

# SEIZE THE DATA

Dr Graham Leask explores how industry can make the most of a modern phenomenon.

WORDS BY *Dr Graham Leask*

Listening to a recent talk on ‘big data’ I was reminded that the pharmaceutical industry is awash with data, but devoid of information. What this means in practice is that data – although capable in skilful hands of becoming a useful source of insight – rarely fulfils this role for pharma companies.

## FIVE SINS

There are five reasons. Firstly, over-dependence on CRM systems, combined with the aggregation of inputs that are better separate. Although an important role of the CRM is undoubtedly as custodian of customer records, getting data into your CRM is often a great deal easier than getting useful information out.

Secondly, standard use of smart dashboards produces a set of predetermined charts that display a chosen view of reality and act to distract attention away from the key issues.

Thirdly, there is an over-reliance upon Excel-based analysis that is simply not adequate to handle the complexities of modern, highly-correlated pharmaceutical data.

Fourth, there is a lack of training which will equip representatives to use data in clever ways, and direct their efforts, building competitive advantages. Finally, the use of marketing audits aimed at measuring the delivery of marketing messages, the methodology of which corrupts the very essence of what they are trying to measure.

These problems are not universal but common and each weakens the value of our data in its own way. Many CRM systems, for example, dumb down the complex interaction between a representative and a customer to a binary choice of call or meeting. This loses valuable information that disguises the important representative behaviours. (see visual).

## ANALYSE THIS

Universal use of dashboards may be reminiscent of Soma in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Used selectively they can be valuable, but they are the exception in report form. If a standard deck of charts is routinely circulated, soon they are seen as ‘company wallpaper’ and little notice is paid to them. I once attended a meeting where a large number of charts were presented; the use of so many disguised the one important chart lurking within.

The analytics engine used by many companies is still Excel. This is fine if you want to check your budget, but using these tools to produce linear forecasts can produce the false impression of a robust and statistically significant relationship.

Modern statistics have advanced tremendously since Sir Francis Galton experimented on a packet of seeds in 1875. Linear regression, although undoubtedly useful, relies on four underlying critical assumptions, most commonly violated by complex pharmaceutical data.

This renders many analyses as an unsafe base on which to make decisions. Similarly flawed is the overuse of correlation where, for example, a really interesting 0.992 correlation can be shown between the US spending on science, space, technology and suicides by hanging, strangulation and suffocation.

## NATURAL SELECTION

One anecdote perhaps summarises the issue. In one company, having spent vast sums on a new sales force support system, one manager reported to me that trying to use it was “like trying to take a drink from a fire hose”. This is not to say that data is not useful. The key question is – what is the *right* data?

If we accept the old adage that nothing is sold until someone convinces another person, then the crux of the effective representative’s role is to maximise customer contact on their assigned territory. Here, the key question is; which are the right customers to call upon and what is the optimal frequency of contact?

The first of these is down to a mixture of local knowledge and correct targeting, where the biggest change has been availability of the NHS Prescribing Data. This allows us to precisely tailor our sales argument to focus on relevant competitors.

Call frequency is a specialist analysis that I spent a year working on at Aston University; work that culminated in winning the BOBI Award for commercial analysis. Two findings here are pertinent. Firstly, the effective call frequency corridor is often lower than you may think. Secondly, promotion doesn’t occur in a vacuum - correct alignment to the environment is critical. In conclusion; use selective data well, rather than rely on a house of cards. 📄

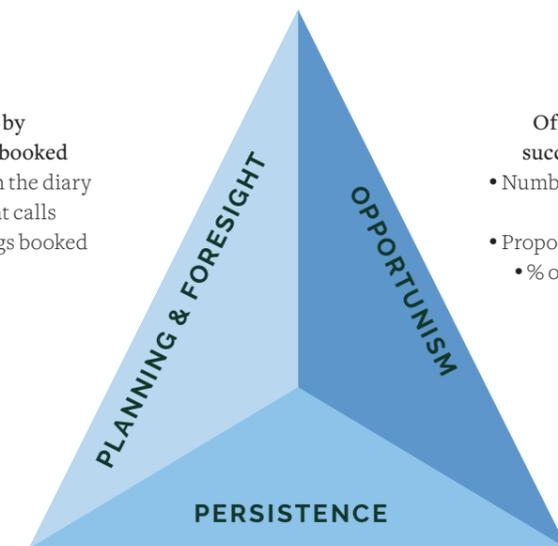
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## The Key Dimensions of Field Force Strategy

- Measured by appointments booked
- % of appt calls in the diary
    - Appointment calls
  - Surgery meetings booked

- Often the mark of a more successful rep measured by
- Number of appt calls seen on spec
    - Total spec calls
  - Proportion of hard-to-see doctors
    - % of total calls seen by small meetings and spec



- Measured by follow up calls
- Proportion of meeting contacts followed up within two weeks
  - Proportion of target doctors seen