

# Why does the word 'data' drive fear into the hearts of many marketers?

By [Velia Duncan](#)

11 Jun 2015

Is it because it conjures up an image of reams of numbers scrolling down a screen; when the reason you entered the field of marketing in the first place is because it dealt with real people, and not abstract figures? You're not alone...

Since time immemorial, marketing has been regarded as more of a 'left-brained' activity; a career that involves more creative thinking and less mathematical reasoning. But then came CRM, and with it a whole host of number-based methodologies involving statistics, value segmentation and predictive modelling.

It's enough to give any left brain a whole brain headache. (And that's without factoring in the inevitable collaboration with the dreaded IT department!)



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But what if you changed the way you thought about data? What if, instead of picturing reams of numbers scrolling down a screen, you pictured a crowd of people standing in a mall?

Because in reality, that's what those figures are. Each abstract number represents a real person, with real passions, real preferences and a real purse.

At Arc South Africa, we believe that when you start thinking about people - instead of numbers - you will free yourself from the fear of data, and instead begin to embrace the very real advantages that data can bring to bear on your business.

If you are in retail, for example, we wouldn't start out by looking at your books. Instead, we ask people-based questions relating to recency, frequency and monetary value. We ask "Who is buying your products?", "When last did they shop with you, and how often do they shop at your stores?", and "How much do they typically spend?"

Once we understand these basics, we start to understand which behaviours need to change and which need to be reinforced to achieve specific objectives. We also begin to build an understanding of your most valuable customer segments, or those with the most future potential value, in order to inform where to focus marketing spend.

This might sound simplistic - but getting started is often the hardest part of implementing a data-driven strategy.

Breaking things down into their simplest form often helps us to understand not just who we're talking to, but also why we're talking to them and how we should talk to them, what we want them to do and how we're going to motivate or inspire their action or change in behaviour.

The benefit of understanding data from a people-perspective also helps marketers explain their strategy to others who are equally baffled (and quite often bored!) of the numbers game. People like the IT department, the creative team, and often the Board of Directors.

Thereafter, get the specialists to do the data heavy-lifting to create segmentations, build predictive models, and analyse results. And get them to translate the results from data speak into marketing speak. That's our job.

These are the results that the creative team will use to create meaningful, relevant communications. But they can only do this if they understand them.

The richer and more accurate the data, the clearer the insights, the better the magic.

Data should be your informer, technology your enabler but insights linked to human behaviour should always remain your driver.

At Arc, we believe that when we are creating human value, we are creating value for our clients.

## ABOUT VELIA DUNCAN

Velia Duncan has been in the Direct Marketing and CRM industry for 16 years. Armed with a B.Bus Sc degree from UCT, she started her career in retail at Stuttafords. After travelling and completing a further diploma in interior design, Duncan cut her DM teeth working for Reader's Digest as Product Manager on multiple product ranges in South Africa and Africa.

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