Turning Big Data into Individual Insights

A Guide to Building a Data-Driven Marketing Strategy

How Marketers Can Achieve & Maintain High-Quality Data

Data hygiene may not be the most exciting topic in marketing, but its value is immediately apparent as soon as any marketer tries to use unreliable data. Whether the conversation is about analyzing consumer trends, marketing attribution, measuring media spend or any of the other marketing strategies needed to succeed today, they all require accurate data.

If the data isn't accurate, optimizations, reporting, and attribution records won't be accurate either. Everything revolving around marketing and communications, involves some level of data input. When that's incorrect, how we see consumer trends, how we decide on products, how we communicate to the masses will also be faulty.

Poor-quality data not only drains marketing resources but also limits marketing effectiveness according to findings from our recently commissioned Forrester Report. In fact, wasted media spend is the most frequently cited repercussion, with an estimated 21 cents of every media dollar spent by organizations in the last year was wasted due to poor data quality. This translates to a $1.2 million average annual loss for midsize companies and a $16.5 million average annual loss for enterprises.

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We found that as much as 32% of marketing teams' time is spent managing data quality, and 26% of marketing campaigns in the last year were hurt by poor data quality on average.

Data itself is often the key barrier to implementing a cutting-edge marketing strategy. Whether the issue is difficulty integrating, managing, or collecting it, data is also often both the best asset and the biggest challenge modern marketers face.

Marketing Evolution is a data-first company measuring the scalability of marketing efforts for big data organizations. We wanted to package our own learnings and the learnings of our customers to explore what leads to poor quality data, how to identify better practices and put them into practice—and ultimately, convert into actionable insights.

Common Data Quality Issues

Sophisticated marketing systems often produce sophisticated problems. There are a handful of common data issues that we may either overlook or never acknowledge to be detrimental to the overall trends and strategic advances of the business. Here are the most common data hiccups that marketers run into:

Out of Date

Data can become inaccurate alarmingly fast. For example, 17 percent of Americans create a new email address every six months.

Overwritten at the Wrong Time

Whether it's human error or machine error, if even one field gets skipped in a software routine, the entire data output can be wrong.

Inaccurate Data

For whatever reason, some data just comes into the system wrong in the first place. The classic example of this is misspelled names. Brands can spend hundreds of dollars trying to convert a high-value prospect only to realize that every communication they've sent has been dismissed outright because the prospect's name wasn't spelled correctly.

Ambiguous Data

If you are working with legacy systems or have inherited data files from someone who left the company years ago, it's quite possible to find fields and codes that don't make sense. Or information in the fields may not really convey any truly useful information.

Poorly Formatted

One data input system may record customer website visits one way, while another input source records them in a different way. Without intermediary software to make the formats consistent, the data isn't usable.

Duplicate Records

Duplicate records are the bane of most sales departments, where one prospective customer contacting the company multiple times can result in multiple files in the lead generation database.

Missing Data

Information fields can be left unfilled or become blank for myriad reasons. Sometimes this renders all other information for that file useless.

Unused Data

This is one of the most difficult data hygiene problems to solve. Assessing which data fields are actually being used by different teams and individuals inside or outside of the marketing department can be real detective work. But it's usually worth it; unused data fields bloat data files and slow down optimization. If certain information isn't being used and isn't going to be used, it should be deleted. Due to GDPR, this is often actually required by law.