their data and analytics budget

**. . . money is being spent to implement a variety of advanced tools**

**“What’s your firm’s current use of the following technologies?”**  
(Not all options shown)

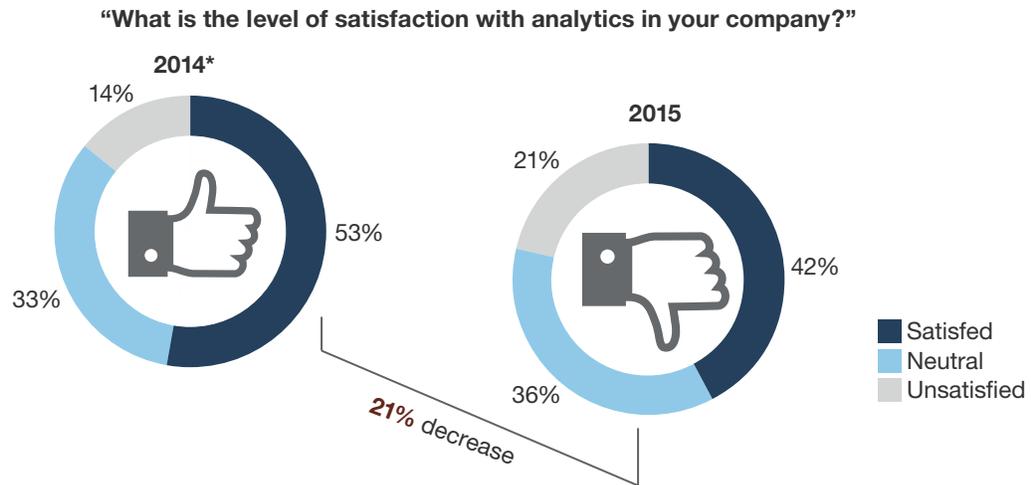


Base: North American and European data and analytics technology decision-makers

Source: Forrester’s Global Business Technographics® Data And Analytics Survey, 2015; Forrester’s 2Business Technographics Global Data And Analytics Survey, 2014; and Forrester’s Forrsights Strategy Spotlight: Business Intelligence And Big Data, Q4 2012

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**FIGURE 1** Despite Increased Investment, Analytics Satisfaction Is Going Down (Cont.)**1-2 | But analytics satisfaction is going down****Yet despite increased investment, satisfaction declined**

Base: 595\* and 1,200 global data and analytics decision-makers  
(percentages may not total 100 due to rounding)

Source: Forrester's Global Business Technographics Data And Analytics Survey, 2015; and Forrester's Business Technographics® Global Data And Analytics Survey, 2014

**Avoid The Big Data Analytics Investment Trap**

Here is the trap — your business partners want big action and big outcomes from their big investment, and they will become dissatisfied when separate big data, analytics, and insights delivery technologies don't work as seamlessly as expected.<sup>3</sup> But past big promises associated with data warehouses and enterprise BI platforms mean you may have only one shot to get it right. You need more than just a big data lake. Enterprise architects must:

- › **Reduce the time gap between data and action.** Many of today's customer interaction opportunities are mobile moments.<sup>4</sup> Waiting an hour to act on insight from them is not acceptable, but technologies like Hadoop struggle to deliver against real-time needs. Forty-five percent of data and analytics decision-makers say their firms are implementing or expanding real-time insight delivery technology, with another 22% planning to invest; however, many vendor offerings are based on open source, like Apache Kafka and NiFi, and are still immature.<sup>5</sup>
- › **Support the faster release of new insight capabilities.** Releasing application updates a few times a year is no longer an option. You need faster delivery across the board to support age-of-the-customer priorities.<sup>6</sup> However, the disconnect between data and analytics technology

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management is a key choke point. For example, 53% of data and analytics decision-makers say that it takes months for IT to make new customer data sets ready for self-service analytics or data science, severely limiting the release of new capabilities.<sup>7</sup>

- › **Recognize that the pace of technology innovation makes both of these hard.** In the second quarter of 2015, venture capital investment reached “dot-com”-era levels — in excess of \$18 billion, with a significant share going to big data startups like AtScale, Globys, H2O.ai, NexJ Systems, Qubole, and Skytree.<sup>8</sup> All of these startups market their solutions as “platforms,” but while platforms can solve complexity problems, having too many of them can also hinder responsiveness.<sup>9</sup>

## Insight Platforms Will Help You Reverse Business Dissatisfaction

Insight platforms are converging from many vendor tools that can help you avoid the trap and reverse the trend of increasing business unhappiness. Insight platforms are different from typical BI or predictive analytics tools because they are built on a big data foundation and include data management, analytics, insight testing, and feedback in an integrated package or suite (see Figure 2). Forrester formally defines insight platforms as follows:

*Insight platforms unify the technologies to manage and analyze data, test and integrate the derived insights into business action, and capture feedback for continuous improvement.*<sup>10</sup>

Insight platforms overcome technology issues that block turning data into action by:

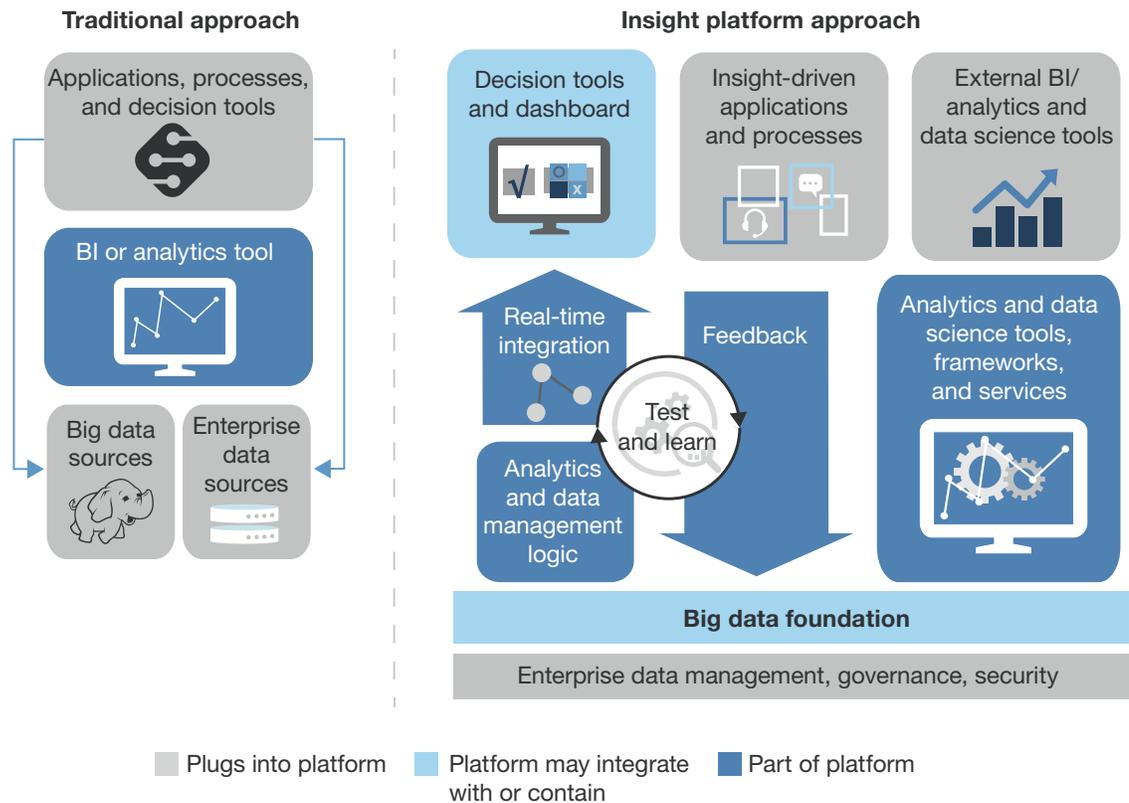
- › **Combining flexible big data management with analytics.** Hadoop and cloud technologies have made it easy to run data management and analytics processes on the same big data infrastructure. Now big data management vendors are adding analytics and big data analytics vendors are adding data management. For example, big-data-as-a-service vendor Bigstep is adding analytics tools like Tableau Software to its stack for a single licensing fee, and BI-on-Hadoop vendor Datameer has added a data governance module.
- › **Including a variety of tools and frameworks to meet different analytic needs.** You will need more than one type of analytics to create insight, and platform vendors are increasingly offering a combination of SQL and advanced modeling and visualization techniques. For example, IBM’s BigInsights platform features predictive modeling tool SPSS as well as Big SQL and BigSheets for spreadsheet style analytics.
- › **Hosting business logic that automates insight creation.** By combining data management and analytics tools with real-time components like Apache Spark, insight platforms host custom business logic that automates data management, analytics, and insight execution tasks. For example, GoodData, a BI-as-a-service vendor, offers an R runtime environment to execute predictive analytic models. Cisco used H2O.ai’s 100% Java environment to automate the refresh of 60,000 predictive models.

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- › **Accelerating insight delivery through integration services.** Insight platform vendors increasingly offer APIs and connectors so you can embed insights into business application and business process management software. For example, machine-learning-as-a-service pioneer DataRobot automates artificial intelligence (AI) then exposes insights found through APIs that can be called from within your application. Customer relationship management vendor Salesforce is coming at this the other way by investing in InsideSales.com so that the latter’s predictive analytics can be more easily embedded.
- › **Evolving to incorporate test, learn, and optimize functionality.** It’s no longer enough to push insights one way into your business decisions. Insights-driven firms understand the importance of continuous feedback, experimentation, and learning. Except for marketing automation and digital experience platforms, where A/B testing is well established, few vendors today offer specific test, learn, and optimize functionality. We expect this to change, however, as lessons from digital leaders like LinkedIn, Netflix, and Stitch Fix generate broader demand.<sup>11</sup>

**FIGURE 2** Insight Platforms Package Data, Analytics, Insight Delivery, And Feedback Functions



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**Vendors Of All Types Are Evolving Their Insight Platforms**

The insight platform concept is immature but evolving rapidly; you may already know many of these platforms by different names — predictive analytics, BI-on-Hadoop, big data or insight suites, big-data-as-a-service, big data customer analytics, and advanced analytics platforms.<sup>12</sup> Vendors for each of these formerly separate tools are busy adding capabilities to create converged platforms (see Figure 3). Start your evaluation by understanding different vendor licensing and deployment approaches:

- › **Enterprise vendors sell suites you must buy and integrate.** Enterprise software vendors still offer mature suites of data and analytics tooling integrated to varying degrees. Examples include IBM BigInsights and Pivotal Big Data Suite. These require you to buy, install, and integrate the components; however, many vendors are also productizing their suites in the cloud, such as IBM's Bluemix.
- › **Packaged solution vendors offer buy-and-connect products.** Big data startups, advanced analytics vendors, and interlopers from marketing customer analytics are mostly likely to offer packaged solutions. Some, like Lavastorm Analytics, come with their own database or Hadoop data store; others, like Looker Data Science and H2O.ai, install over your existing big data infrastructure. Most vendors also offer cloud alternatives either by installing on public vendors like Amazon Web Services (AWS) or by running as a service on their own managed cloud.
- › **Cloud and information service vendors sell insight-platforms-as-a-service.** Pure cloud insight platforms include major players like AWS and Microsoft. These companies have or are adding analytics services onto their cloud data infrastructure. They also include big-data-as-a-service firms like Bigstep and Cazena, which are adding analytics tools like Tableau as part of their pricing. Finally, they include BI pure plays like 1010data and GoodData and information service providers like FICO (Decision Management Suite).
- › **Integrators prefer to leave and license or manage their platforms for you.** BI service providers have been developing technology IP to give them an edge for years.<sup>13</sup> The availability of open source big data tools has only accelerated this trend. Firms like Harman International (formerly Symphony Teleca), Infosys, Saama Technologies, and many others are creating sophisticated insight platforms that they then either license and leave or offer to manage as an ongoing insights service.<sup>14</sup>

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**FIGURE 3** Vendors Take Different Approaches to Sell You Insight Platforms

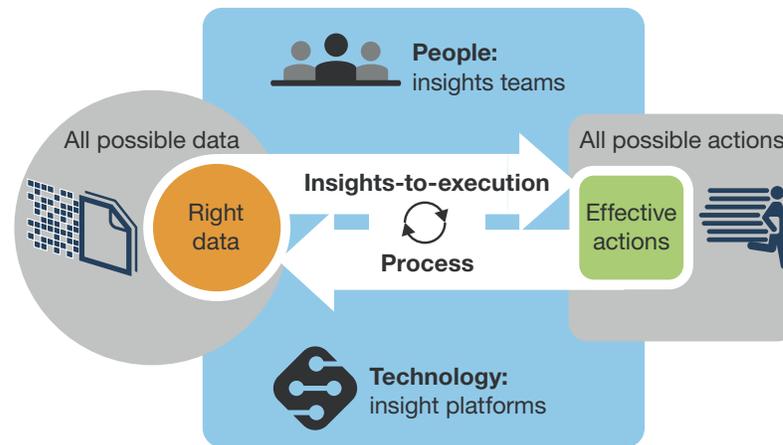
Vendor type	Licensing approach	Example vendors and products	Trend
Analytics-as-a-service	As-a-service	1010Data, AtScale, DataRobot, and GoodData	Adding data management into their cloud-based business intelligence (BI) and advanced analytics tools
Big-data-as-a-service	As-a-service	BigStep, Cazena, and Qubole	Extending open source big data management with analytics tools
BI-on-Hadoop	Buy and connect	Datameer and Platfora	Extending their visual and spreadsheet-style analytics capabilities with more data management and governance
Big data packaged applications	Buy and connect	Customer Decision Hub, Maana, Pegasystem, RedPoint Global Convergent Marketing Platform, and SAS Customer Decision Hub	Generalizing their customer analytics tools for enterprise use cases beyond marketing
Cloud vendors	As-a-service	Amazon Elastic MapReduce, Amazon QuickSight, IBM Bluemix, and Microsoft's Cortana	Adding more analytics and BI tools to their data management cloud infrastructure capabilities
Enterprise software vendors	As-a-service, buy and integrate, or managed	IBM BigInsights, MIOsoft MIOnext (context server), and Pivotal Big Data Suite	Further integrating offerings and simplifying platform pricing and operations
Service providers	As-a-service, leave and license, or managed	FICO Decision Management Suite, General Electric, Infosys Information Platform, and Saama Fluid Analytics Engine	Converting in-house tools and data they own to create product offerings
Predictive analytics	Buy and connect	Alpine Data Labs and H2O.ai	Extending core predictive analytics with data management and application delivery tools

## Use Insight Platforms To Build Systems Of Insight

Systems of insight are the business discipline and technology to harness insights and consistently turn data into action.<sup>15</sup> They are different from your BI practices today because they create closed-loop systems that 1) connect data to insight; 2) embed insight into your business operations, creating action; and 3) link action back to more data and continuous optimization. Insight platforms can help your firm build systems of insight more quickly by packaging or integrating the data management, analytics, testing, and insight execution technology you need (see Figure 4).

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**FIGURE 4** Insight Platforms Package The Technology You Need To Run A System Of Insight**Leading Firms Are Using Insight Platforms To Drive Customer-Obsessed Outcomes**

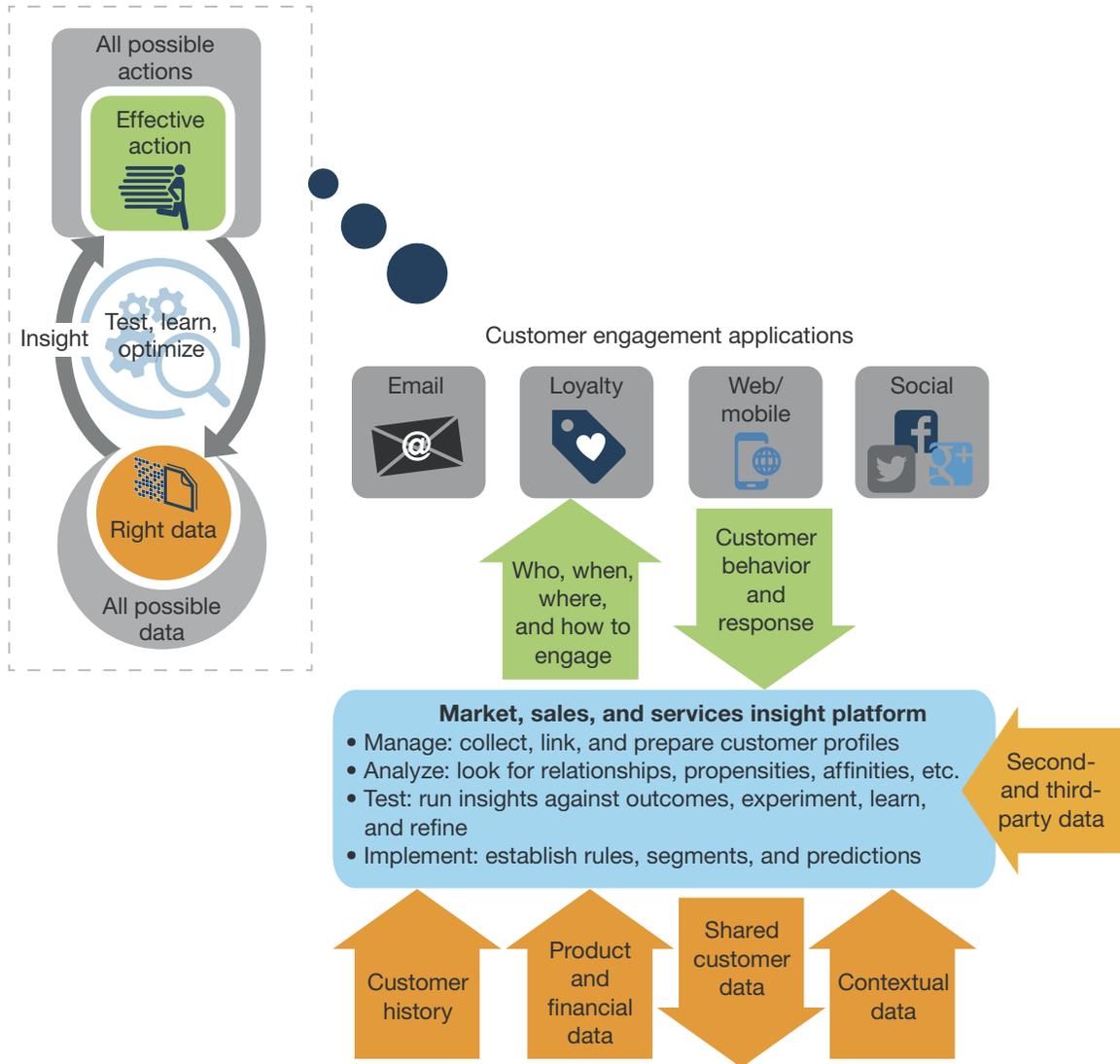
Leaders connect their insight platforms to systems of engagement that drive growth, customer engagement, and digital operational excellence (see Figure 5).

- › **A Chinese telecom uses MIOsoft’s MIOnext to do real-time personalization.** The firm collected over 20 petabytes of customer behavior and location data but had no way to use it for real-time offers. It employed MIOsoft’s MIOnext, a customer context platform built on Spark and Hadoop, to determine best-action insights in real time by reducing the in-memory volume to 20 terabytes for all active customer interactions while analyzing all customer data (from the data lake). Because it could work so fast with so much data, the company was able to learn and adapt its rules more easily to changing customer behavior.
- › **CA Technologies built an insight platform to drive sales.** CA’s chief sales officer needed better insights into the pipeline to generate new sales. In response, the firm’s big data analytics team worked closely with sales operations to build an insight platform called Compass Sales 360. The tool puts intelligence about sales opportunities, their health, customers, and partner performance at the fingertips of the sales executives. The company benefits from this system of insight with better data management discipline and improved productivity from its sales force, leading to new signings and customer acquisitions.
- › **WGBH uses RedPoint Global to improve donations.** The public broadcasting company wanted to understand the relationship between brand messaging, social media, and donor activity. It used RedPoint Global’s Convergent Marketing platform, a customer insight platform, to match tweets to donor profiles and determine channel messaging strategy. By closing the loop, it can now track outcomes, update donor profiles, and find the best way to engage with donors individually.

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**FIGURE 5** Insight Platforms Provide The Analytics Technology That Firms Need To Engage Customers



**Recommendations**

**Integrate Platforms With An Information Fabric**

As an enterprise architect, you instinctively want to rationalize platforms and connect them in a logical way. This is important because much of the data needed by different platforms will be shared. Enterprise architects should take the following steps:

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1. **Rationalize insight platforms around the customer life cycle.** Your business may already use several insight platforms under different names, as customer analytics, parts of marketing suites, big data predictive analytics tools, or service providers' solutions left behind or in the cloud. Discover and map your platforms to the customer life cycle, then help executives throughout the cycle choose platforms that best support customer-obsessed operating goals.<sup>16</sup>
2. **Build an information fabric that includes both data federation and a big data lake.** You'll need more than a data lake to bring together all the data your insight platforms require. Build a data lake or hub to better manage big data if you need it, but don't forget to add data federation technologies, data operations management and governance services, and a catalog to create an information fabric (see Figure 6).<sup>17</sup>
3. **Build data pipelines that exchange data and insights.** Insight platforms will need shared enterprise data about customers, products, and transactions. But departments operating insight platforms are also likely to capture data that other parts of your organization need. Building a data pipeline feed for marketing is a great way to incent marketing to share its data with product or risk management insight teams.

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**FIGURE 6** Connect Insight Platforms Using An Information Fabric



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**What It Means**

## Insight Platforms Will Accelerate Digital Transformation

Digital and analytics go hand in hand. By helping your business close the gaps between big and fast data, insight, and action, insight platforms will speed your firm's digital ambitions. This may seem obvious, but to fully appreciate how far and how fast change will happen, EA pros must consider other important technology innovations and trends:

- › **Insight platforms will embrace AI and cognitive customer engagement.** Empowered hyperadopters will drop your product or service just as quickly as they liked and bought it.<sup>18</sup> How will you keep up? By changing processes based on a survey? Advancements in AI like deep learning are letting machines achieve breakthroughs in cognitive functions. Insight platforms will embrace these tools to automate how your firm responds to many customer interactions, while keeping your customers happy and emotionally engaged.
- › **Insight platforms will be essential to internet-of-things (IoT) success.** The IoT is about machine-to-machine as well as human-to-machine connections. This means analyzing and taking action on vastly more and significantly faster data. How will you do this? By putting all that data into Hadoop? Insight platforms will evolve to support the special, event-driven, and edge computing needs for IoT use cases. Today, analytics for IoT is nascent and mostly embedded in other platforms; however, expect this to change over the next two to three years.

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## Supplemental Material

### Survey Methodology

Forrester's Global Business Technographics® Data And Analytics Survey, 2015 was fielded from January 2015 through March 2015 of 3,005 business and technology decision-makers located in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, New Zealand, the UK, and the US from companies with 100 or more employees.

Forrester's Business Technographics Global Priorities And Journey Survey, 2015, was fielded to 14,596 business and technology decision-makers located in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, New Zealand, the UK, and the US from small and medium-sized business (SMB) and enterprise companies with two or more employees. This survey is part of Forrester's Business Technographics and was fielded from December 2014 to March 2015. Research Now fielded this survey on behalf of Forrester. Survey respondent incentives include points redeemable for gift certificates. We have provided exact sample sizes in this report on a question-by-question basis.

Forrester's Business Technographics Global Data And Analytics Survey, 2014, was fielded to 1,658 business and technology decision-makers located in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, New Zealand, the UK, and the US from SMB and enterprise companies with 100 or more employees. This survey is part of Forrester's Business Technographics and was fielded from January 2014 to March 2014. Research Now fielded this survey on behalf of Forrester. Survey respondent incentives include points redeemable for gift certificates. We have provided exact sample sizes in this report on a question-by-question basis.

Forrester's Business Technographics provides demand-side insight into the priorities, investments, and customer journeys of business and technology decision-makers and the workforce across the globe. Forrester collects data insights from qualified respondents in 10 countries spanning the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Business Technographics uses only superior data sources and advanced data-cleaning techniques to ensure the highest data quality.

Forrester's Forrsights Strategy Spotlight: Business Intelligence And Big Data, Q4 2012 was fielded to 634 IT executives and technology decision-makers located in Canada, France, Germany, the UK, and the US from SMB and enterprise companies with 100 or more employees. All respondents reported working for companies that were currently using or planning to use business intelligence technologies. This survey is part of Forrester's Forrsights for Business Technology and was fielded during October 2012 and November 2012. Survey respondent incentives included gift certificates and research reports.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Forrester defines an enterprise as having more than 1,000 employees. Source: Forrester's Business Technographics Global Priorities And Journey Survey, 2015.
- <sup>2</sup> For example, the IDEA (identify, design, engineer, and analyze) cycle is used for turning mobile aspirations into reality. After further research, Forrester recognized that this cycle has general applicability outside of mobile use cases; for example, the internet of things. Source: Ted Schadler, Josh Bernoff, and Julie Ask, *The Mobile Mind Shift*, Groundswell Press, 2014.
- <sup>3</sup> For example, Forrester often hears from clients during inquiry calls that they are building Hadoop data lakes only to have the project stall over infrastructure management and integration problems.
- <sup>4</sup> Customer obsession requires marketers to rethink campaigns and instead deliver self-perpetuating cycles of insight-driven interactions. Firms must assemble contextual marketing engines to realize this vision. These engines will leverage real-time interaction management (RTIM) to align inbound channels with outbound marketing and optimize customer interactions for maximum return on marketing investment. For a complete analysis on the necessity of real-time customer engagement, see the "[Brief: Demystifying Real-Time Interaction Management](#)" Forrester report.
- <sup>5</sup> Source: Forrester's Global Business Technographics Data And Analytics Survey, 2015.
- <sup>6</sup> Modern applications are more modular and loosely coupled than their predecessors, allowing organizations to create, deliver, and evolve them at a pace unthinkable a decade ago. To learn how to master modern application delivery practices, see the "[Forget Two-Speed IT; DevOps Enables Faster Delivery Across The Board](#)" Forrester report.
- <sup>7</sup> Source: Forrester's Global Business Technographics Data And Analytics Survey, 2015.
- <sup>8</sup> US venture capital firms invested a record-setting \$70 billion in 2015, with 51% of these funds going to internet companies and 55% of deals happening in California, centered in Silicon Valley. Source: "U.S. On Track To Break \$70 Billion In Venture Capital Funding in 2015: KPMG Report," KPMG press release, August 18, 2015 ([http://www.kpmg.com/us/en/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/press-releases/pages/us-on-track-to-break-\\$70-billion-in-venture-capital-funding-in-2015-kpmg-report.aspx](http://www.kpmg.com/us/en/issuesandinsights/articlespublications/press-releases/pages/us-on-track-to-break-$70-billion-in-venture-capital-funding-in-2015-kpmg-report.aspx)).
- <sup>9</sup> Every vendor is hawking its platform solution. If their stories are true, why even worry about architecture? The fact is that platforms, when strategically acquired and operated with thought, offer a great opportunity to accelerate customer-obsessed value. To learn about Forrester's platform taxonomy, see the "[The Platform Explosion: Harness It Or Lose Agility](#)" Forrester report.
- <sup>10</sup> Forrester defines a software platform as a set of integrated software components and modular services assembled for the purpose of supporting other parties as they design, build, and run specific types of custom business logic. An application service is a discrete functional capability, data, or insight provided through an API to other applications and platforms. An application service can also be a software platform only when it allows developers to design, build, and run custom business logic. Since vendors have been conflating these ideas and slapping the terms "platform" and "service" on every product, enterprise architects must clearly understand the difference as they plan a rational approach to strategic investment. To learn about Forrester's platform taxonomy, see the "[The Platform Explosion: Harness It Or Lose Agility](#)" Forrester report.
- <sup>11</sup> You might not have heard of Stitch Fix, a retail disruptor that sells clothes to people who don't like to shop. The company uses a combination of human decisions and algorithms that continually learn from one another. It also does random experimentation to learn what works best and improve its insights over time. For more on this case study, see the "[Transform Customer Experiences With Systems Of Insight](#)" Forrester report.
- <sup>12</sup> Using the TechRadar™ methodology, Forrester labeled insights platforms as a Survival-stage technology because of the massive convergence of different vendors in the market and the coming consolidation as venture funding dries up considerably in 2016. To learn the about the maturity of big data technologies, see the "[TechRadar™: Big Data, Q1 2016](#)" Forrester report.

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For detailed analysis on the devaluation of unicorns and the new opportunity to double down on digital transformation to meet customers where they live and work, see the [“What Comes After The Unicorn Carnage?”](#) Forrester report.

<sup>13</sup> IP stands for intellectual property.

<sup>14</sup> Concerned with time-to-market and inspired by new cloud models, business and technology decision-makers increasingly look to service providers for relevant insights that they can apply directly to their business processes. To learn about this emerging group of providers and an analysis of market trends, see the [“Insights Services Disrupt The Data And Analytics Market”](#) Forrester report.

<sup>15</sup> Since defining systems of insight as the business discipline and technology to harness insights and consistently turn data into action in April 2015, Forrester has published a number of additional reports that describe how to apply systems of insight to business problems. See the [“Digital Insights Are The New Currency Of Business”](#) Forrester report, see the [“Digital Insights Will Power Great Digital Experiences”](#) Forrester report, see the [“Combine Systems Of Insight And Engagement For Contextual Marketing”](#) Forrester report, and see the [“Brief: Supercharge Systems Of Insight With New Infrastructure Architectures”](#) Forrester report.

<sup>16</sup> It's helpful to map technologies to stages in the customer life cycles because you will understand where one or more platforms are addressing the same stage and where there might be opportunities for strategic rationalization. Mapping will also show you where gaps exist in coverage exist and suggest executives who might be interested in replacing disparate BI, analytics, and data management tools with an insight platform. To better understand this framework, see the [“Top Technologies For Your BT Agenda”](#) Forrester report.

<sup>17</sup> Enterprises face growing challenges in bridging disparate sources of data to fuel analytics, predictive analytics, real-time insights, and applications. To learn how to address this pressing business problem, see the [“Information Fabric 3.0”](#) Forrester report.

<sup>18</sup> Forrester defines hyperadoption as the rapid and simultaneous uptake of unprecedented behaviors. To understand how you can successfully participate in the next big thing that consumers do by building the right connection with the right customers at crucial moments in the hyperadoption cycle (attention, intention, and action), see the [“Will People Really Do That?”](#) Forrester report.

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