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STORYMASTERS
SOLUTIONS

Storytelling in the Time of Corona
Identifying and interpreting the data that matters to your audience

The challenge of navigating the sea of research

While our supplies of face masks, toilet paper, flour and yeast have dwindled, **the 2020 pandemic has provided us with a surplus of a different commodity…**

Data. *Mostly big and raw.*

New statistics and numbers are accumulating daily – and businesses are stockpiling it in [hopes of keeping their brands afloat in the looming recession.](#)

The reality is, that source data won't help your business if you can't put it to good use. It's just the raw materials needed to build your boat. The real life-saver is the interpretation of the information that leads to the knowledge which can be used to make better decisions.

But how? With so much data flying at you – what are the steps to make sense of it all, process it, and turn that information into actionable insights?

On the next few pages we'll steer you through a 3-step thought process and point out the pitfalls to avoid.

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Start… by hitting pause

Data charts do not automatically translate into a story for your brand and business. What is measurable isn't the same as what is valuable. **You must first stop to make sense of it all and to process it.** This is the time to dig into what is behind the numbers and identify the context. *Data without context is meaningless. It's just data.*

▶ **Here are 3 questions to ask yourself:**

1) What is the social context and connections between data points?
2) What are some hypotheses?
3) What strategic thinking can you provide?

This is just one example of applying strategic thinking.

From the example provided you could make a recommendation around marketing – but you could also look at it from an access and distribution standpoint. You can market the hell out of something - but if they're not going to the store anymore…

All companies will have bespoke questions they need answered. It is important to use the 3-step thought process and consider the impact across different areas of your business.

- Shopper insights
- Brand promotion
- Supply chain and distribution
- Marketing
- Public or community relations

Here is how this looks in real life: In March, <u>Navigating to a New Normal</u> - our year-long, multi-generational, cross-geographical, nationally-representative quantitative and qualitative research study. We are collecting data daily – and want to ensure that we are using it wisely. For example, we found that shopping and sales of cosmetics during the pandemic are down 36%.

Okay, great. So now what… *or rather why.*
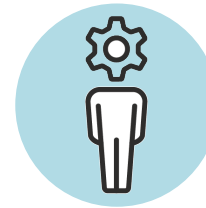
Social context and connections

Cosmetic shopping and sales are down, which may mean people are not using makeup the way they were pre-pandemic. With the shift from in-office to work-from-home and the limits on social interaction, the need to cover-up or enhance appearance, or go glam, has fallen by the wayside.

Informed Hypothesis

People aren't using the makeup they already have – and don't need to replenish their cosmetics.

Consumer behavior has changed. They're not in the makeup aisle anymore replenishing or being inspired to try something new. The typical underlying needs or motivations have gone dormant.

Strategic Thinking

You need to identify a reason for customers to want to use makeup again. What are other or different motivators and benefits to cosmetic use? What about play, fun and artistic self-expression? Influence trial of new makeup when the risks are low (the only person seeing you right now is your cat).

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Everyone has a miss once in awhile

Connecting the dots between "big data" and "thick data" isn't always smooth sailing.

Even story experts hit some rough patches.

It's okay to make a mistake if you learn from it.
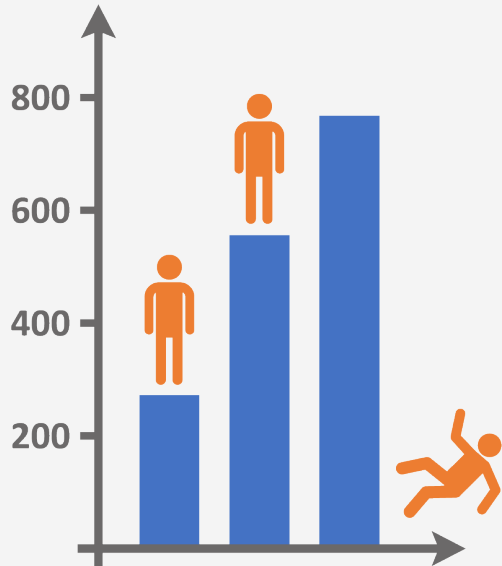
Learning from missteps is the hallmark of growth and we've all had more than a few opportunities to learn and improve. Here are a few pitfalls with examples and our lessons learned:

We Missed the Forest For the Trees. It can be very tempting to answer the research question and lose sight of the overall business objective and miss the opportunity to drive strategy. Case in point, a retailer engaged us in a multi-phased project comprised of qualitative exploration to i.d. customer needs and key opportunity areas for innovation. From this work, ideas were developed into concepts. Next, concepts were tested to assess customer appeal and fit with brand to help the team prioritize where to place their bets. In reporting the results, we answered the immediate question of 'which concepts should be prioritized,' but failed to bring in the previous qualitative context to paint the bigger picture of 'why' the most appealing concepts were rising to the top. By not including highlights from our previous phase of learning we did not tie our final concept learning back to the overarching need states and missed the chance to paint a more strategic POV for our client. What need states represent a better fit with their brand? Which need states reveal a preponderance of higher performing concepts to help guide our client toward a platform for growth? These were the big misses that we had to go back and correct in order to improve our story.

We Neglected to Show Our Thinking. We recently tested different features for a new technology service. Our testing spanned across several global markets.

One feature had been positively received in prior qualitative research was now revealed to be polarizing in our quant testing. This feature performed well with consumers in one market but performed poorly in another market. We noted and reported this difference in our data, but our client needed more. What was prompting this difference? How could it be reconciled and what should be done about it? By taking the data at face value, we missed an opportunity to not only infuse meaning from our original learning, but also to stop and consider the social, political, and cultural influences at play. Once we did pause to reconsider these possible factors, we identified several likely scenarios and brought those forward to our client. While we could not conclusively point to one clear answer as to the discrepancy, by stepping out of the data we were able to offer an informed set of possibilities which our client appreciated.

What Did We Learn From Our Mistakes?

- *Don't just answer the 'what' when you have access to learning that illuminates the 'why'*

- *Even routine research can benefit from an elevated perspective*

- *It is important to step out of your big data and apply the thick data lens of social and cultural context and meaning*

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In action

Now, take what you've learned and apply it across other areas of business.

Social context and connections

Informed Hypothesis

Strategic Thinking

Shopping for cosmetics down 36%

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Shopper insights

Brand promotion

Supply chain and distribution

Marketing

Thank you for joining us for our Storymasters: Solutions series. Do you have more questions about the best way to work through your data to tell a story? We've got answers!
Email us at storymasters@ignite-360.com

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