Predictive Marketing

An Interview with Dr. Kira Radinsky,
Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer, SalesPredict

EDITORS' NOTE *Dr. Kira Radinsky is one of the up-and-coming voices in the data science community, pioneering the field of Web Dynamics and Temporal Information Retrieval. A graduate of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, she gained international recognition for her work there and at Microsoft Research. Radinksy was recently recognized in* Forbes' *2015 "30 Under 30 in Enterprise Tech." She was named to the prestigious "35 Young Innovators Under 35" by the* MIT Technology Review *in 2013, and in 2014,* Forbes *named her one of the 50 Most Influential Women in Israel. She is a frequent presenter at global tech and industry conferences, including TEDx, WWW, and Strata.*

Kira Radinsky

COMPANY BRIEF *Using predictive analytics plus CRM and marketing automation system data plus the open web and outside data sources, SalesPredict (salespredict.com) goes beyond predictive lead scoring to help B2B companies address three key questions: who is most likely to buy, who will buy more, and who will churn. Users will gain insights that will help them target inbound and outbound marketing more effectively, deliver more sales-qualified leads, increase conversions, accelerate sales cycles, and retain more customers.*

Would you talk about the vision and what made you feel the opportunity was there for SalesPredict?

I was doing my Ph.D. on predictive analytics and specifically on how to utilize the human knowledge we have to predict future events. Taking information from other resources like Wikipedia, for instance, I managed to predict different global events.

It made me think it would be really cool to apply it to economics to understand it in a more scientific way, because business leaders often make decisions based on a gut feeling. I wanted to see how we could take a scientific approach to making better business decisions.

This is pretty much what drove me to create SalesPredict. Today, we work with B2B companies trying to determine where to focus their sales and marketing efforts to get much better results, and finding predictive patterns using knowledge from both their internal systems and what we can draw on from outside data sources, and information we can find on the web.

How broad is your client target market?

We're working with many technology and financial services companies, and we also have customers coming from oil and gas, healthcare, and other industries.

The most important thing is not the industry – different industries just require different data sets. The companies need a certain number of sales wins and losses for our systems to predict accurately and they need to have organized information. We work with companies that have just six months of past data, but it works because they tracked sales carefully and saved everything.

Is it hard to show differentiation in this space?

Predictive marketing, in general, is getting a lot of buzz, and companies are moving more towards this focus and setting aside budgets for it.

On the surface, it may look like our competitors have similar solutions, but behind the scenes, some have only a single "standard" model or teams of data scientists working on their customers' data and supplying them with the results. What we have learned from our experience is that the market is so dynamic that building one model is not enough. The model should also be updated all the time, which doesn't scale if one takes a consulting services approach.

Behind the scenes, we have a product with automatic data science algorithms that collects data from our customers and builds the model on its own without any expert input, learning the statistics all the time and updating the predictions as conditions change. This automated, dynamic approach is one difference.

Second, we know that people don't trust black boxes. Most predictive solutions take a black box approach: they provide a lead score and that's it. It's hard to get experienced salespeople and marketers to trust that ranking versus their gut since they don't know what went into it. At SalesPredict, we're transparent and provide a full explanation of the factors behind our scores so customers can see why certain leads are ranked higher than others. This is a big differentiator.

The company that succeeds is not the one with the best algorithm behind the scenes, but the one that can scale and endure over time. If a model is stale and irrelevant after two weeks, customers won't accept it. With a consulting approach, they're not necessarily keeping up to speed.

Are you past the point where you know you have something special?

We have a product that works with wonderful results; we have customers that doubled their pipelines and conversion rates, who had 10 percent retention uplift, which is great.

We can now scale in B2B predictive marketing and sales, but from a technology point of view, my vision is bigger. I'm always thinking about how we can model and predict economics in general and I'm excited to understand the deep value in how naturally economics works.

What is it about Israel and its culture that spurs entrepreneurship?

In many cases, people here are less afraid to try. It even starts in the Army. At 18 years old, we're doing really hard technology work with little time and we fail a lot, but we are encouraged to try again. We get so much feedback on trying that people want to try and failing isn't bad. Israel itself is a start-up. There is no choice but to innovate because we won't survive otherwise.

There is also a supportive mentor community here. When there is a question, it's not hard to find help. No one will tell us "no" when we ask for help. People are offering us help because they think this is the right thing for us to succeed together.

As a woman entrepreneur, are there challenges within Israel?

In the past, there may have been, but this experience has changed a lot. Even in my undergrad studies in computer science, we had 40 percent women. The younger generation is unaware that there is a gender gap. Until I came to the United States when I was 21, I didn't even know what the glass ceiling was. It says a lot about the society in Israel. Even in the Army, men and women take on similar positions.

There have actually been benefits to being a woman. People want to help me more so that women have a successful entrepreneur to look up to. ●