

Data Mining in Franchise Organizations

Ye-Sho Chen

Louisiana State University, USA

Bin Zhang

Louisiana State University, USA

Bob Justis

Louisiana State University, USA

INTRODUCTION

Franchising has been a popular business approach given the high rate of business failures (Justis & Judd, 2002; Thomas & Seid, 2000), and its popularity continues to increase in today's e-business-centered global economy. For example, *Entrepreneur* magazine's well known for its Franchise 500 listing in early 2001 included a category called Tech Businesses into its Franchise Zone which contains subcategories of Internet Businesses, Tech Training, and Miscellaneous Tech Businesses. At the time of this writing, 35 companies are on the list of Entrepreneur.com. Netchising, combining the power of the Internet for global demand-and-supply processes and international franchising arrangements for local responsiveness, seems to rise as an effective global e-business growth strategy (Beck & Morrison, 2000; Morrison, Beck & Bouquet, 2000). The Netchising business model "offers potentially huge benefits over traditional exporting or foreign direct investment approaches to globalization" and is "a powerful concept with potentially broad applications" (Davenport, 2000, p. 52).

In his best seller, *Business @ the Speed of Thought*, Bill Gates (1999) wrote: "Information technology and business are becoming inextricably interwoven. I don't think anybody can talk meaningfully about one without talking about the other" (p. 6). Gates' point is quite true indeed when one talks about data mining in franchise organizations. Despite its popularity as a global e-business growth strategy, there is no guarantee that the franchising business model will render continuous success in the hypercompetitive environment. This can be evidenced from the constant up-and-down ranking of the Franchise 500 by Entrepreneur.com. Thus, to see how data mining can be "meaningfully" used in franchise organizations, one needs to know how franchising really works. In the next section, we show that (1) building up a good "family" relationship between the franchisor and the franchisee is the real essence of franchising, and (2)

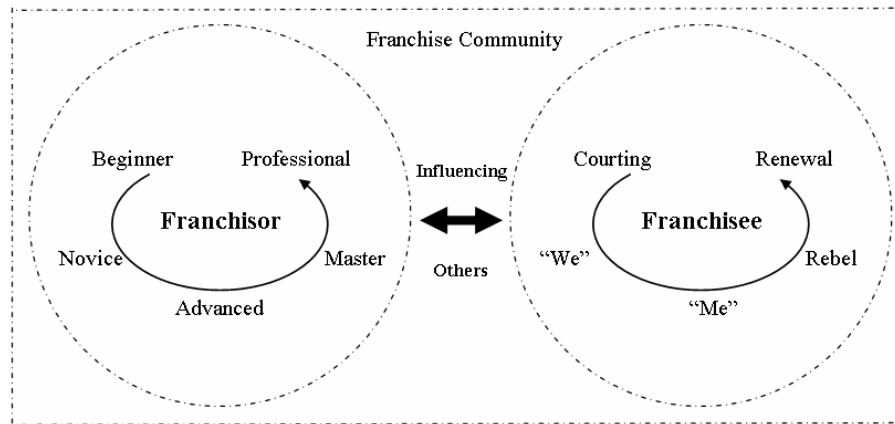
proven working knowledge is the foundation of the "family" relationship. We then discuss in the following three sections the process of how to make data mining "meaningful" in franchising. Finally, future trends of data mining in Netchising are briefly described

FRANCHISING: THE FRANCHISOR/FRANCHISEE RELATIONSHIP

Franchising is "a business opportunity by which the owner (producer or distributor) of a service or a trademarked product grants exclusive rights to an individual for the local distribution and/or sale of the service or product, and in return receives a payment or royalty and conformance to quality standards. The individual or business granting the business rights is called the *franchisor*, and the individual or business granted the right to operate in accordance with the chosen method to produce or sell the product or service is called the *franchisee*" (Justis & Judd, 2002, pp. 1-3). Developing a good "family" relationship between the franchisor and the franchisee is believed to be the most important factor for the success of a franchise (Justis & Judd, 2002). Figure 1 describes how such a "family" relationship is built in the franchise community.

In Figure 1, the franchisor has to learn to deal with many issues to increase the business. The learning process is incrementally developed through the following five stages (Justis & Judd, 2002): (1) Beginner's learning how to do it; (2) Novice's practicing doing it; (3) Advanced's doing it; (4) Master's teaching others to do it; and (5) Professional's becoming the best that you can be. At a higher stage of the development, most of the problems in the previous stages have been dealt with. However, more complicated and challenging questions will arise as the franchise continues the expansion. This is especially true when the system reaches the stage of

Figure 1. Understanding how the franchisor/franchisee “family” relationship works



Professional, when many unforeseen and difficult problems could happen all of sudden. Bud Hadfield (1995), the founder of Kwik Kopy franchise and the International Center of Entrepreneurial Development, aptly stated: “The more the company grows, the more it will be tested” (p. 156). To capture the learning process, a counter-clockwise round arrow surrounding the franchisor is used to depict the increasing intensity of learning as the franchisor continues surviving and thriving.

To understand how the “family” relationship is developed, one needs to know the five phases of franchisee life cycle (Schreuder, Krige & Parker, 2000): (1) Courting: both the franchisee and the franchisor are excited with the relationship; (2) “We”: the relationship starts to deteriorate, but the franchisee still values the relationship; (3) “Me”: the franchisee starts to question the reasons for payments-related issues with the attitude that the success so far is purely of his/her own work; (4) Rebel: the franchisee starts to challenge the restrictions being placed; and (5) Renewal: the franchisee realizes the “win-win” solution is to continue teaming up with the franchisor to grow the system. Similar to the franchisor, a counter-clockwise round arrow surrounding the franchisee is used in Figure 1 to depict the increasing intensity of franchisee life cycle as the franchisee continues learning and growing in the franchise system.

While the franchisee progresses through the life cycle, the “family” relationship is gradually developed through a process of influencing others (Justis & Vincent, 2001), as depicted in Figure 1 with a bi-directional arrow: (1) working knowledge, proven abilities of expanding the franchise system profitably; (2) positive attitude, constructive ways of presenting and sharing the working knowledge; (3) good motivation, providing incentives for learning or teaching the working knowledge; (4) positive individual behavior, understanding and leveraging the strengths of the participants to learn and enhance the

working knowledge; and (5) collaborative group behavior, having the team spirit to find the best way to collect, disseminate, and manage the hard-earned working knowledge. By going through the processes of learning and influencing, both the franchisor and franchisee gain the working knowledge in the franchise community progressively. The franchisor, the franchisee, and the franchise community in Figure 1 are surrounded with dashed lines, meaning there is no limit to the learning process.

MANAGING FRANCHISE ORGANIZATIONAL DATA

There are many contact points within the franchise community where the franchisor and the franchisee can influence each other; in business these contact points are sometimes called “touchpoints.” Based on the Customer Service Life Cycle (CSLC) model developed by Ives (2004), Chen, Chong, and Justis (2002) proposed a framework (see Table 1) to harness the Internet to serve the customers for the franchising industry. The 11 sub-stages in Table 1 are based on two well-known franchising books by Justis and Judd (2002) and Thomas and Seid (2000). The model in Table 1 may be used as a comprehensive guide for a franchise system to develop its Web site, especially at the stages of Requirements and Acquisition.

Table 1 also is a comprehensive framework for a franchise organization to model the data needed to serve its customers, that is, franchisees and their customers. A well-designed Internet strategy shall empower the franchisor and the franchisees to collect, use, renew, store, retrieve, transmit, and share the organizational data needed to do the collaborative work in different phases of the CSLC model. Specifically, three types of data are needed:

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