



Scott Howe

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Scott Howe is a former Corporate Vice President of Microsoft Advertising Business Group. Previously, he was a corporate officer at aQuantive, where he managed three lines of business, including Avenue A | Razorfish, DRIVE Performance Media, and Atlas International. Earlier in his career, he was with the Boston Consulting Group and also Kidder, Peabody & Company, Inc. Howe is a magna cum laude graduate of Princeton University, with a degree in economics, and he earned an M.B.A. from Harvard University. He serves as a director of Blue Nile, Inc.*

**COMPANY BRIEF** *Acxiom (acxiom.com) is an enterprise data, analytics, and software-as-a-service company that uniquely fuses trust, experience, and scale to fuel data-driven results. For over 45 years, Acxiom has been an innovator in harnessing the most important sources and uses of data to strengthen connections among people, businesses, and their partners. Utilizing a channel and media neutral approach, they leverage cutting-edge, data-oriented products and services to maximize customer value. Every week, Acxiom powers more than a trillion transactions that enable better living for people and better results for their 7,000-plus global clients.*

### **What are the keys to the consistent results Acxiom has achieved?**

We have been in business for around 45 years, but I don't want to overemphasize our leadership. We are a work in progress and a long way from where we would like to be.

In business and in life, we constantly have to reinvent ourselves.

Our clients vote with their wallets and if we're not innovating and becoming better, they will leave us. We're neurotic about constantly improving in order to serve our clients.

### **When you're transforming a company, how critical is it to continually drive the message through the organization?**

We're working on automation and standardization of processes in order to improve the price points we deliver to our clients. Some of these changes have real implications for our people.

# Constant Reinvention

## **An Interview with Scott Howe, Chief Executive Officer and President, Acxiom**

Although we try to do a good job of making sure everyone knows why we're doing what we're doing, not everyone will agree with it. The hardest part is when the right business action has a bad personal impact on great people.

We're in a really dynamic space and we think there is a lot of demand for data to drive better decisions and, in turn, a lot of demand for our services. However, when the desires of our shareholders get in the way of what is good for our associates, it creates the toughest trade-offs to make.

### **What is the client sweet spot for Acxiom?**

The legacy Acxiom client for the better part of 35 years is Fortune 500 companies, and we work with over half of those.

However, at any moment, any business in the world could be making a bad decision because they don't have the right data, they can't figure out what it means, or they can't action it even if they can figure out what it means.

The more information they have, the better decision they will make. Data-driven decision-making is no longer the realm of really big companies but of every company.

So in terms of what is driving our growth over the past year, it's about expanding our definition of clients from Fortune 500 to every advertiser, agency, publisher, and enterprise software company, and trying to arm them with the data and capabilities to allow them to make better decisions.

### **Have the services and products changed? How have you adapted to address the needs of today?**

Marketing is marketing and it doesn't matter whether we reach customers over the phone or through their mailbox or via TV – we want to deliver relevant content that is appreciated by the folks who see it.

Increasingly, what companies are realizing is that they need to think about analog and digital channels holistically.

This makes marketing far more interesting. People are not products of what they read in an e-mail or the conversations they had in a store; rather, their perception of every company and advertiser is the sum of every interaction they've had with them.

As a result, sophisticated businesses need to be able to get across those different touch-points, and tell a cohesive story and deliver cohesive communications to their customers across those different points.

### **Do you need to be communicating with clients at the C-Suite level?**

Absolutely. Data is a common denominator across the C-Suite. There is not a single person that shouldn't be using some form of data to make better decisions when he or she comes to work every day. We want to cultivate a relationship with the entire C-Suite.

Data is relevant to everybody in the C-Suite and increasingly, if we can communicate with them, we can bring them value that will be very apparent to them.

### **In leading Acxiom, how critical is it to support the communities in which you operate?**

It's huge. No one compartmentalizes their job from the rest of their life anymore. So, too, does corporate responsibility blur into community responsibility fairly seamlessly.

We have a matching program for donations and we also encourage people to donate a percentage of their time back. We don't care how they choose to participate but we like that they do.

### **You're headquartered in Arkansas. Do you find the state to be business-friendly and what are the merits it offers?**

Arkansas is increasingly a business-friendly state. I'm originally from the Midwest so I'm probably biased, but what I love about it is what I would call heartland values. In our DNA at Acxiom, there is a culture of trying to find people who say what they mean and whose deed is their word. When these people say something, they follow through, and they have broad shoulders that can carry anything on them. They are team players who look at themselves before they point a finger, and always ask themselves how they can be better.

We have a lot of Acxiom associates and they imbue our company with those values. It's a credit to the state for grooming high-caliber citizens.

Also, I'm fairly apolitical. CEOs should be. Politics is a personal preference. That said, I have nothing but tremendous respect for Governor Hutchinson, and more specifically, in terms of his handling of Arkansas House Bill 1228. He approached this as intelligently as I've ever seen a politician approach any issue. He took a principled stand, he reversed his original opinion in light of an emerging fact base of how the nation perceived the issue, as well as how his own citizens perceived the issue.

At a time when similar legislation had a harmful impact on states like Indiana, Governor Hutchinson showed that our business climate was much more progressive and much more inclusive. ●