



Image by [Jack Moreh](#)

The deal with data: How to apply it in a way that makes a measurable difference

The buzz around “data” has been going for a while now and remains very much the rage in 2020. Big data is the big deal that has the potential to transform a business by giving its clients what they want, when they want it, where they want it and how they want it.

Data is one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal today. But, as with any other tool, the power of the tool is limited by its application, which relies on the vision, creativity and expertise of those using the tool to turn it into something meaningful.

Data is nothing more than information, but the information in and of itself is of little use to marketers and advertisers. It’s only when clients understand that data-is-people that it starts to have an impact on both strategy and personified creative delivery.

0.5-Second attention economy

Recent research shows that on mobile we form a decision on the validity and appeal of the content we are viewing in less than a second. We’re in the age of the attention economy where we understand that human attention is a finite resource.

The slice of our attention that marketers and advertisers are constantly vying for is getting smaller and smaller, and smaller yet. This highlights a critical question, often overlooked by marketers; you can pay for reach and frequency, but can you pay for engagement?

I see the industry swinging in this regard. The importance of creative that is unique to the target segment is not even enough. I call it the WhatsApp test – if you are not forwarding the content to your own peer groups, then the creative missed the mark. This defines what data-led creative is.

Highly targeted, customised messages, ads or content that speak directly, relevantly and in engaging ways to the individual, while demonstrating an understanding of their needs, desires and entertainment profile, is where the wins are.

As we become increasingly accustomed to our online world being curated and customised for us, to the internet reflecting our individual needs and preferences, so the pressure on brands increase to ensure they delight us at every juncture.

What this means for marketers, advertisers and content developers is that they need to personalise, personalise and personalise some more.

The power of the personal

Personalisation works by placing the individual at the centre of the communication strategy, powered by real data, in a way that is simultaneously smart and discreet. It's not just about a name in an email newsletter, it's about a tailored message that demonstrates insight into the individual's interests, preferences and spending patterns.

Get it right and clients are delighted and immediately the brand gains equity in the form of recognition and respect.

Get it wrong though and the client is instantly irritated; An emailer from a large insurer serves as a great example. Sent in mid-November to a client in the Western Cape, the insurer offered information on how she could protect her vehicle against hail during the rainy season.

Sounds nice enough, except that November is not the rainy season in Cape Town. The location of the client is information that the insurer definitely had access to, and personalising emails of this nature to only send to clients located in rainy areas is almost rudimentary in how easy it is.

The result was that the client unsubscribed from the insurer's marketing mailers. That's a debit in the attention column.

Conversely, a campaign Hoorah created for Audi demonstrates how the combination of data and creative can lead to real personalisation.

By utilising the data Audi made available about their customers we were able to mine that information to create a personalised video to remind them when their vehicle warranty was due for renewal or extension. The video addressed the vehicle owner by name, referenced their specific Audi model, the date or kilometre reading at which the warranty would expire, as well as the dealership at which the vehicle was purchased.

This data was the crux of the message and allowed us to create a personalised video for the individual that addressed their specific vehicle concern. The data was the foundation around which the creative was developed.

Jason Liebenberg, Director of Personalisation at Hoorah, had this to say about a campaign he ran for Audi: "Audi wanted to increase the perception of value around its after-sales service and extended service plans, and the ROI was significant, even from the first campaign. Across the board we're finding that hyper personalisation has a higher perceived value, which sees higher levels of engagement and a 'how did they do that?' reaction that, in turn, encourages action."

Data is a queen and creative is king – a royal combination!

The Audi case study shows that by using data, in creative, the most important thing to still remember is that there is a human being at the receiving end of the message. While data should be the foundation of strategic thinking, it can't cloud the creative or make the message seem forced or formulaic. And that's where the flair of the creative director becomes more relevant than ever. The savvy ECD knows that creative is what tugs at the heartstrings ultimately, but that leveraging the data is a smart way gives the creative wings to soar.

Here at Hoorah Digital, are the first to sing data's praises, it is also important to recognise what data can't do. It can't be personable in and of itself. It can't surprise, engage, delight or invoke much emotion by its mere existence. That's where the creative still triumphs. And the real ROI is found where data drives creative.

The application of the right kind of data, as with technology in general, is that it has the ability to streamline operational efficiencies and strengthen the quality of decision making. When it comes to creative in marketing, and advertising in particular, data takes the guesswork out of the equation. Rather than speculating about what the client needs or wants, or relying on the creative director's "intuition", the data offers measurable insights into actual customer behaviour and preferences.

It feels like marketers are coming to terms with the power and potential of data, throughout the industry, and they are increasingly aware of its transformative capability. And while data is big, it's crucial to pay heed to the fact that data is still about people, and the data is merely a tool for understanding and relating to people in a better, more delightful way.

Article by Jay Thomson, Co-Founder Hoorah Digital



*Jay Thomson is co-founder of **Hoorah Digital**, an advanced digital media and marketing performance consultancy. The agency works with in-house teams using its technology and expertise to optimise clients' media mix, to bring down overheads and to maximise the profitability of their digital channels.*

