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Data industry must cut the jargon

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One of my biggest bugbears about the data industry is our fascination with the mechanics behind data analysis. Go to any data seminar or data specialist's website and its odds-on that they'll mention all the analysis techniques that they offer, using all manner of acronyms and techie terminology that the majority just won't and don't need to understand.

Conversely, if you pick up any advertising trade magazine or text book, no-one's banging on about the techniques behind the ad, proclaiming it a masterpiece because it was shot using a wide-angle lens, with a PAR 36 colour filter. Instead, the piece will more likely focus on the fact it is expected to succeed because the content engages its target audience of 64+ females.

Equally a telephone company doesn't bore its customers with the nuts and bolts behind making or receiving a call. The customer merely expects the phone to work and doesn't want to know much more beyond that, other than how much it costs.

Data has grown in prominence over the last decade. It is widely accepted that a marketing campaign which is tailored to the individual is more successful than one which appeals to the masses. Similarly, marketers realise the power of scrutinising their customer base to identify different groups of customers that can be used as a template to find lookalike prospects, or as the basis of a communications strategy designed to move individual customers up the purchasing cycle from their existing group into the next highest category.

The theory isn't rocket science and as a result is generally understood. Yet the data industry insists on dressing it up with the in-depth "how", most of which is unintelligible unless you have a firm grounding in statistics. As clouds gather on the economic horizon, it will be essential for data practitioners to alter the way they sell their services. The focus needs to shift from the mechanics to cold, hard results. It is far more effective to demonstrate to clients an uplift in ROI through showcasing great work (anonymised if necessary) than dazzle them (or not) with finer points of chaid algorithms or chi-square testing.

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