



By Richard D. Czerniawski

WHAT DOES THE DATA MEAN FOR YOUR MARKETING?

Last week I wrote, “If one doesn't follow the data, one is accused of being ignorant of science. But from what data is the science drawn? It's possible that the data is ignorant (drawn improperly), or the manager using it is ignorant.” My musing, *“How Good Is Your Data?”* tackled the relationship between faulty data and science. This musing focuses on the interpretation of the data and how it impacts marketing.

Let's return to the coronavirus pandemic given the impact COVID-19 and the decisions our elected officials made to deal with it have affected our lives. We've been quarantined for several weeks and, in some areas, still counting. Businesses closed. Schools shuttered. Families separated. Graduation celebrations canceled. Job offers rescinded. Events canceled or rescheduled. Sports put on indefinite hold. Air travel and the travel industry crippled along with many "Mainstreet" and even large businesses. As a result of measures taken to flatten the curve, societies and economies are suffering worldwide. Take the economy, we, in the U.S., are in a recession. It's a depression for those many who have lost their jobs with poor prospects of being rehired any time soon or at all.

Were the decisions to stay in place, close schools, and “non-essential” businesses consistent with the data? Perhaps. However, more than 50% of deaths caused by COVID-19 occurred to nursing home patients. A decision to shutter them and those identified as “vulnerable,” while allowing all others to continue working, may have been a better decision as it relates to our national health and economic well-being. I'm not trying to arm-chair quarterback here. I'll leave that to the experts and pundits.

What I am positing is that the meaning of the data from which we make decisions is contextual. We can't view it in isolation. The coronavirus poses a multidimensional problem, one that goes beyond the virus. We need to understand the impact on our citizenry's other health-related issues that have been ignored or undertreated due to intense focus on COVID-19? Cancer screenings and detections are down! How about the impact on inner-city children from broken homes who depend upon schools for meals, care, and education? Many do not have computers and therefore, cannot attend online. What will it mean for their ability to avoid poverty and, perhaps, lawlessness? Early indications are that lower household incomes have suffered the most financially. What impact will the millions of losses of jobs have on mental health, domestic abuse—spousal and child—and, even, drug abuse? How long will it take for our GDP to regain pre-pandemic levels, and what will be the consequences with each passing month? Week? Day? Let's not ignore the potential impact on our civil liberties that have, in part, been temporarily suspended. Will they return? I'm not even

broaching monetary policy as we're entering the Twilight Zone.

In time, we'll know whether the decision to close organizations and shutter in place was a wise one when we consider and analyze these other factors. In 1972, Zhou Enlai, who was then the Chinese Premier, was asked his opinion on the impact of the French Revolution, which occurred nearly 200-years earlier. He responded, "Too early to say." It will take time to sort out the impact of decisions made from incomplete and contradictory data regarding the virus, and a focus on it to the exclusion of other dimensions to the problem. We need to examine the whole cloth.

I'm certainly relieved that I did not have to make the difficult and "unwinnable" decision regarding closing cities, counties, states, and nations. (Watch how both sides will argue it as we approach election season.)

The meaning of data is contextual. We need to bring context to the data if we're to give it meaning. What it tells may be different than what it is whispering to others analyzing the same data. I'm referring to marketing. Specifically, I'm relating to a situation I had before acquiring the REACH Toothbrush from DuPont, for Johnson & Johnson, in 1976.

REACH Toothbrush was special. (J&J sold it to Church & Dwight. However, it lost its specialness as J&J changed its brand positioning strategy, engaged in product "decrementalism," reduced marketing support, and new products—particularly disposable and premium electric toothbrushes—entered the market. It's about being more than a toothbrush. It's about being an "in-home dental cleaning instrument.") It was angled like a dental instrument, had a compact head to fit those hard to clean back teeth, and had two layers of bristles—soft, longer outer bristles for cleaning between teeth and along the gumline, and hard, shorter inner bristles for scrubbing teeth clean. The REACH Toothbrush removed 58% more plaque than standard toothbrushes, which shared the same design—straight handle, large brush head, and one level of bristles.

My predecessor accomplished one task before he left the company, and I was charged with evaluating whether to acquire the REACH Toothbrush and launch it nationally. (REACH Toothbrush was in a controlled store test in Chicago and Milwaukee—20 stores in each market.) My predecessor's sole task was to undertake a blind home use test (sans a concept to explain the unique design) versus Oral-B. The names of the brushes were removed before consumers were given them to use. They used each brush for one week. The result: consumers preferred Oral-B 60% over 40% for REACH. Sacre bleu!

Convinced we should acquire the REACH Toothbrush from DuPont, I had to persuade the powers of the company—including Messrs. Dave Clare and, yes, Jim Burke, Johnson & Johnson's President, and Chairman, respectively. No matter what person or persons to whom I proposed we acquire REACH, each had one question. I heard this question over and over again. Can you guess it? Indeed, you can and maybe inquiring the same one. "How do you explain the 60% - 40% loss to Oral-B? Context.

The meaning of data is contextual. There was no concept to explain the rationale for the REACH Toothbrush design! Consumers did not know that the straight-handled toothbrush was Oral-B as all toothbrushes were designed to look, feel, and work in the same way and generate the same results. My response to the question was REACH Toothbrush did not lose to Oral-B. Instead, the in-home use test suggested that 40% of toothbrush users—the market for toothbrushes—preferred REACH Toothbrush to standard toothbrushes. It was more impressive that it generated this result sans a concept to explain the rationale for the design, and it's superior cleaning outcome.

Mr. Burke gave my management permission to go ahead and acquire REACH Toothbrush from Dupont based on his confidence in the Brand Manager (me)! He obviously appreciated the context.

The meaning of data is contextual. In subsequent concept-use tests, REACH Toothbrush achieved top 2-box "purchase interest" ratings of 80% before use (40% Definitely will purchase and 40% Probably will purchase), and 80% following 1-week in-home usage (60% Definitely will purchase and 20% Probably will purchase). Moreover, REACH Toothbrush achieved the leading share position in its first Nielsen bi-monthly audit (which, measures retail sales), despite double-digit out of stocks!

The meaning of data is contextual. What does the data mean for your marketing?

Take your marketing to the next level. Check-out my new book, AVOID CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing. It can help you achieve success during and post the COVID-19 recession. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Stay safe and be well.

Peace and best wishes,

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