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How does Airbnb hire data scientists?

5 Answers



Riley Newman, head of analytics at Airbnb

Answered Jan 29, 2014 · Upvoted by William Chen, Former Data Science Manager at Quora and Chandan Saha, MS Data Science, Rutgers University

Over the last two years we've optimized our hiring process pretty heavily. In the old days we would screen resumes and then schedule lots of 1:1's. Typically people would ask questions aimed at assessing a candidate's proficiency with stats, technicality, and ability to solve problems. But there were three problems with this - the interviews weren't coordinated well enough to get a holistic view of the candidate, we were never really sure if their answers would translate to effective performance on the job, and from the perspective of the candidate it was a pretty lengthy interrogation.

So, we designed a new interview process that is much more effective and transparent - we want to give the candidate a sense for what a day in the life of a member on our team is like, and get a read on what it would be like to work with them. In total it takes about two days to make a decision, we've had no false positives (possibly some false negatives though), and the feedback from both the candidates and our team members has been positive. There are four steps to the process:

1. Resume/phone screens - We look for people who have experience using data to drive decisions, and some knowledge of what Airbnb is all about. On both counts we'll get a much deeper read later in the process; we just want to make sure that moving forward is a good use of either of our time.

2. Basic data challenge - The goal here is to validate the candidate's ability to work with data, as described in their resume. We send a few datasets to them and ask a basic question; the exercise should be easy for anyone who has experience.

3. In-house data challenge - This is the meat of our interview process. We try to be as transparent about it as possible - you get to see what it's like working with us and vice versa. So we have the candidate sit with the team, give them access to our data, and a broad question. They then have the day to attack the problem however they're inclined, with the support of the people around them. We encourage questions, have lunch with them to ease the tension, and check-in periodically to make sure they aren't stuck on something trivial.

At the end of the day, we gather a small team together and have them present their methodology and findings to us. Here, we look for things like an eye for detail (did they investigate the data they're relying upon for analysis), rigor (did they build a model and if so, are the results sound), action-oriented (what would we do with what you found), and communication skills.

4. If all goes well with the in-house challenge, we bring them back in for four interviews - two with business partners and two for assessing their alignment with our core values. The business partners focus on the candidate's ability to collaboratively work through a problem; core values is more aimed at discussing Airbnb's mission and ability to connect with someone in a less-technical setting.

We've used this process for the last 8 months and really benefited from it. I would

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Anonymous

Answered Jul 19, 2014 · Upvoted by Guruprasad Nayak, Data Mining PhD student

I attended the process described by Riley above and did not really enjoy it, I was rejected in the in-house data challenge round.

The problem with in-house data challenge is that the problem at hand is huge, the problem typically takes a week to solve thoroughly given all the checks\steps required in a modeling exercise. The candidate is expected to solve the problem in 7 hours, without any errors.


The team seems to be very focused on getting very good insights from data and not on the candidate's holistic ability to solve problems.

I agree that I myself had limitations, I was not very well versed with R and was taking time to implement all the steps required. In the end, given the limited time and limited ability to use R I ended up presenting only Exploratory Data Analysis that was obviously not sufficient to impress the Airbnb A team.

I will work on my technical and statistical skills and I will try again for Airbnb, meanwhile Riley if you could work on preparing an in-house challenge that can actually be completed in one day, it would be great.

Thank you, Wishing Airbnb all the best.

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Eshika Roy, works at DexLab Analytics

Answered Sep 14, 2018 · Author has **167** answers and **120.2k** answer views

The world of technology is pacing up. And AI and data science are front-runners of change.

In this context, San Francisco-headquartered Airbnb has something to share – something related to the art of hiring data scientists. The company has led down steps they follow to hire data scientists and they are discussed below:

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- Before conducting a face to face interview, the candidates are required to pass a given assignment, which is structured to measure their data capability.
- For the interview, the candidates have to go through an in-house challenge, wherein they would be asked to use real world data to solve daily problems. It would help get a better idea about how the team at Airbnb functions.
- After clearing the in-house challenge, the candidates would be asked to sit for four long haul interviews – in which two meetings would be with its business partners and the other two would be less technical, specifically to ascertain if the candidate can be aligned with the organization's core values.

Now, if you are thinking of taking a step in this direction, better back yourself up with a good [Data Science Certification](#) ! This will help you go a long way.

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