



Confidently Hire,
Manage & Evaluate
The New Breed of Big
Data Taxonomist

by John Flaa

“The goal is to turn data into information, and information into insight.”

Carly Fiorina
Former CEO of HP





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“Information is the oil of the 21st Century, and analytics is the combustion engine”

“The most valuable commodity
I know of is information”

Gordon Gekko
Wall Street



Millions of people visit websites every minute to get answers to personal or business questions. It may be as simple as when to put the trash out or as complex as when will the next satellite fly over & photograph a wild fire area so the right teams can be deployed in the areas that need it most.

Taxonomists organize and categorize data using the vernacular your users do. They predict and rapidly respond to terminology changes (ie: music isn't called LPs or cassettes anymore).

Your business depends on getting people the right data fast so that they can make great decisions for themselves, their family, their business and beyond!

Are you ready to lead the new breed of big data taxonomists?

“People seldom see the halting & painful steps by which the most insignificant success is achieved.”

Anne Sullivan

The first question is what type of person do you need to hire? You have 2 options based upon your answer to this question:

Does Your Taxonomy Group/Department Exist?

NO - You'll need to hire someone more senior or a consultant (ie: Vettanna) to get the department setup

YES - Hire a kick ass taxonomist as an employee or temp labor.

In the following pages we'll reveal what you need to know to:

- Set up your Taxonomy Group/Department
- The key traits of Kick Ass Taxonomists
- Taxonomy Job Description Template
- 5 Sample Interview Questions



Here are the issues that must be addressed and the earlier the better.

- Who does the Taxonomy Group report to?
- Who issues the business goals to the Taxonomy Group
- What are the interface points with other teams?
 - When
 - Who
 - What info does the team member need from taxonomy?
 - What info does taxonomy need from other team members?
 - For the info, what level of detail and quality is expected?
- What are the processes that are needed?
- Do the taxonomists update the database/meta data directly or do they provide the updates to an engineer/analyst?
- What tools are right for your company?
- Is a Lexicon required?
 - Key terms in your industry
 - Definitions of target demographics (users)
 - How your users use your data
 - Predictions for the future of your industry & users

As you can see, just popping an inexpensive junior person into the mix without this setup will only confuse and frustrate everyone.



“Without big data analytics, companies are blind & deaf, wandering into the web like deer on a freeway”

Geoffrey Moore

“Big data taxonomy is the thoughtful organization and classification of information.”

John Flaa, Co-Founder of Vettanna

Key Traits of Kick Ass Data Taxonomists

Now that you've got the key issues resolved, it's time to hire! The field is relatively new, but there are experienced and trained taxonomists to choose from. These are their traits:

Both Left and Right Brain Thinkers

Like many people in tech, they have the ability to be logical & creative.

Logical Intuition

It sounds like an oxymoron. We don't mean "woo woo" intuition. It's intuition that is steeped in observation and research of an area and its trends. It's intuition that is predictive based upon facts.

Mad Research Skills

It's being able to do quick, deep research fast. It's learning that the type of wood that a guitar neck is made of affects the sound and therefore the style of music.

Organized & Detail Oriented

It's being able to conceptualize and quickly imagine a grouping and then another regrouping of things without leaving anything out.

Wordsmith

Understanding language, cultural idioms and slang. It's knowing that soda is pop in the Midwest USA and a sweater is a jumper in the UK.



Creative Thinkers

A creative thinker is zigging while your zagging. For example: If they work for Amazon or Guitar Center and their category is guitars. They notice that Lizzo (who sings, dances and plays flute) has risen in popularity and created a resurgence in the popularity of flute playing. They'd do some quick research to find that flutists are experimenting with electronic sound - using guitar pedals & wireless systems. So, they'd find the one's that the flute gurus have found success with and they would tag those guitar products with the word "flute" too.

“Creativity is intelligence having fun.”

Albert Einstein



Taxonomist / Metadata Analyst

If you enjoy being a wordsmith, researching products, and creating elegant user experiences based on solid taxonomy guidelines, then we want you to join our amazing team. Our existing team is made up of people with degrees in Library Science, Linguistics, Business Administration, and Data Science but the main requirement is that you are a person who is passionate about collaborating and creating intuitive user experiences and can clearly and adroitly communicate taxonomy decisions within a multidisciplinary, global team

Duties

- Analyze site's current content and update classification as necessary
- Work with stakeholders and developers of new features to ensure proper classification prior to launch
- Excellent communicator. Communicate language used and explain the logic behind your classification decisions
- Work well with a variety of people and personalities
- Active listener. Ask questions to get to the root of a problem
- Be open to receiving/giving praise and constructive feedback,
- Rabid desire to learn
- Organized and detail oriented
- Demonstrate ability to manage multiple tasks
- Estimate task timelines accurately
- Reprioritize or rework a project approach based on unforeseen events,

Qualifications

- 3+ years of experience with taxonomies and metadata analysis
- Experience with content management systems
- Understanding of SEO best practices

Now you're wondering:

"What do I ask to find out if applicants have the right skills?"

Here are 5 sample questions to get you started.

1. "If you walked into a room with 100 different items in it, how would you organize said items?"
2. "The project manager posits that your classification scheme won't work. What do you say?"
3. "What steps would you take if you needed to learn as much as possible about men's Italian leather shoes in 20 minutes?"
4. "Are you an artist, musician or crafter?"
5. "Imagine you are working on a project and you have a deadline for completion in 2 weeks. It'll be tight, but you can do it. One of your co-workers was out sick for a week, their project is due in 3 days. They've asked you to pitch in and help. What do you do?"





You've just hired a smart, detail oriented, creative maverick. The worst thing you can do is micromanage them. That will kill their spirit and productivity.

What Do They Need To Succeed?

- Input into their goals and deadlines
- Autonomy
- Tools to do an effective job
- Let them know how they will be evaluated

How Do You Know They Are Doing Their Job?

- Just as with an engineer, set milestones and micro deadlines.
- Status reports and one-on-one meetings

Warning Signs of a bad skill or team fit

- Arguing that's personal and not problem solving
- Missed deadlines
- Categorizations that do not result in better user stats

“In God We Trust. All others must bring data.”

“Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic.”

JK Rowling



There are 2 keys to an effective evaluation of your taxonomist:

1. Make it clear, up front, what they will be evaluated on. They will concentrate on nailing those goals. If you do not, and you surprise them by evaluating them on something you did not tell them about, you will undermine their efforts, derail their productivity, demoralize them and loose a valuable team member.
2. Take the job description and for each line item write what the specific observable actions or measurable results are.
3. BONUS: Now you know what the expected results are so it will be very clear when the EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS or fell short.

We've opened your eyes to the field of taxonomy and how you can get started. Here's how Vettanna can help:

Recruiting

We have 2 models.

- The traditional headhunter - we vett, you interview and they become your W2 employee.
- Alternative Workforce - we vett, you interview, Vettanna hires them as our W2 employee then either of us can manage.

Consulting

We'd love to partner with you. Vettanna can:

- Setup your Taxonomy Group/Department
- Evaluate your Group and make recommendations
- Review a document or answer a quick question

Training

Our sister company provides the following online training classes:

- [Video Job Interviewing for Managers, Recruiters & Hiring Teams](#)
- [Communication Skills for Technical People](#)
- [The Secret Conversation Styles of Men, Women & Bosses](#)

"Every company has big data in it's future and every company will eventually be in the data business."

Thomas H.
Davenport