

# Delivering Customer Value

An Interview with Anne Doherty,  
Group Vice President-Sales, Audience Solutions, Acxiom

**EDITORS' NOTE** Anne Doherty has held her current post since May 2015. Prior to this, she was SVP, Sales & Account Management, Consumer Insights & Targeting; SVP Sales & Account Management, Targeting, SVP-Sales & Service, Data & Analytics, and VP of Sales & Account Management-Data & Analytics for Experian; and VP of Sales-Strategic Partnerships and Director of Sales for Equifax Marketing Services. She received her B.S. in Communication and Media Studies from Western Michigan University.



Anne Doherty

**COMPANY BRIEF** Acxiom ([acxiom.com](http://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.

## How do you define your current role and what are your key areas of focus?

I oversee our Audience Solutions group, which is a newly formed division developed primarily to supplement our data, recognition, and decision science assets.

I lead a team of individuals that are charged with driving topline growth through our existing client relationships, as well as prospective client relationships and ultimately, ensuring that clients are finding value in what we are providing to them.

It's also my job to make sure that our front-line sales and delivery teams are operating at peak performance. If they are, we should be providing exceptional customer value – keeping us at top of mind with clients.

## From an inside perspective, what has made Acxiom so successful?

We have a very clear philosophy regarding data. We view it as more than just a resource; rather, it is a catalyst for every consumer interaction. We have been doing this for more than

45 years. We're a leader in this space, and we're taking everything we have been doing with data, recognition, and analytics, and moving that into the online space. We have also been adamant regarding consumer privacy and being an advocate for the consumer. Part of our brand promise is making sure our clients are educated on privacy and compliance.

## Are the large Fortune 500 companies the sweet spot for Acxiom and are next generation companies also a big focus?

Acxiom recently realigned and moved to a three-division structure in order to make sure all of our products and services are scalable and accessible to everyone. Fortune 500 companies are important to us, to be sure, but we want to ensure that companies of all sizes can benefit from a relationship with us.

In Audience Solutions, we now have four sales teams. They consist of a team focused on our online self-service tool to help the small and medium businesses out there; we have an emerging team focusing on the mid-tier companies; and we have a group for our enterprise accounts that focuses on the Fortune 500. We are covered whether a client desires a full-service relationship or just wants to obtain ancillary services.

## How high up within the company do you need to work? Who has become the customer decision maker?

We've always had a strong relationship with the CMO. Now, with technology driving so many business decisions, we are having more frequent interactions with the CIO. Many companies have embraced the importance of data, and are starting to hire Chief Data Officers. We are very comfortable with those relationships. With many of our services, we're talking directly with day-to-day users. Strategy happens at many levels, and we are fearless about engaging where needed.

## How critical has it been to get the messaging across to those coming in about the innovation this company offers?

Before reorganizing to a divisional structure, we were a generalist sales organization. We found that going to market with a generalist approach, and all-encompassing solution, was not servicing clients well.

We are at a pivotal time to move the business forward, and it's about getting my team

to focus on the basics; it's about sitting in front of our existing clients and understanding how they're using our data and recognition services; it's about digging into the details and learning what we're doing well or where we are falling short. Sometimes this reveals some hard truths, but it is the best path to improvement. We need this insight to lead in the market and build out offerings based on the voice of our customers. We need to stay ahead of the curve and make sure we are building solutions that drive value in their business.

## What do you tell young women about a career in this field and are the opportunities there today?

Many women, myself included, are in sales because of the flexibility it provides. My sales organization is 50 percent women. Acxiom is no different than many other companies where there is tremendous pressure on women leaders to strive for the top. We're trying to change that by giving them choices in how they want to lead their careers and how they define what success means for them. It's different for everybody. We shouldn't assume everyone wants to be at the top.

## How important is it for you to maintain client interaction?

Client interaction is critically important to me. Talking to clients helps me understand where we're providing value and where we can do better. I need to grow this business, and I can't do that by being disconnected from those who place their trust in us.

## How hard is it to be patient when these things take time to accomplish and are you able, as wins happen, to enjoy them?

I'm a pretty goal-oriented person, and I get excited about both short-term and long-term wins. Our business offers a mix of those. I look at where the business was when I arrived and where we are today, and we are seeing positive momentum. When I came into this role, there were five or six renewals that were in jeopardy and today those are secure for long-range deals.

The short wins help keep our energy up during the slower periods of the longer deals. We are also adding to the sales force, and onboarding and training those individuals takes time, especially if we do it well, which we do.

Overall, we celebrate our successes along the way. Being part of a winning team creates a culture of innovation and growth, and it gets people excited. ●