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Dateline AGL – Marketing for small businesses by the numbers

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Using data sets for marketing micro and small businesses is not the exclusive domain of big business and transnational brands. Data are useful for all businesses, especially micro and small businesses where every day the owner awakes and says, “Today I must make a buck.” Where are you going to find that dollar? Who has an extra dollar to give to you for something in return? What is it that someone wants from you and do they really need it? Data can be converted to information that is in turn converted to knowledge. For the astute businessperson, knowledge from many sources of information becomes wisdom and the path to sustained success.

Mention of words like data, mathematics, analysis, statistics, charts, and graphs, may evoke nightmarish memories of high school math classes to many small business entrepreneurs, and exciting pathways to discovery for others. Data collection and manipulation is not the sole domain of an accountant or bookkeeper. It should be a top-level skill of all micro and small business entrepreneurs.

Small and big data for small businesses

Small data should be understood and used by all small businesses. Big data, however, should not be overlooked or avoided, and it is possible to access information from big datasets that can augment the data collection and analysis activities of small business entrepreneurs.



The differences between big data and small data are the variety, volume, and velocity of the data. Big data are diverse types of data that are unstructured

and structured. Small data sets tend to be much smaller in size with less variety and more easily captured because they are generated at a much slower pace.

Small data provides small businesses with meaningful insights from big data secondary sources and local secondary and some primary sources that can be used immediately. Small data can be quickly organized and presented in various graphical formats to generate information that is understood. Entrepreneurs can take the information and use it for marketing plans and tactics. Big data collection and analysis are used for major business decisions such as expansions into new markets and corporate growth.

Data useful to the small business entrepreneur

In most jurisdictions there are public datasets at the national, provincial/state, regional and local levels. Company and business sites on social media generate metrics as do websites. There are reports published on the internet and housed in public libraries that provide secondary and tertiary-level data. Small businesses can conduct surveys on their own using free online survey platforms to generate primary data. Websites of competitors and target audiences include many types of data. And business cards collected from clients, prospects generate data that can be used within the laws and rules of individual privacy and data use.

Sources of data

The number one source is an email database assembled by the entrepreneur. Every company engaged in marketing outside of a neighbourhood needs an email database to augment online marketing tactics. These would include email marketing campaigns to collect original primary-level data.

Municipalities hold volumes of secondary and tertiary data including demographics, regulatory mapping, utilities and transportation mapping, capital works budgets that show projects and facilities to be funded along with schedules, and strategic plans for growth and development. Regional governments and Chambers of Commerce publish industrial directories online and offline.

Local libraries are repositories for volumes of primary, secondary, and tertiary data that can be accessed online and offline.

Collection and analysis of data in the quest for information

Collecting secondary and tertiary data is an easy activity. Collecting primary data through surveys and interviews is complicated and good data collected that can be useful hinges on the art and science of asking a question. Poorly conducted surveys fall into the saying, “garbage in and garbage out.” Study how to craft questions and design surveys before reaching out to clients and prospects. Know well the purpose of the survey.



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Marketing micro and small businesses by the numbers to generate data is a modern business development activity to find new markets, new clients, create client/customer loyalty and prevent competitor intrusion. Terms like 'big data' need not marginalize the information-gathering of a small business entrepreneur. Small data has a place in marketing and is ideal for most small businesses.