

Don't try to tame big data - rather try to leverage smart data

 By [Richard Mullins](#)

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Data is one of the most valuable assets any organisation owns today. But much as crude oil needs to be transformed into petroleum to power a motor vehicle, raw big data must first be refined before you can use it to fuel the growth of your business.

In practical terms, this means that you need to have a good understanding of the data resources you have access to as well as a clear plan for the ways you want to use it to grow your business. It's not how much data you have - despite the buzz about big data - but rather the quality of this data, how quickly you can access it and what you do with it.

Instead of trying to tame the gushing well of big data, rather think about what your business objectives are and which pieces of data will help you to meet them. In the context of marketing, you could consider how data will allow you to build a more complete picture of your customers so that you can interact with them with more relevant, effective, and timely messaging.

Some questions you could ask are:

- Which systems can we tap into for customer insights?
- How well are these systems integrated? How consistent is the customer data across these systems?
- How clean is our customer data - in other words, how confident are we that it is accurate, up-to-date and sourced with the customer's permission?
- Do we have access to contextual data about the customer journey?
- Does our data span all of our customer channels and touch points - does it give a complete view of our relationship with the customer?

- What are our campaign or marketing objectives? Customer acquisition or retention? And how do we map these objectives to measurable KPIs?

Today, marketers have access to a massive range of data sources, from transactional and CRM systems through to geo-location data gathered from mobile phones and behavioural data collected on the Web.

Leading marketers are looking carefully at which of these sources they can mine for data-driven decision-making. They are also creating data architectures that allow them to map out the sort of data they need to collect to meet their goals, as well as the tools and technologies they will use to do so.

In the end, you should not collect data for its own sake, but to build a deeper understanding of your business and the audience it serves. This, in turn, allows you to make better and faster decisions about how to deliver more meaningful, targeted and profitable engagements with your audience.

ABOUT RICHARD MULLINS

Richard Mullins is the director at Acceleration. He opened Acceleration's Johannesburg office in 2000 and has played an instrumental role in the growth of Acceleration in South Africa.

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