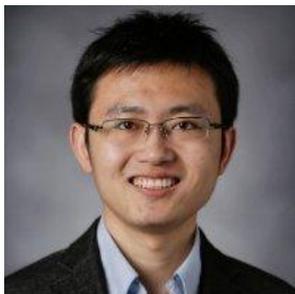


Dai Li, Data Scientist at Tagged, Shares a Slice of His Day-to-Day Work

TAGGED™

MEMP Alumnus 2013

By Pranav Deshpande



On a windy Monday morning in San Francisco, Dai Li settles in to his chair to begin the week. Dai, a recent MEM graduate, works as a data scientist at Tagged, a social discovery website that also has a bunch of mobile products. As he starts to go through the emails and analytics reports that have piled up over the weekend, his phone rings.

“Good morning Dai! This is Pranav calling from Duke. Is this a good time to talk?”

“Hi, Pranav. Yes, it is, and I’m happy you called.”

“All right, I’ll get straight to the questions. I don’t want to take up too much of your time. First, can you elaborate on some of your responsibilities at Tagged?”

“Sure. Broadly speaking, most of my tasks as a data scientist involve data modelling, machine learning, and A/B testing. I work on two of the company’s products – MeetMe and Swoon. MeetMe is a social discovery app that helps you meet and hangout with new people near your location, while Swoon is a location-based dating application. I work on the algorithms that are used by these products and focus on using data-driven techniques such as A/B testing and machine learning to improve these algorithms.”

“I find it exciting that you work so closely with products! Could you walk me through a typical day?”

“I start by going through reports containing specific product usage data that is relevant to the task I am currently working on. This involves putting together queries in order to measure and analyse relevant metrics and generate reports based on these analyses. I then spend some time with data engineers and assist them in utilizing this data and the feedback gathered from it to design, change, or improve existing algorithms.”

“Thanks! Moving on, what skills do you think are most valued in your line of work?”

“Interesting question. To work as a data scientist, it’s important to have a solid foundation in mathematics and statistics, as well as more advanced subject matter areas such as machine learning. In terms of technical skills, it is advantageous to have a good grasp over data analysis tools such as R and SQL. I feel that it is not mandatory to know these tools per se since different companies use different tools while some let you choose what tools to use. What really matters is to have a good understanding of data analysis concepts. It is also important to have good communication skills. You should be able to explain ideas and convey messages effectively. I also feel that, as a new employee at an organization, it’s important to establish your credibility by working hard, being proactive, and doing quality work.”

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“Now on to a topic that all our readers eagerly want to know more about: how have you leveraged what you learned as an MEM throughout your career and in your current job?”

“Good question. I would say that, as someone who was always interested in analytics, working with Professor Egger and enrolling in his classes really helped me improve my understanding of data analysis and develop the skills that helped me get my current job. I always knew that I wanted to specialize in analytics so when I enrolled in the MEM program I took advantage of the opportunities available to me to improve my understanding of data analytics. I worked with Professor Egger on a data mining project during my time at Duke, which involved mining earthquake data to uncover hidden patterns to make better predictions for research and commercial purposes. The emphasis that the coursework placed on team work, communication, and collaboration also helped me improve my

interpersonal skills.”

“I’m sure that will give our readers a few things to think about. What is the work culture like at Tagged?”

“It’s really fun. The company is around 8 to 9 years old, which, by start-up standards, makes it an older company. However, the culture is still like a typical start-up. The organization is pretty flat and there is not much hierarchy. All senior employees and company leaders are very accessible and they pretty much have an open door policy.”

“Thanks. Moving on to my last question for you, where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?”

“It is really hard for me to say where I will be in my career in the next 5 years, honestly. What I do know is that in the short run I want to focus on improving my technical skills and learning more about the products at Tagged.”

“All right! Thank you for taking the time out to talk to me today. I’m sure a lot of the current MEMers will find this very useful.”

“Glad I could help. Feel free to give me a call again if there is anything you need.” ■
