Organisations need to prioritse data to tell meaningful stories

By Shaune Jordaan   18 Nov 2020

"Data" is likely to be right up there with the buzzwords of the next decade. But more than mere buzzwords, data is not only here to stay, but will also transform the way in which we all do business.

Source: www.pexels.com

Data is where it's at, but data in and of itself is of little value. In its unanalysed, under-utilised form, data is merely dashboards and spreadsheets with facts and stats that point to what is happening. But unravelling and interpreting the "why" is where the real magic happens.

Enter data-led storytelling

Storytelling as a means of sharing information is part of our evolutionary DNA. Human beings, researchers have found time and time again, have always told stories - because narrative lends itself to the transmission of information in a more digestible way. Where facts can do nothing more than present data, the narrative of a story offers that all-important context which ensures the viewer/listener/reader actually understands the import of the message being communicated.

In a world where the collection of data is happening at every turn, the need to turn that data into meaningful stories - or data storytelling - is the real priority.

In its most successful form, by creating a narrative out of data findings, data storytelling helps laypeople (i.e. not data scientists) grasp, comprehend and utilise complex insights in a way that can guide their business decisions and actions in a strategic way.

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By employing storytelling to make sense of data, it becomes easier to connect the dots, unpack trends and spot the kind of "golden nuggets" of information that will give businesses a competitive edge in the next decade, and beyond.

Making sense of data-led storytelling

The first step is to prioritise the creation of a data storytelling culture within the organisation.

It may well all begin with the collection of relevant data, but creating an organisational culture that understands and values the importance of that data in driving the business objectives is key. As such, a dynamic data strategy, that references the value of data-led storytelling, needs to be supported by all stakeholders to ensure it can inform decision making at all levels.

So while it may not require Elon Musk to understand the opportunities hidden in the data, it does necessitate an organisational culture that values data as an integral element of the business.

The next step is to build the creative capability to ensure that the data that is readily and abundantly available can be presented in an engaging and relevant format. Writing for *Forbes*, Brent Dykes, senior director of data strategy at Domo, says: "To form [these] data narratives, data storytellers will lean on their human creativity, empathy and contextual understanding in ways that can't be easily replicated by technology."

The Puppo campaign by Colenso BBDO Auckland serves as a brilliant example to illustrate the point above. The campaign saw a bespoke ad created for every registered dog in New York. An algorithm extracted information on each of the 100,729 dogs registered on the New York City Dog Licensing Dataset.

This data was then linked to a Puppo health benefit, which through the use of modular copy and an art direction system saw the creation of a unique ad for every dog. Dog owners were targeted, via their postal codes, in campaigns that included posters, digital display and digital out of home ads. The agency reported that in just one week website users increased by 68%, of which 28% visited as a result of the posters. A further result of the personalised ads was that organic search for "puppo" went up by 144%.

[Puppo - Every dog has its ad](#) from [Colenso BBDO](#) on [Vimeo](#).

> " *The clever and creative application of the available data, combined with media tech capabilities, helped tell a story in a relevant and appealing way.* "

While technology offers the tools and insight that inform creative work and underpin it with the necessary credibility and gravitas, data doesn't replace the magic. The magic happens when the data and the narrative come together, often in a highly visual way, to create a story that connects, resonates, and speaks to people. Because that's the power of storytelling.

So while data strategy should definitely be a focus area for businesses that want to secure their continued existence, the creative input and storytelling ability of human beings can never be discounted, in the next decade and beyond.

ABOUT SHAUNE JORDAAN

Shaune Jordaan is the co-founder and chief commercial officer at Hoorah Digital. He is passionate about delivering world class results to brands and building a digital culture that drives change. He is the former co-founder/CEO of an award winning performance digital agency with an extensive global client list. He's worked extensively across the globe, growing digital portfolios and leading digital transformation. He is one of Africa's most experienced digital leaders.

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