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Analyzing how media's consumed

3/18/2016 – With the launch of its latest product, Rhiza for Sales, Pittsburgh-based software company Rhiza is using data to enable sales representatives at local TV stations to sell advertising more effectively.

"The technology that supports the selling of that advertising is antiquated at best," said Josh Knauer, CEO of Rhiza. "We saw an opportunity to bring our product to hyperlocal markets."

Founded in 2014 with eight employees, Rhiza has nearly tripled in size since then. The company now boasts 34 employees and investment from Draper Triangle and two other venture capital firms — one in Silicon Valley and the other in Fargo, N.D.

In the past, Rhiza typically has worked with large corporations such as Comcast and the BBC to provide data analysis to salespeople that allows them to be more targeted in their approach to selling spots. Now, it's shifting its focus to the local markets.

Rhiza software sifts through what Knauer approximates are hundreds of billions of records about consumer behavior. But those worried about data privacy shouldn't be concerned, he said.

"We specialize in nonidentifiable targeting. We don't know who anyone is, we don't know their home address, we don't know their phone number," Knauer said.

What Rhiza's algorithm does, according to Knauer, is look at demographics and patterns of behavior and predict how groups of people choose to consume media.

As the company unveils the new product, it's also celebrating its winning of the Carnegie Science Center's Corporate Innovation Award, an honor Knauer credits to the company's employees. The makeup of Rhiza's staff is more diverse than most other tech companies. Fifty percent of the staff and management team are made up of women, and 34 percent of employees are people of color.

The company is focused on community outreach, volunteering at local colleges, high schools and elementary schools to teach young people in STEM.

"We're trying to show people that there are interesting careers in STEM and engage in our broader community," Knauer said.

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