



Is Your Data Cheating on You?

Five Signs You and Your Data are Growing Apart



Your relationship with your data can be a lot like a love affair. Think about it. At first you're head over heels. Then, suddenly, there's a distance. Information that used to flow freely is withheld. Simple questions go unanswered. Before, the world seemed so certain. Now it's all confusion. You just don't know where you stand. It's time to admit: your data doesn't love you anymore.

How can you avoid such an unhappy breakup? Be prepared. Here are five signs that you and your data are growing apart.

1 It's showing up late

There are few things more frustrating than a loved one who constantly arrives late for important relationship events, like dinner with the parents, your engagement party – or your wedding. How does that make you feel? Bitter, spiteful and, worst of all, ignored.

The same is true of your relationship with data. If it's not real time – or at least right time – you feel empty and unfulfilled. More important, timely data is vital to making informed decisions. If your data is always late or out of date, you run the risk of making some very bad choices.

To be an effective decision-maker, you need fast access to relevant, accurate information. You need data that provides true business insights. You and your data must be able to make sweet music together. But such harmony is rare. In fact, nearly 50 percent of companies report they have made a bad business decision as a result of stale data, according to a global survey of C-level executives conducted by Kelton Research.

If your data is not timely and accurate and if you don't have an effective strategy for improving the situation, you too will make poor decisions. And they'll result in lost sales, declining market share and lonely nights lingering in the office, wondering where it all went wrong.

Of course, not every piece of data needs to be refreshed every second of the day. But the more timely the data is, the better it is. This is not easy to achieve. With so much data flooding into your business, it's hard to sort it all out. But knowing the shelf life of your data is crucial to your business decisions. If your data is expired before it hits your desk, it will end up breaking your heart.

2 Your data is giving you the runaround

Everyone enjoys a little game of "hard to get." But when hard to get becomes impossible to get, people tend to get frustrated. The same is true of data. If your data resides in dozens of places – business intelligence tools, applications, spreadsheets, emails, etc. – you're probably spending too much time chasing and not enough time getting. Worst-case scenario: you throw up your arms and forget the whole thing.

Data can be a big tease. It's all around you but when you set off to capture it, it's often just out of reach. It's the beautiful figure vanishing around the corner. It's the romantic conquest that you can't quite successfully complete.

And now, with the rise of SaaS and cloud computing, data is more elusive than ever. Most cloud applications do not offer tools for data integration. A recent report from Appirio found that only 4 percent of organizations with cloud-based applications have actually tried to integrate cloud-based data.

So, despite an explosion of data, there is still no intuitive way to access it or make sense of it. (Which really does sound like the opposite sex.)

Ultimately, data should work for you, not the other way around. Big data shouldn't be a mysterious partner. It should be an intimate one, with the potential to unlock new insights from previously unreachable places. But that rapport requires a means to access and analyze enormous amounts of newly available information without all the legwork. That's when you'll finally have the data relationship others can only dream of.

3 You're living in the past

How happy are you in your current relationship? Do you find yourself pining for those days when you couldn't keep your hands off each other? You can't keep living in the past. If the flame has gone out, you need to find ways to keep it burning.

People have a tough time letting go. But a successful relationship is about moving forward. In other words, just because your best moves worked 10 years ago, that doesn't mean they will work today.

You and your data are no different. In your relationship together, you have to find new ways to measure and improve your performance. You can't rely on the same tired metrics you used a decade ago. You need to be quick on your feet and come up with fresh solutions every day. If you're letting outdated measures gauge the success of your business, you might not be in business much longer.

So what can you do to change the mood? You need to keep up with the latest literature, and, um, websites.

That's right. You need to use all the data at your disposal. For instance, don't rely solely on slow, patchy feedback mechanisms like customer surveys and printed comment cards to gauge client satisfaction.

You should be getting immediate feedback from sources like Twitter, Facebook and ratings-and-reviews sites. If you're not, you're missing a huge opportunity. You need to know what customers are saying online and you need to put all that social data to work for your business. And that's just one example of a new measure of business success that can create a serious competitive advantage.

So don't waste your time wondering why your lover isn't bringing you flowers anymore. Figure out instead how you're going to get that Swiss watch.

4 Communication breaks down

Honest and open communication is the foundation of any successful relationship. A breakdown in communication is usually one of the first signs of a major relationship problem. Some partners just find it hard to be honest. Why? Not because they're cheating. It's a defense mechanism to avoid problems or confrontation. People tell little lies because they think it's what their partner wants to hear. Things like, "Of course you don't look fat in those jeans." But avoiding the truth today can lead to far worse problems tomorrow.

“Just because your best moves worked 10 years ago, that doesn't mean they will work today.”

Similarly, if an organization or department has a habit of spinning or massaging data before it goes up to the executive ranks or out to the public, trouble can't be far behind. Checking data for accuracy is one thing but rounding a number when it shouldn't be rounded or

applying "logic" so that the data shows what a department wants it to, rather than reality, is a major communication problem.

The city of Detroit, for example, was recently accused of fudging its numbers on homicide because it wanted to avoid being labeled the "murder capital of the United States." Critics charged that the city was counting murders differently from almost every other major city in the U.S. and as a result was intentionally underreporting its number of homicides. Yes, it avoided the title, but city officials got assaulted in the media.

We all want to look good and present ourselves in the best possible light; but you have hard decisions to make and only with accurate data do you stand a chance of making them correctly. For a healthy and productive data relationship, honest communication in the form of direct and unfiltered access to the data that matters most is a must.

5 There's just no spark

Even if you do everything right, if there's no magic a relationship is doomed to fail. You can keep waiting for the sparks to fly, but if it's not there, well, it's just not there. It's all about the "wow" factor. Do fireworks go off when that special someone walks in the room?

Data needs a wow factor as well. To inspire, data not only needs to be compelling, it needs to be presented in an exciting way. But for the most part presentations are dominated by boring tables and text that fail to inspire.

Don't believe it? A new study from SlideRocket found that most people hate PowerPoint presentations so much, they'd rather give up sex than sit through another stultifying PowerPoint.

The good news is that it is possible to spice up your data and pull out those juicy insights that make a real difference for you business.

Just like a hot new look can make the sparks fly anew, visualizing data dramatically improves the insight you're

able to glean from it, according to research from TDWI. And that advantage is even more pronounced when the visualization is rich and interactive, beyond just simple charts and graphs. If the magic is missing, it's time to ditch the tables and text and consider a visual approach.

Meet Domo

If any of these telltale signs sound all too familiar, it may be time to consider Domo, a new form of business intelligence that can help keep your relationship with your data fresh, exciting and strong. By bringing all of it – finance, sales, HR, compliance and more – together in one intuitive, visual interface, Domo gives you real-time access to all the information you need in one place. No more searching. No more waiting. No more doubt.

To learn more, visit www.domo.com or call 1.800.899.1000.

