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January 26, 2015, 6:30 PM ET

# Microsoft Courts Data Scientists with Revolution Analytics Buy

Article

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[Email](#) [Print](#)By [CLINT BOULTON](#)  
Reporter

[Microsoft](#) Corp.'s acquisition of Revolution Analytics Inc. is the latest sign that Big Data is moving into the mainstream. Microsoft, which has been beefing up its efforts getting more developers to build Big Data and analytics applications on its Azure cloud software, announced the acquisition on Friday.

"In order to empower our customers, we need to maximize the value of every byte of data they store and process," said [Joseph Sirosh, a Microsoft corporate vice president, in a blog post](#). Revolution is "great at Big Data," he said.

Microsoft is betting on the timeliness of its acquisition as more businesses adopt analytics. Revolution's software helps companies use R, an open source programming language that more than two million programmers use daily to build predictive models. R is popular among university computer science students, many of whom continue to use it in their careers as data scientists.

"It gives Microsoft immediate credibility with the upcoming generation of data scientists, most of who look to R as the go-to tool for writing modern statistical analysis packages," said [Jeff Kelly, an analyst who tracks Big Data adoption for boutique research firm Wikibon](#). In the arms race to create solutions that harness Big Data, [some companies are struggling to use Hadoop because their developers aren't accustomed to the programming model](#). But Mr. Kelly said data scientists, already proficient in statistical analysis, are already well versed with R.

Data scientists who extract data from of a data warehouse or Hadoop processing system, use R to slice and dice it for insights, and visualize the results. But businesses analyzing financial, social media and other data often need to scale the analytics across clusters of computers.

Mr. Sirosh, whom Microsoft CEO [Satya Nadella](#) recruited from [Amazon.com](#) Inc. to build out its data analytics business, said open source R tools don't have the memory to scale across enterprise environments. Revolution fills that gap, enabling R to analyze a lot of data across large computer clusters. "Enterprise customers are reluctant to embrace those kinds of open source solutions without a strong feeling that they can scale," Mr. Sirosh said. Microsoft, in turn, will help scale Revolution's software, which is used by the likes of Pfizer Inc., American Century Investments Inc. and Michigan State University.

Another synergy of the deal: Revolution's integration with commercial Hadoop software made by Hortonworks Inc., whose software also forms the core of an Azure cloud analytics application. Ideally, Microsoft will be able to integrate R and its Hadoop cloud

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service to reduce some of the data extraction typically required before analyzing data, Mr. Sirosh said.

Revolution Analytics was founded at and spun out of Yale University in 2007. The company, based in Mountain View, Calif., raised \$38.7 million in venture funding from the likes of Intel Capital and North Bridge Venture Partners.

Dan Vesset, an IDC analyst, said that the market for advanced and predictive analytics software, of which R is a part, will grow from \$2.5 billion in 2014 to \$3.4 billion by 2018.

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4:59 pm January 28, 2015

**Louise Penberthy** wrote:

"R, an open source programming language..."

Programming languages by definition can't be "open source." The development environment for a language might be open source, but the term for a language is "open standard."

12:03 pm January 27, 2015

**Oliver Graham** wrote:

I was at a data quality conference last summer.

Panel on what academics were offering.

R vs SAS came up. Someone remarked that kids going through school today learn R. Companies have a ton of SAS in use.

I texted a friend in grad school. Yes he'd used R. Preferred MatLab.

What about SAS? Huh? He'd never heard of SAS.

If I were SAS, I'd be very nervous. When these tectonic shifts happen there's very little you can do after the fact.

8:24 am January 27, 2015

**PA Data Scientist** wrote:

Revolution R is a solid organization ... it will be interesting to see how Azure comes into play. (I thought RR was buddied up with Pivotal.) In any case, SAS is and will continue to be troubled by these developments.



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