

Preface

There are 115 books listed on the R project Web site, more books have been published since that list was last updated, and if you are wondering why one more is needed, well, I am here to explain why. I have been working in the field known as business analytics for nearly a decade now. You may know the field as statistical computing, data mining, business intelligence, or, lately, data science. I generally prefer the term decision sciences, but overall the field refers to using data, statistical techniques, and specialized tools to assist decision makers in government, research, and industry with insights to maximize positive outcomes and minimize costs.

I found the field of business analytics to be both very enjoyable and lucrative from a career point of view. Selling credit cards and loans and getting more revenue from the same people was a lot of fun, at least in the early years for me. The reason I found business analytics interesting was that it combined the disciplines of investigative and diligent thinking with business insights.

I also found the field of business analytics a bit confusing. There were two kinds of people with almost opposing views on how to apply business analytics: technically minded people (like computer science and statistics majors) who aimed for robust results and business-minded people (like MBAs) who aimed for revenue and quicker results. I was caught in the middle of the occasional crossfire.

When I started learning all this—in 2001—the predominant platform was the SPSS and SAS languages. In 2007, following the birth of my first son, I discovered the R programming language almost as a necessity to keep my fledgling consulting shop open as I needed a reliable analytics platform without high annual fees. In launching an analytics startup at the age of 30, I found that I could not afford the tools that I had been using in some of the world's largest corporations (and I discovered that there were no separate discounts for small enterprises in India). So I moved to R because it was free. Or so I thought.

But R took me a lot of time to learn, and time is not free. Something was wrong – either with me, or the language, or the whole universe. In the meantime, I started writing an analytics blog called DecisionStats (<http://decisionstats.com>) to network with other business analysts, and with almost 20,000 views every month and nearly

100 interviews with leading analytics practitioners, I slowly obtained more practical insights into the field of business analytics.

Over a period of time, as I slowly immersed myself in R, I discovered that it, like all languages, had its own set of tricks and techniques with tradeoffs to get things done faster, and I did need not to memorize huge chunks of code or be overawed by those who could. I was aided in this by a few good books including R for SAS and SPSS users by Bob Muenchen, great blogs like those by David Smith and Tal G. Overall, I learned R at a much faster pace than I had expected to initially, thanks to Prof. John Fox who made R Commander, Prof. Graham Williams who made Rattle, and many others who have helped to make R what it is today. The R community exploded in size, acceptability, and organization, and I was no longer fighting a lonely battle to learn R on my own for analytical purposes.

In 2012, R has grown at a pace I could not have imagined in 2007. I am both humbled and blessed to know that R is the leading statistical computing language and used and completely supported by leading technology companies including Microsoft, SAS Institute, Oracle, Google, and others. *No R&D budget can compete with nearly ALL the statistics departments of the world and their professors working for free on this project.*

If you are a decision maker thinking of using R in combination with your existing analytical infrastructure, you will find the brief interviews of various partners and contributors to R to be very enlightening and helpful. They have specifically been added to increase the book's readability for a business analytics audience that may prefer reading English to code.

I would like to thank Anne Milley of JMP, Jill Dyche of Baseline Consulting, Bob Muenchen of the University of Tennessee, Karl Rexer of Rexer Analytics, and Gregory Shapiro of KD Nuggets specifically for their help in mentoring me through my analytical wanderings. I would also like to thank Marc Strauss and Susan Westendorf of Springer USA and Leo Augustine for their help.

I am humbled by the patient readers of Decisionstats and appreciate the attention that the R and broader analytics community has shown towards the author.

Delhi, India

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R for Business Analytics

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