

Efficient Store Chain Location Data



Chris Hathaway - CEO

CEOCFO: Mr. Hathaway, what is AggData?

Mr. Hathaway: AggData is a company that provides store location data. We figured out a way to automatically extract this data from the web and provide it to our clients in an easy-to-use format. We specialize in chain location data, and we distinguish ourselves from other data providers because we go directly to what we consider the primary source, the websites and store locators of the companies themselves. We extract the data from there so it is always fresh, up-to-date and accurate. We then provide the data in various ways and clients use it in many different applications, whether it is competitive research, retail analysis, advertising, technology, and more.

CEOCFO: Why do people have the need to go to AggData?

Mr. Hathaway: If you wanted a complete list of Walmart locations, you could go to Walmart.com and type in every single zip code in their store locator, then copy and paste the information that is returned. However, that is going to take excessive time and resources, whereas we have a way to extract this data automatically, sometimes in a matter of minutes. We sell that data for a nominal price, and it is a much better value to a customer who just wants to get the data and move on to the interesting work, which is analysis, prediction and using the data to discover valuable information and make decisions.

CEOCFO: Your site indicates that AggData was created because you needed it. When did you make the transition to market? How did you realize people would pay for this info and how do people find you and know you have this?

Mr. Hathaway: This started back when I was in graduate school. My background is in Computer Science; I was a developer and studied programming through school. I had previously worked for a company that did data extraction from the web, and in grad school I was playing around with some of the software I helped develop and realized that instead of selling software or services surrounding the software, I could use the software to collect data and then sell that data as the product. At that point, I had no idea what type of data I would sell, but I started looking around and trying out different types of data collection from the web. I then fell into this niche of store location data. I tried it out, and it was something that I could easily collect because it was always publicly available online through these sources. I posted a few lists online, and people started buying them. At that point, I had a few people helping me out, and we knew we were onto something, so we focused all of our efforts on store location data and eventually created a company around that service.

Our customers usually find us through searching online or through word of mouth. If you are looking for a list of Walmart locations, BestBuy locations, or any number of the 3000+ retailers and chains we cover, there is a good chance is that you are going to find our site, since there are not any other services that provide and collect data in the way that we do. In addition, we have many great clients who are evangelists for AggData and share within the industry the services we provide, which spurs a lot of our growth.

CEOCFO: Do you see a trend in general for companies wanting the information and not the tools to get the information?

Mr. Hathaway: I think companies are always looking for more efficient ways to accomplish tasks using data, and each company has their own specialty to offer. If they find themselves spending a lot of time on other things such as collecting data, and somebody else can do the same task much more efficiently, they are much more willing to source that task to someone like AggData. We have encountered several clients who have internally tried to maintain these data extractions themselves, but in every case it becomes unmanageable because it is not their primary focus. It is a side project for them,

whereas for us it is our complete focus. It is much easier for them to let us do what we do best and then take the data and use it to do what they do best.

CEOCFO: *What is the criteria for creating a list for you or will you create by request?*

Mr. Hathaway: In general, we have grown our library from client requests. At the beginning, I started out with several lists I thought would be useful, but since then our growth has been largely clients who come to us with requests for us to collect more chains. At the same time, we get requests for other types of data collection, and sometimes we will do it and sometimes we will not. Often we will provide the extraction service but then not include it in our library. What I am looking for when we include something in our library is that it is definable. We can say, for example, this is a complete list of Target store locations, whereas if it was a list of Chinese restaurants in the U.S., there is no real understanding that the data is a full and accurate representation of that category. We include things that we can stand behind and say they are complete, accurate pictures of whatever that list may be. From there, we try to stay within the scope of chain locations because that is the product that we are building and the library we want to grow.

CEOCFO: *There are many chains that have a lot of activity. How do you keep up to date?*

Mr. Hathaway: Because of the technology we use, we are able to create templates for websites so that when we run the automated extraction it knows what the website looks like and knows how to get the store location information out of it. When we build that the first time, as long as the website does not change, we can continually run it to get refreshed versions of data. We run each list every three months by default. We can just run that same extraction again and get a new, complete version of that data. We will keep our historical data as well, with some of our lists going back to 2008. If a website does change, we have to fix things and rebuild, so there is a lot of maintenance involved, but we can rely on patterns on the web to catch new stores or closing stores with each update.

“AggData is an example of a company that has been able to find an interesting solution to the very old problem of getting information in an efficient way... We are basically reverse-engineering the web.” - Chris Hathaway

CEOCFO: *What is the most common format you provide the data in and what might be something a little more unusual?*

Mr. Hathaway: Right now almost all of our data is in the CSV format. We try to keep our data in the rawest format possible and CSV works great, because any mapping software, database software or spreadsheet software will take CSV as an input. We do provide it in other ways as well, and commonly we will create KML files, which are used in Google Earth. Customers can import with KML files with logos and other features so they can have an immediate map for the store list.

One thing that we recently announced and which we are in the middle of deploying is an integration with ESRI software ArcGIS online, which will integrate our data directly in with their services so anybody using ESRI’s mapping platform can quickly find and add the layers we provide into their maps. We are excited about this opportunity and the prospect of other types of direct integrations with larger GIS platforms and other software solutions.

CEOCFO: *What is the geographic range right now?*

Mr. Hathaway: The U.S. certainly makes up the majority of our data, and that is where we started, but we have been rapidly expanding internationally. We have basically saturated at least the major chains and retailers in the U.S., so a lot of our newer requests are international. We have a very large set of data in Canada with 200 to 300 lists that include Canadian locations, and many other English-speaking countries are very well represented. However, our methods are not limited by country or language. We have lists covering data in over 35 different countries, and we are always interested in expanding farther.

CEOCFO: *What else can you do with the technology?*

Mr. Hathaway: The underlying technology is industry agnostic. We use it to collect store location data, but it could be used to collect any type of structured data on the web. By structured data, I mean when you go to a website and pages for individual pieces of content are all formatted the same, whether it be a location, product or blog post. As long as there is a pattern on that website, our technology can extract that pattern and turn it into usable data. We have done some side projects based on that with things like sports statistics or looking at historical information, such as Oscar winners since 1912 or Olympic results. We are basically reverse-engineering the web. The information started out in a database, and a web developer created the website to display it in a more user-friendly format. We are just reversing that process and taking it from that user-friendly version back to the raw data.

CEOCFO: *What is next for AggData?*

Mr. Hathaway: I mentioned a few things already. We are looking to expand a lot more internationally, and we are doing some very interesting integrations with large software platforms. We have also seen interesting media projects done with our data, various data visualizations that tell interesting stories. Recently there was an article on the online version of Time Magazine that took our data, and, based on the results of the recent election, categorized different chains as leaning more democratic or republican depending on their locations. We want to foster that type of creative use of our data. I am hoping we can start providing more tools to help people get started in that analytical process. There are plenty of big firms that do in-depth data analysis, and we do not want to replace that. But I believe we can give people a bit of a head start using some basic understanding and analysis of the data we have and creating tools so that users can find the data they need much more quickly.

CEOCFO: *Have you protected what you have developed or do you see the need to do so?*

Mr. Hathaway: We do not really claim ownership of this data. It is location data, and anybody walking down the street could find the same information, so we do not claim copyright over the data any more than McDonald's can claim copyright over the addresses of their stores. We just provide the data on a larger scale and in a more efficient way. We count on the fact that this is a fairly complex problem, and unless a company was completely focused on what we do, it would be very difficult for them to reproduce or compete. We have gotten a five-year head start and have not seen anybody attempt what we are doing at the same scale.

CEOCFO: *What surprised you most as the concept and the company have grown and developed?*

Mr. Hathaway: When I first started posting data, I had no idea how people would use it. I think that has been the most fun to experience over the years – seeing all the different uses for our data. I was not even aware that our largest market existed, which is commercial real estate, and how much analysis they actually do when they decide which stores they are going to put in this strip mall or that new shopping center. Our clients have only become more creative and intelligent with our data from there. It has been very exciting to see these uses of AggData that I did not even know existed beforehand.

CEOCFO: *What should people remember most when reading about AggData?*

Mr. Hathaway: AggData is an example of a company that has been able to find an interesting solution to the very old problem of getting information in an efficient way. I talked about some of these industries that I had no idea existed; these are old, very established industries that we have been able to disrupt because we are approaching the problem from a modern computing angle. I believe this type of experience can be replicated in many different industries, using technology to solve problems in new and different ways than they have been done before, disrupting the 20 to 30 year traditions of industries by taking advantage of the wonderful technological advances that we see emerging in modern society.

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**For more information visit
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