

RAISING THE 'DATA BAR' IN NEW ZEALAND

Absolute Analytics managing director Mark McKenzie spends much of his time working to ensure agencies, web developers and clients have the best possible decision-making data at their fingertips. His impressive credentials include being the preferred lecturer for The Knowledge Academy, an industry representative for the Auckland Institute of Studies, a director of MeasureCamp Auckland, and host of Web Analytics Wednesdays.

NZ Marketing spoke to McKenzie and Absolute Analytics' senior strategist Joel Sadler to learn about their experiences working with New Zealand companies and how Absolute Analytics is helping raise the 'data bar' in digital in New Zealand.

What gave you the idea to start Absolute Analytics?

McKenzie: I've worked on the agency side both in the UK and here, working in a range of agencies in account management roles. I needed good data to show clients the return – or lack thereof – of our work and help plan the next strategy or campaign. This was always difficult because I didn't have the technical knowledge or experience at the time. Those that did either didn't have the available time, understanding or passion for the work. In truth it was a distraction from their main role.

These were good companies and so I thought surely other agencies, clients, budget planners and account managers out there must be facing these same issues. Once I rolled up my sleeves and started learning for myself, I found I loved working with the powerful insights I was uncovering.

What problems do you see in the market that lower the bar?

McKenzie: Lack of direction and talent. Often, we don't have this data because there are large knowledge gaps in companies on both the client and agency side. Part of this is because it takes a mix of talents and experience which can't be found in one individual and it is difficult for most companies to afford or find.

You need the data analyst to know how to use the data; the marketing strategist for context and to explain why we're doing this; the technical specialist to understand the technical requirements and have experience, but most importantly actually like doing the

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work. Most web developers hate this work and want to get back to building websites and funky app designs. I dream of a day when big creative design companies stop just slapping down Google Analytics on websites and calling it job done.

We hear a lot about big data, AI, programmatic and machine learning – what's your take?

McKenzie: We're at the point where this could have awesome value, but we're trying to run faster than we're ready for. All these catchy headlines are powered by good data. We moved from big data to AI because the big data was too big, often wrong and too unstructured to easily get value from. Now we're hoping AI and machine learning will solve all our problems. If we don't have good, and enough data to make significant decisions, the underlying problems still remain.

What are you doing to try and raise the bar?

Sadler: Many agencies and web companies we work with are fantastic at taking charge of the data and leading clients down the 'data maturity' winding path, but often the client need more responsibility and ownership. They generally don't have the resources or budget to hire internally for those skills and experience, and if the agency or web company is not leading them to invest – in more than what the agency needs to get by on – the client doesn't see the opportunity slipping away. If you're not tracking good data now, your competitor is, and when the next advancement in digital marketing comes along you can't get that data back.

To solve this, we work with agencies, web companies and clients to create clear measurement plans across all mediums, implement difficult tracking and draw insights. Often, we'll train clients and agencies to the extent that



Joel Sadler
senior strategist
Absolute Analytics



Mark McKenzie
managing director
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they no longer need us and that's OK – we did our part.

McKenzie: Last year some passionate agency folk, clients and I brought the very first MeasureCamp to Auckland. It's a completely free international event, drawing thousands of people over the years. Our first New Zealand MeasureCamp was held during a June weekend with more than one hundred eager attendees looking to be involved. I'm also on the organising committee of Web Analytics Wednesday, a monthly meetup group that's also free to attend.

You talk about working with and helping agencies a lot, how does that work?

Sadler: To be specialists in this area we've given ourselves strict rules in the work we will and won't do. This means turning work away. For example, we categorically do not do any kind of marketing or advertising, because when we give advice to clients on what channels, mediums or sources might be best for them, we want to come from a place that's completely unbiased. We also truly enjoy working with agencies and web

companies and we care about their success and their clients, and if we're running AdWords or building our own apps, that would be a conflict of interest. For this reason, we never take commissions for introducing unencumbered clients to agencies.

Do you have an example of something you've worked on that you could share?

McKenzie: We recently worked with Cadence Communications on their client Splore Festival. It's a big music event and involved their ticketing company iTICKET. Splore received a professional Google Analytics setup across multiple landing pages, event websites and iTICKET website using Tag Manager, custom event tracking, e-commerce tracking and in-depth training as well.

We worked with iTICKET's development team to ensure correct cross-domain tracking all the way through the customer journey, with iTICKET's CEO Reece Preston getting involved to ensure their partners' needs were met.

The Splore team received in-house technical training around campaign tracking providing real lasting business value. We left

Splore with both strategic and tactical level automated dashboards for budget planning and monitoring to ensure their guests receive the best possible online experience.

Cadence Communications ended up with all the user journey tracking they needed to continue to deliver awesome effective campaigns for Splore. We continue to work with Splore, their agency and iTICKET to further this goal.

What would be the next step for someone who wants to raise the bar?

McKenzie: Go to the website absoluteanalytics.co.nz or find me or Joel on LinkedIn. Come to MeasureCamp Auckland 2019 or Web Analytics Wednesday. We're always happy to have a coffee to chat things through and we'll normally shout you a free web analytics health check audit to get things started.

Sadler: Say hello, ask us a question, we're pretty friendly.

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