



Finding Value in Data

Companies are getting good at hunting every database nook, social cranny, and sensor corner to flesh out data and store it for actionable insight. But getting value out of data, making it pop and sizzle to reach objectives and beat the competition is still a raw pursuit.

If data is the new oil, then pumping it out and trucking it off is mechanical and labor-intensive. Fueling projects, teams and revenue streams with valuable information requires planning and execution.

MIT's Sloan Center for Information Systems Research (CISR) has a lot to say about data value. Jeanne Ross, CISR principal research scientist, offers some savvy advice for closing the gap between petabytes of information and sustainable success.

Strategy – Adopting a data-rich culture guided by analytics starts with a strategy. Simply hoarding data is not a strategy. Insight into customers and markets, speed to attack burning initiatives, and intelligence for making better decisions requires top-down buy-in. Really, a strategic plan to wrap the data around. Align your data with a strategy, and then go solve a problem.

Goals – Decide what's most important. Whether your goal is squeezing the supply chain, or designing better products, analytics serve as a weapon to accomplish organizational goals. Moving forward, implement processes that drive solutions. Analytics are a learning experience because not all data is created equal. Quantum leaps in revenue and efficiencies are achieved goal over goal.

Leader – See your analytics initiative through one set of eyes. Appoint somebody data czar and build a data team around a common direction. Define exactly what data means to your company, not individual departments. If the shop floor goes in one direction, and customer service goes in another, data integrity suffers and reporting will be inconsistent.

Security – Although not a Sloan hot button, bringing all this information out in the open comes with a risk. Now, with critical decisions made using data bubbling from outside sources, employees in non-IT functions suddenly have the keys to the kingdom. If good BI is about sharing, then define ownership and ensure employees driving the data bus are vetted for access to sensitive areas.

Technology – Part of the investment in analytics is landing the right technology. And part of the data analytics wave is riding on cheaper tools and open-source technologies. Startups in analytics, search and data warehouse appliances are delivering affordable, more manageable applications. In the background, moving everything to the cloud saves time and money. Pushing everything through mobile devices boosts both adoption and agility.

Vision – Having the right analytics vision means applying enterprise capabilities. Don't just analyze data, put it into action. Again, enterprise is much better at gathering and storing data, but opportunities get wasted when success isn't framed from start to finish. Without a healthy vision, you might enjoy isolated victories, but sabotage progress with a lot of distractions and failures.

Key takeaway: Articulate an analytics vision and stick to it. You'll find value in the processes, people and technology capable of making data pop and sizzle.