



WHITE PAPER

# DATA-DRIVEN HEADLINES

A Guide to Using Data to Drive Media Coverage



Over the course of just a few years, big data - the collection, storage and analysis of high volumes of complex information - has gone from insider terminology to mainstream public discourse. Indeed, big data's rapid ascent in just about every industry has recently led some commentators to express "data fatigue," spurring debate about the true value of big data and its ability to meet the expectations of its most ardent evangelists. However, regardless of whether or not big data is more hype than substance, one thing is clear - the "datafication" of everything, from consumer preferences to public health, has become an inescapable part of life in the digital age.

Against this changing backdrop, however, the most important question for PR practitioners remains the same. How can we use the power of data in order to generate results for our clients? But while data of all shapes and sizes continues to be top of mind for communications professionals, its strategic and effective use remains elusive. What's more, an emphasis on big data's value for PR, while important, has often veiled the fact that you don't need big data to generate big headlines.

Though it should be no surprise that communications professionals are more at home working with language than deciphering algorithms, when it comes to using data to build a successful media relations campaign, you don't need an army of data scientists, statisticians and analysts to get the job done. In this article, we focus on how to put different types of data to work in order to drive media coverage and increase your organization's share of voice.

## Understanding Data as a Media Relations Tool

With all the talk about big data it is easy to forget that there are plenty of other types of data out there that can serve as the cornerstone of a strong media relations campaign. Below we break down the three types of data organizations can use to generate headlines and make news.

- **Proprietary Data** - Considered the "gold standard," proprietary data is about more than just ownership. It's data that you and you alone have access to as a result of your organization's resources, technology or customer base. What makes proprietary data so powerful, especially from a media relations' perspective, is the inability of other organizations to replicate it. In a world where data sets on a wide variety of topics are now publically available, the ability to produce exclusive and original data is an invaluable tool for media relations and content development.
- **Commissioned Data** - Unlike proprietary data, which is produced in-house, commissioned data is generated through partnerships and collaborations with third parties. The most common form of data used by companies, commissioned data includes market research, opinion polls and customer surveys conducted by professional research or analyst firms. Though potentially costly, these studies can produce significant and novel findings on industry trends that can be leveraged into relevant stories ripe for media consumption. This type of data may be viewed as more credible if it is produced in conjunction with a reliable and recognized source.
- **Curated Data** - With the plethora of third party data already out there, there's a good chance someone has already done the work for you. Companies can mine preexisting studies and reports from a wide range of organizations, including government agencies, analyst firms and academic institutions, to cull information that may have initially been underpublicized or even unreported. In addition, synthesizing a number of reports on a specific topic is a great way to present old data in a new light. While curated data is the least costly and most readily available data option for organizations, it is no less efficacious when used strategically.



	Proprietary	Comissioned	Curated
Source	Company's own resources: business, customers, prospects, technology, products etc.	Research project conducted with a third-party.	Collected from existing third-party studies typically in the public domain.
Pros	If data is exclusive to the organization, it can be highly valuable and difficult to duplicate.	If the right partner is chosen, it can lend credibility to the research.	By aggregating information from recognized sources, time-to-market can be quick and affordable.
Cons	May be considered biased based on the source.	Typically costly and more time-consuming to conduct.	It may be hard to find the exact data or statistics to support your agenda.
Cost	<b>Free - \$\$</b> Although the information may be free, it may take time or additional resources to extract it from the company.	<b>\$\$\$</b> Commissioned surveys may cost as little as \$1,000 but prices can rise to \$30,000 or more when partnering with an industry analyst firm.	<b>\$</b> Typically, these resources are free to the public but collecting and analyzing the data may take time and resources.

## Using Data to Drive Media Relations: 7 Tips for Success

A strong narrative and compelling story lies at the heart of every successful media relations campaign. In a culture where data is pervasive, the use of numbers and statistics can be an especially persuasive way to tell your organization's story. Data can offer key insights that resonate with your target audiences and bolster the legitimacy and credibility of a story in ways that language alone might fail to accomplish. With this in mind, below are seven approaches for using data to generate media coverage.

### 1. A Single Data Point Can Make Headlines

Working with data can be daunting, especially for the uninitiated. However, when it comes to media relations, even small data can produce big results. Truth is, you don't need a large and complex survey with thousands of participants to make an impact. Small data sets, while not statistically significant, still have value from a media standpoint. Even a snapshot of just five CEOs or a sample of 100 customers nationwide can provide a powerful news hook. Sometimes you only need one salacious statistic to get the attention of the media. To be sure, every media outlet has its own criteria for accepting studies and survey results. Taking the time to become familiar with the standards of your target publications is essential to securing coverage.



### 2. Aggregate Data to Create New Data

Finding unique data doesn't always require initiating a new study or commissioning an original report. As we mentioned in our breakdown of curated data, with the plethora of information readily available via the web, the information your organization needs is probably already out there; it may just require a little digging. By synthesizing the data available in multiple industry reports your organization can lend greater credibility to an issue and offer audiences a more comprehensive understanding of the data than each individual report can accomplish on its own.



### 3. Examine Data Over Time to Identify Industry and Market Trends

When it comes to finding relevant data points for a media relations campaign, a little bit of good research can go a long way. Using a creative eye to examine industry reports and studies that are released annually can reveal information about significant industry trends. Want to know how certain issues have changed over the course of a number of years? The answers lie in looking at data over time. While these reports may already be well-trodden ground, looking at these studies year over year might provide insights regarding industry trends that have gone unnoticed.



#### 4. Know What Questions to Ask (and what not to ask)

While objectivity remains the standard for producing scientific studies, in PR our responsibility is to our clients and their business objectives. When designing surveys and opinion polls, carefully constructed questions can help provide the support you need to buttress your organization's agenda while still adhering to standards of truth and ethics. Remaining attentive to the wording and placement of questions, as well as answer choices, is crucial for producing valuable results. Conversely, research design is as much about knowing what to omit as it is about knowing what to include. Simply put, if there's a question you don't want the answer to, don't ask it.



#### 5. Data Doesn't Have to Be Expensive

Though commissioned data might come with a hefty price tag, access to data does not have to drain your organization's budget. In addition to curating third-party data, become savvy about using the focus group that's already around you. For example, if your organization has a strong social media following, a single, well-crafted question might net a substantial number of responses. Similarly, placing a survey on your website provides a low cost option for collecting data that, while not scientifically sound, still has major PR value.



#### 6. Tap Your Organizational Resources

It's quite possible you're already sitting on a treasure trove of data and just don't know it. In fact, a host of untapped data may lie in your company's infrastructure. Look at your web patterns, what do they tell you? What can you learn from examining your customer service calls, email responses and social media traffic? Tapping your organization's resources with an eye towards extracting relevant data will unearth significant information that speaks not only to your key audiences and customer base but also to your industry as a whole.



#### 7. Visualize the Headline

In the digital age, audiences no longer restrict their content consumption to the written word alone. Determining the best way to tell the "data story" is essential to producing results and ensuring that your core audiences remain engaged with the content you produce. With traditional news outlets embracing new media platforms, one of the most effective ways to leverage your data is through the use of images and other visual assets.



While whitepapers, executive summaries and press releases are certainly still powerful media relations' tools, infographics, webinars and slideshows provide even more compelling formats for data consumption.

As communications experts we already know how to tell a great story and data can provide the most compelling details in that narrative. Incorporating data into story lines, or letting the data dictate the story, can yield significant results. From big data to small data, facts and figures can be news in their own right, and by following these seven tips, your organization will be well positioned for success.

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