

Data Management – Mind Data Like a Child

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It should go without saying that caring for your data is a key aspect of any modern business – large or small. But what does that mean in practice? While the larger organisations can luxuriate in having an army of data analysts offering insight into any given customer transaction, the reality for SME can be vastly different.

But smaller businesses can learn from the basic approach. From a customer perspective, your data should be considered one of your most important assets. So, like taking care of your own children, here are some first principles for getting the most out of your data.

Protect it

Data storage & compliance

You should ensure that your data is stored safely and securely. Here are the top five things to remember when managing your data:

1. Make sure that you have a nightly back up of your data, in case the file or database becomes corrupted.
2. If you're storing your data yourself, you should ensure that accessibility to the data is restricted.
3. Ensure a password policy is agreed and enforced for the storage and transfer of data.
4. USB ports on PCs should be disabled to ensure that data cannot be removed from the company easily.
5. Enforce a clean desk policy to reduce the risk of unauthorised access to, loss of or damage to company or client information.

Alternatively, you might decide to use an external supplier to store your data. The advantage here is that the data management company is bound by law to have appropriate security measures in place to prevent unauthorised access, disclosure, accidental loss or destruction of client data. This gives many companies peace of mind knowing that they don't have to worry about the security of their data.

Spend Plenty of Quality Time with It

Analyse and Segment

It might not seem the most interesting way to spend your time, but often taking a little time out to look at your recent sales figures and customer information can throw up some interesting finds. Take, for instance, simply looking at the address data of your newest customers.

You might find that half of your recent customers have come from a new county or country. Ask yourself why – is there something about your product or service that is significantly helping customers in that region?

Furthermore, do these sales present other opportunities – do these new segments offer up more opportunities in similar catchment areas in other parts of Ireland, or indeed, the world? Plenty of Irish data service providers can analyse your current customers in Ireland, and use various mapping tools to find similar populations based on various factors including demographics, spending power and life-stage amongst others.

Taking a little time to look back may well through up some new insights and opportunities for taking your business forward.

Nurture it

Let it grow and develop

Understand that your customer or prospect database is more than a fixed, unchanging pile of names and numbers. With some care and attention, and a good diligence in maintaining and updating records (whether manually or automatically) your data will begin to show you additional growth opportunities.

You might find that your sales team has had some recent success in selling more products to your existing customer base. This might mean that your marketing strategy should shift from new business acquisition to one of cross sell or retention.

As you see your database develop, you'll often see that the change itself becomes the opportunity.

Handle With Care

Data Transfer & Compliance

Your data isn't much use to you if you can't take the above insight and put it to some practical use. This may involve sending it out to an external agency to create a printed mailing or email campaign.

If you're ever transferring your customer data, at the very least password protect the file and communicate the password separately, preferably verbally. Ideally a company should choose one of the many available on-line file transfer tools like, Sharefile, Dropbox, SFTP or Cisco Envelope. All members of staff who have access to data should be aware of the process of transfer chosen and trained in how to use it.

Learn from it

Measurement and Accountability

Build a feedback loop into your data strategy. When you're building a data driven marketing campaign, say, to win back former customers, adopt a test and learn approach. Send your message to 10% of your target audience, watch the response and then scale out to the full list, adjusting if necessary.

As you build on these kinds of approaches, you will begin to learn the 'personality' of your own data. You'll learn how many records become obsolete and how quickly. This is known as information decay and can arise from poor data entry, bad maintenance, or simply your target customers moving roles or companies.

So don't be put off by present hype surrounding Big Data and Analytics. Put simply, taking a simple, controlled approach to managing your data can reap enormous rewards in short to medium term. Maintenance of a viable, clean, customer file can offer your company a wealth of opportunity. From providing more clarity on existing challenges through to identifying new sales opportunities the data your company holds can be key.

And as with looking after your children, you'll find the best rewards come when you handle it well.

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