

## AI and the Agency - Interview

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**How does AI apply in the agency? Join Tickr data scientist Sam Kahn and CEO Tyler Peppel as they discuss opportunities and challenges ahead for AI in the agency/client relationship.**

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TP: Let's start, for people who don't know Tickr, by explaining how we fit into the agency world.

In simple terms, we move the data-intensive parts of the agency/client relationship into the cloud, and in the process we make that data more accessible and actionable, for both agency and client. Tickr frees the agency to focus on human-powered insights and strategy.

We also provide specific solutions to support the agency workflow, for example, tracking campaign performance, brand reputation, relevant media mentions, crisis events, etc.

So that's what Tickr does. Sam, how about if you talk a little about your background and what you do at Tickr...

SK: Sure, happy to. Before Tickr I worked at NASA, applying machine learning to energy forecasting. This included using deep learning to

understand how to distribute energy through an energy grid. After that I moved onto Salesforce where I applied my AI skills to help understand how financial and social data correlated with customer retention.

At Tickr I'm in charge of building all of our AI product offerings. AI helps our customers better understand, extract more meaningful insights and make quicker, data-driven decisions. This includes surfacing the most relevant news and social content, automating information extraction, and removing noise from our customer's data feeds.

In that sense, a lot of what I do may not be visible to the end user as "AI" but it plays a key role in our platform. It's continuously helping Tickr perform better, 24/7.

TP: Taking a step back, I think it's useful to look at how AI has evolved recently. Back in the day, people laboriously taught machines every possible approach to a problem. That method might have been viable in a static, closed world like the rules of chess, but not so practical in fluid dynamic situations, like guiding a car through a busy intersection in real time. The breakthrough came when someone figured out how to tell the computer what the goal was and it was able to figure out the rules on its own.

SK: Right, this created tons of advantages and accelerated progress. For example, with advances in computer vision, image recognition, and sensor fusion, cars have learned how to drive on their own. While some simple road rules were given to the car, their ability to spontaneously identify potential hazards and steer in real-time would not be possible without machine learning. And although it's early days, we are already at a point where self-driving cars are, per mile, safer than human-driven cars.

TP: So let's tie this to Tickr and what we are doing today with agencies and brands. Tickr's initial value proposition was to unify cloud metrics and content from various sources into one real-time UI. Once we started doing that, we realized we had access to a unique and powerful data set that

spanned client and agency and was useful to both. It was pretty obvious that the next step was to start to mine that data for insights that could help agencies and client work smarter.

SK: We have an enormous volume of data across different data feeds and integrations. For example, we have terabytes of metrics and content that brands track and base decisions on. This effectively allows us to spot patterns in decision-making that differentiate brands and help them win. These insights go into a feedback loop between agency and client.

TP: Agencies have not traditionally thought of data (especially historical data) as a key part of their value proposition, but that is changing quickly. We are now working with our partners to make it a reality. For example, we see no reason that a campaign planning tool couldn't learn by watching the inputs and outcomes of past successful campaigns, just like that car we talked about learns to drive by watching a human driver. Results of this learning could then augment and support the work of the agency account team.

SK: The machine learning algorithm would pick up on subtle, key patterns in the successful campaigns. From here we would suggest ways in which future campaigns will be more successful. We can also begin to understand not only what makes a successful campaign for a given brand, but for their industry as well.

For example, let's say the client is a major airline. We can optimize not only for a given airline brand, but over time, we can learn some unique characteristics of airline brands and airline audiences in general. What we learn can help compare two competitors in a category and help quantify what a brand needs to be successful in that category.

TP: Based on what you are saying, the metrics from past campaigns become training data to "teach" the AI algorithms?

SK: That's right. We use anonymized data to help our models understand what have made campaigns successful in the past. The algorithm finds hidden patterns which a human could not find (or may take years to find). These machine-driven insights provide decision support for the agency team and client stakeholders.

TP: Once we have enough data, we can run simulated campaigns and preview outcomes. Then we could adjust variables to optimize campaigns. I can see that being pretty straightforward with a targeted paid campaign. Where it could get really interesting is when you have multichannel, with paid, email, social, content marketing all working together.

SK: Yes exactly. You can think of the AI algorithm as having knobs that we can tune. Let's say one of the knobs we tune is advertising spend targeted to 20-29 year olds. We can turn this knob up or down and see how this affects the success of a given campaign. There can be lots of knobs, related to any possible variable in the campaign. Running simulations not help reduce risk, but can inspire new creative thinking as well.

TP: A key feature we should talk about is the ability to combine private internal client metrics with public and third party data sets. Integrating the data sources vastly increases the value. For example, all the metrics involving an email campaign are private; it's when you are able to map those private metrics against the public impact (mentions on news and social, for example) that the value grows exponentially.

SK: Something unique about Tickr's offering is our ability to combine internal client data with third-party data such as social and news in near real time. This gives agency and client the ability to adapt on-the-fly to externalities such as unfavorable news cycles or a major influencer suddenly tweeting something positive about your brand.

The external data sources are considered by the AI algorithm and become "knobs" that help optimize the campaign strategy. In the influencer

example, if an influencer is retweeting negative posts about a brand, we'll know in advance which Twitter demographics we need to reach to preserve brand reputation.

TP: I can see that as the agency dataset gets richer over time, the possible applications will grow as well. Initially you can focus on a single client, eventually you can look at multiple clients in a given industry, then multiple industries. Once you start to develop cross-client and industry metrics, the data would be anonymized.

SK: Agreed. The data will always be anonymized; there is never a need to not have it anonymized. From the algorithm's perspective it doesn't care about who the data is related to, it just cares about the content and information encoded in the data.

TP: With enough data over time, it could be possible to start generating broad insights into "business best practices." Agencies are uniquely positioned to look across clients and spot patterns; they just haven't traditionally had the tools to do that. That's where we come in.

We see incredible potential for agencies to expand their client value proposition by offering more and more qualitative insights backed up by data. I can imagine a time when clients begin to select agencies as much for the breadth and quality of their data offering as for traditional agency services.

SK: So what you're hinting at really speaks to me. I've worked enough with agencies to have a sense of how much we can help them, and it's great to have our agency partners helping us shape our platform. Making partners more successful in their client relationships allows us to focus on what we do best - building and extending our platform.

I think that's something that really makes us different, how our partners have helped us shape our platform in a way that supports the current agency/client workflow.

TP: I definitely think the ability to offer AI-assisted insights will become a key differentiator for agencies, and potentially even a part of their core business offering over time. Brands are also developing their own data strategies, but the agency will have an advantage in being able to create cross-client, industry, and cross-industry insights.

SK: Yes I think it would be difficult for an individual brand to get the cross-brand and industry-level intelligence that would be available to an agency that has served that industry over time.

Combine that with the ability to spot deep and very subtle patterns, take in both internal and external data sources in real time, and then learn and adapt over time.

TP: Agencies that move in this direction will naturally have more opportunities to tie marketing performance to business performance. Beyond that, agencies that focus on the data side could eventually position themselves as a resource for all kinds of quantitative (and agency proprietary) metrics about marketing and business in general. I could also see that becoming a new revenue stream for agencies over time.

SK: It's still early days for these possibilities, but we're starting to understand how to capture this value. And let's not take for granted that Tickr is very uniquely positioned to play a role here that enhances and empowers the agency. Others are talking about it but we are actively working on it.

TP: I'd summarize this way: Agencies' real-time relationship with clients puts agencies several degrees closer to the client business reality than any outside analyst could be. At Tickr, we see how extracting the untapped

“data value” from the agency/client relationship means new opportunities for agency and client business transformation. We’re excited to be working on this; stay tuned for more.

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