



Data can make our lives better, but we must proceed with caution

Posted by [Derek A. Lackey, Editor](#) / April 02, 2018

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Evidence-based and data-driven are the new buzzwords for decision making in business, government and social-service organizations. Who could disagree? What else would responsible leaders use to make their decisions? Gut feel and intuition are definitely out of fashion.

The volume, velocity and variety of data available to organizations are unprecedented. Computing power and storage capacity make it possible to analyze data like never before. And the continued automation and tracking of almost everything from seeing who is at the front door and monitoring a household's electricity usage, to following our digital and mobile breadcrumbs mean that the volume of data will continue to grow exponentially.

So when the questionable practices of Cambridge Analytica came to light recently, there was an immediate reaction sparking widespread discussion about the collection and use of data. Some see having access to vast amounts of data as an opportunity, while others feel it leaves them exposed. Consumers are nervous, but so are businesses or at least they should be. Having access to consumer data raises the stakes for organizations that have to carefully consider what they can and should do with information they collect.

For companies such as ours that specialize in providing data and analytics, addressing issues of privacy, consumer protection and transparency, along with ensuring delivery of expert methodology, appropriate technology and useful storytelling, are always top of mind.

Environics Analytics is the leading provider of data on demographics, lifestyle, mindset, behaviour and media preferences of Canadians to businesses, governments and not-for-profits. Integrating data from hundreds of authoritative sources, our geek team (which includes more than 100 qualified modellers and statisticians) annually creates privacy-compliant databases, which collectively contain approximately 40,000 variables for one million postal codes. These data are used by more than 2,000 organizations, who combine them with data they collect, to answer their key business questions.

What should not be forgotten in this discussion is how data-driven decision making, when done legally, ethically and responsibly, makes the lives of Canadians better. We've helped municipalities develop more efficient delivery of emergency services

such as fire, ambulance and policing. We also provide critical information that planners at all levels of government need to fund social services, streamline health care, conserve energy, deliver education and more.

Good analytics benefit consumers as well. All of us are busy. We want to receive messages and offers about things that are of interest to us, that make our days simpler, more efficient and help us find products and services easily while filtering out those that do not. We don't want to receive targeted ads for the next month in our web searches for a product we bought yesterday. And we want our local merchants to stock products that are tailored to our lifestyle.

When businesses and organizations do good analytics, everyone benefits. So what are good data and analytics practices?

Here are five principles from which we never deviate:...

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