

# HOW BUSINESSES WANT TO DEPLOY YOUR DATA

*Companies as diverse as group-fitness chains, life insurers and storytelling platforms are using customer data to improve their services in new ways*



From left to right: Toni Reid, vice president of Alexa experience and Echo devices at Amazon; Dave Long, co-founder and chief executive of Orangetheory Fitness; and Yaron Ben-Zvi, co-founder and chief executive of Haven Life, at The Wall Street Journal's Future of Everything Festival in New York in May. PHOTO: ADAM SCHULTZ/PRODUCTIONMANAGER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (2); ANDY DAVIS/PRODUCTIONMANAGER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (1)



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**H**umans give off a lot of data, from heart rates to movie preferences. It's no longer just technology companies that use this information to deliver better services, streamline business operations—and make money. At the same time, consumers and regulators are asking questions about privacy implications.

Executives spoke candidly about collecting, interpreting and deploying customer data during The Wall Street Journal's Future of Everything Festival last month.

Some, like Dave Long, chief executive of Orangetheory Fitness, are seeking to broaden the applications of customer data they already collect. Customers at Orangetheory's 1,200 global workout studios wear heart-rate monitors and use rowing machines and treadmills outfitted with trackers, giving them real-time information about how their bodies perform and the workout's effects on their fitness.

Recently, insurance companies have expressed interest in that data, too, Mr. Long said. By the end of the year, the company plans to offer an optional feature on its mobile app that would let customers share their data with insurers, he said. In exchange, they could potentially receive subsidies for taking classes or get lower insurance rates if their performance improves.

#### NEWSLETTER SIGN-UP

The storytelling platform Wattpad uses audience data to tailor its products. Originally a mobile app where writers posted free stories, Wattpad has introduced an entertainment division, Wattpad Studios, and a book publishing arm, Wattpad Books, to expand on the original stories consumed by its 70 million monthly users. When it adapts stories for film and television, it often uses audience data to decide which chapters to expand and even which characters to kill off.

Wattpad collects roughly a billion data points a day as users search for, read and comment on stories, said Allen Lau, co-founder and chief executive. In the last two years, Wattpad co-produced a Hulu show, "Light as a Feather," and a feature film, "After," both adapted from stories on the platform. Mr. Lau said the company relies heavily on engagement data—mostly in the form of reader comments—during the adaptation process, sometimes giving screenwriters feedback as specific as, "By the way, you can cut out the second male character. No one likes him."

"After," a teen romantic drama, brought in over \$67 million globally on a reported \$14 million budget, but it received a 15% critics' rating on movie review-aggregator Rotten Tomatoes.

The life insurance business has always been data-driven, as companies used everything from blood and urine sample data to motor-vehicle records to calculate individual insurance prices.

Now, insurers can access that data more quickly and at greater scale, said Yaron Ben-Zvi, the co-founder and chief executive of Haven Life, a digital agency owned by Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Co.

Haven Life's algorithmic-based underwriting has allowed the company to cut the traditionally four- to six-week approval process to minutes for some applicants. Where human underwriters determined rates by looking at an applicant's health history and other records, algorithms can analyze and make decisions on data in real-time. With an applicant's permission, Haven Life can immediately view things like prescription history, which it pulls from third-party sources as part of the underwriting process.

Next, the company wants to incorporate electronic medical records, which Mr. Ben-Zvi said would help predict an applicant's health and mortality in a "more complex way." Although tech and health firms are eager to access electronic health data, health care providers have not adopted national standards to digitize medical records.

Amazon.com Inc.'s Alexa can provide the weather report and act as a kitchen timer. Next, the artificial-intelligence assistant could track users' prescriptions and relay personal health information to insurers and hospitals. Amazon has sold over 100 million Alexa-enabled devices, and is increasingly adding these kinds of health-related capabilities.

Amazon collects data from Alexa-powered devices but allows customers to delete the data if they wish, said Toni Reid, the company's vice president of Alexa experience and Echo devices.

Whether Amazon shares that data is not always up to the customer—law enforcement may request it, for example. The company does not disclose the frequency of these requests, Ms. Reid said, but it's "very rare."

For those wary of a device listening in their homes, she added that the Echo speaker uses lights and sounds to make it clear when the device is on, listening and recording. "We thought a lot about the patterns to make sure customers understand when the device woke up, but also when it was streaming to the cloud," she said.

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