



THE 3-MINUTE GUIDE TO

Telling Your Data's Story

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SMART WITH DATA



Go beyond the numbers

If you ask marketers why they got into the profession, many would say it's because they love to tell stories. But what most didn't account for was the influx of data into the day-to-day workings of their jobs.

Marketing leaders today don't use their imagination to create their stories. Instead, they turn to data. But using numbers instead of words doesn't mean you can't craft a compelling narrative. In fact, it's probably more important, because data without context has little meaning.


Still, marketers face three core challenges in delivering data-driven stories.

First, they need to reduce complexity and stay agile. It's impossible to tell a story if you have a maze of different platforms and data sources to navigate. And Adverity research tells us that the average marketer has 52 data sources. This is antithetical to crafting any type of engaging narrative.

Second is accurate measurement and attribution. If you can't be sure of your data, you can't be sure that your story is honest and truthful.

And third is navigating the current web of privacy regulations. With regulations like GDPR and CCPA, marketers are grappling with collecting the data they need to tell their stories while respecting customer privacy.

It's a tall order, but if marketers can solve these three challenges, they'll have the runway they need to craft and share impactful stories. From identifying and acting on hidden trends and market anomalies to shifting time away from manual data collection and analysis, moving your focus from number-crunching to storytelling has the potential to revolutionize your data-driven marketing strategy.





Harmonize data to create a single source of truth

When it comes to data, “the more, the better” is a double-edged sword. Sure, more touchpoints, platforms and channels generate even more granular insights about customers. But if you can’t read the data in a way that allows you to understand the value of individual and combined actions, your data story will be convoluted. It’s like a novel with its pages scattered all over the house. There’s a story there, but the only way to read it is by collecting and organizing the pages. Integrating and harmonizing your data will create the foundation you need to begin telling your data story.

TAKE INVENTORY

A hallmark of digital marketing is the overwhelming number of data sources most organizations have. To integrate and harmonize your data into a single source of truth, you first need to understand what you’re working with. Taking a data inventory is a two-pronged process. It starts with determining how many data sources you need. Then, you need to know if these sources can integrate with your desired business reporting tools. If a data source can’t connect seamlessly to your reporting tool, you will have to rely on manual data wrangling. And then, you have to ask: Are they all necessary? If the answer is yes, can you be sure they are accurate and up-to-date? Before you begin integrating your data, make sure that it’s relevant to your business and has a defined purpose.

PREPARE YOUR TEAM

One of the biggest benefits of tapping into automated data integration technology is eliminating the hours you might have spent manually pulling in data and updating spreadsheets. But if that type of manual work is a big part of your team’s processes, you will need to prepare them for the shift and reallocate their time. Involve your team in this process by sitting down with them and individually asking what balls are being dropped in the current system. Is there too little time spent on campaign postmortems? Do they feel like they don’t have the time to dig into the “why” behind a piece of creative’s clickthrough rate? Identify areas that weren’t getting enough attention and then transition teams to focus on them as part of their day-to-day routine.

LOCK DOWN NAMING CONVENTIONS

Just like a book’s index, your ability to find something useful is only as good as your organizational system. In the world of data, this means getting your naming conventions right. Why? They will help you avoid errors in analysis down the road and remove complexity from the reporting process. When creating a system for naming, make sure to get all stakeholders’ input. If it’s not logical and easy to learn, it will end up being more of a burden than an opportunity, so keep it as simple as possible. A good rule of thumb? If you can’t explain it in 60 seconds, it’s too complicated.



See it
to believe it

Telling your data story comes down to being able to pull from your mountain of data and find the numbers that drive your narrative. It's about looking at the past to inform the present and clearly communicating the "why" behind the data. Marketers know what it's like to spend hours poring over spreadsheets, copy and pasting columns, and pulling in more numbers only to end up with a story that isn't providing real value. Enter data visualizations. People (including your boss!) are highly visual. By employing data visualization to tell your data's stories, you'll be able to create and communicate more impactful narratives.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

First things first, who is going to be seeing these visualizations and what do they need to learn from them? The way you present to your CMO—who might want a high-level overview—will be very different from how you present to your team of marketing data analysts—who will want to get into granular detail. So, what specific story do you want to tell? You should go in with an idea of where you want the narrative arc to land. For example, if the sales team comes to you in a panic over revenue coming in below forecast, you need to be able to look at the data and present it back in a way that clearly shows what went wrong and where.

FIND THE RIGHT CHARTS

You need the right visuals to tell the right story. Consider what you're trying to show. Comparisons of different campaigns? Look to a bar chart. Share of a whole? Think pie. Trends over time? A line graph or an area chart could work. Then there is the plethora of specialized graphics, like word clouds, scatter plots, funnel charts, dot maps and Gantt charts. Look at some of the various web libraries of data visualizations for inspiration. Remember that the goal of any visualization is to make the data more understandable. To put it another way: You'll know a great visualization when you see it.

REDUCE COMPLEXITY

When it comes to data visualization, try to avoid the tendency to "go big." In fact, your data story will come through more clearly if you can simplify it. Every report or visualization should be structured as a narrative and follow a logical thread from beginning, middle, to the end. Remember, humans are visual, so choose a two- or three-tone color palette and then use it to clearly delineate information. Context is the third key element in any no-nonsense report. Why are you telling this story in the first place? What circumstances preceded it, and what does it need to accomplish?



Stay proactive

Marketers are lucky to be living in a time when machine learning can help them achieve pretty much anything. It allows data to move from reporting on the past to predicting what happens next. The latest automated tools can reduce errors, open up hidden opportunities and tell the most compelling story possible.

STOP PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY START

Use AI to detect negative anomalies or identify and monitor weak areas. By using historical data to predict expected values for KPIs, you'll be able to spot problems early on and devise a plan of action. For example, a sudden and unexpected drop in engagement could signal that a new piece of creative is flopping. Being able to see this happen in real time allows you to pull and adjust the creative before it causes too much damage.

DETECT TRENDS

Who wishes they had seen the wellness craze earlier? Or thought to capitalize on seltzers before they got huge? Being able to identify and act on behaviors before they actually become trends is a huge advantage for your business—no matter the category. Using large amounts of historical KPI data, augmented systems can identify and rank trends that will be significant to your business. This not only reduces the time you have to spend manually searching for trends, but buys you time to position yourself favorably.

FORECAST FINANCES

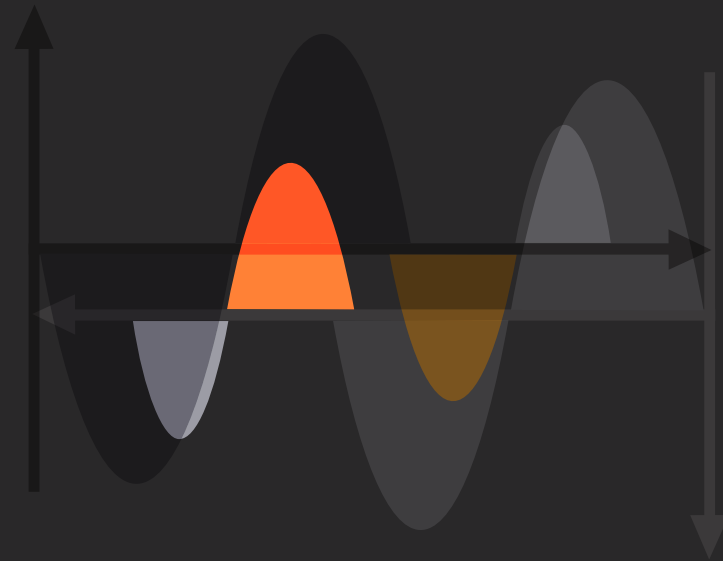
There is no excuse for over- or underspending anymore. AI can act as the ultimate budget manager by monitoring how much is being spent and where and what that means for future plans. This allows you to fine-tune your spending to make sure every dollar is being spent with maximum efficiency. It also allows you to reduce hours spent on assessing spend against budget and saves time for higher-value activities.

About Adverity

Adverity is an intelligent marketing analytics platform specializing in enabling data-driven marketing teams to make better decisions and improve performance, faster and easier. By transforming siloed data into actionable insight, Adverity reduces the complexity involved in demonstrating the return on investment of multichannel marketing spend.



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