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Digital data – analytics are not just for nerds

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There is a saying that is worth returning to now and again, “Ask a question and you feel foolish for 5 minutes, don’t ask it and you’ll be foolish for a whole lot longer.” This may be a bit blunt and melodramatic but the point is still very useful. And when it comes to the world of digital media there are lots of opportunities to feel ‘foolish’

and plenty of questions to ask. Getting to grips with new and changing technologies and media formats for example. Compounding this is the way digital media is portrayed. We are continually told that the future is digital. That speeds of data generation are exponential, that if a business isn’t careful it risks falling behind the digital revolution, and so on.



In the advertising and media industry, we like to think we are ahead of the game and there are indeed many digital experts and leaders among us, but there is still much to learn. Claire Wood, Chairman of IPA Scotland noted in her inaugural address earlier this year that investment in training is key and we should be aiming for ‘digital evangelism’ – we are of course not there yet.

I don’t profess to be a digital leader, or even expert, but in my job as a business analyst in the world of multi-media communications, gathering and understanding digital data is becoming central to my work. Making good use of it is something I must not only understand but become fluent in for my clients.

Hiding behind the hype there are a myriad of opportunities to use digital data to provide actionable insight and many of them are basic. This is why, and this goes for anyone in marketing, you should think of the world of digital not just as one that offers you a multitude of two way engagement channels but also as your data friend – and a generous one at that.

Here are just two (one older and one newer) simple but powerful approaches to analysing website data to improve the online and offline media strategy.

First, let's start with the older one. I strongly advise all my clients to tag all website landing pages with **Google Analytics**. This is nothing new but it's surprising how many marketers still fail to exploit this free technology.



Tagging means web traffic can be tracked at a granular level showing levels and sources of traffic. This can be useful just as a monitoring tool, but combine a well tagged website with paid search or display advertising stats and you can analyse your digital campaign in real time. Want to know which terms are converting best? Which terms bounce most or have the least dwell time? Which landing pages have the best SEO? This is all possible.

Secondly, consider analysing **minutely data** (data by the minute).

This level of granularity is not necessarily suitable for every organisation and only really works where there are surges in response at a minutely level (e.g. due to a profile raising event – a launch or increased PR activity).

Google Analytics doesn't provide minutely data but the good news is that if the organisation is running any digital campaigns using DoubleClick for Advertisers this can be extracted even if an organisation has not invested in a 3rd party web analytics service.

Why track minutely? Many organisations (in the private and public sector) have seen business migrate online or witnessed customers using the website for research before calling. This has provided a challenge in terms of both the need for additional data collection and also new analysis methods.

Where previously, different media channels and distribution efforts could be tagged with a unique phone number, web response tends to be messier with customers taking different journeys to the website.

But, is the effort worth it? Indeed it is. Tracking minutely response online offers the ability to measure customer response across other dimensions such as the device they used or the route they took to get to the website, for example perhaps they started out with a Google search or came across a Twitter mention. Moving forward, the ability to analyse time stamped data across other metrics (i.e. not just website but Facebook likes for example) may open up potential opportunities to answer questions about how target audiences behave.