

## Databases Don't Measure Motivation

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*Automated persuasion is the Holy Grail of quantitatively biased data base designers. However, data base histories are, at best, probabilistic estimates of customer behavior and do not make use of more sophisticated qualitative motivational profiling tools. While usually absent from web designer thinking, qualitative motivational profiling can be integrated into data base designs. However, qualitative profiling would require that designers add to their repertoire a set of qualitative motivational profiling tools. Clearly the quantitative or qualitative tool must fit the task. This contemporary confusion is corrected by separating the marketing and market research tools into quantitative or qualitative applications according to the proper roles they play and the tasks they must engage. Key Words: Motivational Profiling, Data Warehousing, Database Mining, Content Analysis, Data Base Design, Marketing Strategy, Qualitative Market Research, Quantitative Market Research, Customer Behavior, and Micro-Demographics*

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Television entertains us with detectives Lt. Columbo and Gil Grissom of CSI. These shows routinely demonstrate a basic fact: No behavior of any kind occurs unless there are three essential ingredients: motive, opportunity, and means. If detectives have these three sets of facts they catch the bad guys. If marketers have these three sets of facts, they catch customers.

- Motive measures why people want what they want (e.g., the belief that it is good)
- Opportunity measures access to what they want (e.g., can they find it?)
- Means measures the ability to obtain what they want (e.g., can they afford it?)

Customers are definitely subject to these three key ingredients of customer behavior that apply to *any* marketing campaign. No campaign can be successful without a clear understanding of all three. In this essay I argue that the right tools to profile all three components are crucial to solid decision-making information. This requires knowing and utilizing qualitative data and analysis in an enterprise completely dominated by numerical values.

Keep in mind that *motive*, *opportunity*, and *means* apply to any individual, in any context. While all three are necessary in the art of persuasion, it is important to note that motive is of a different logical type. Originally discovered by me in my role of psychotherapist and now utilizing those three components, (motive opportunity and means) as a corporate consultant, the major common denominators of human behavior are linguistic. Motivation is delivered, cognitively speaking, by language mechanisms.

Today's technology allows analysis of those mechanisms. Most experts consider those mechanisms to be qualitative.

Motivation is not limited to marketing. Motivation works across any and all disciplines where people are involved. Anyone who is a boss or has a boss is interested in motivation and how it works. That means virtually all of us are involved in motivational issues. Anyone who is a customer or has customers has a vested interest, which again means virtually all of us. Anyone who is or was a child has the same vested interest in what is or isn't motivating. We can't avoid being involved in motives any more than we can avoid breathing. For the qualitative expert, motivation seems to be a special case of qualitative phenomena in that it has clearly defined mechanisms of action, language mechanisms.

In the context of marketing, to insure that a marketing effort will succeed, marketing executives must have accurate information about these three determinants of customer behavior in any given market. That means selecting the right kind of tools, in terms of the roles the tools play, to generate decision making-information that will lead to marketing success.

Naturally, success in marketing depends heavily on high quality research. Researchers need to know how these three components set the framework for evaluating the most effective use of modern research tools. Opportunity and means are best defined by familiar quantitative tools and web-based systems that analyze demographics and micro-demographics. As described by Richebacher (2001) data gathering, warehousing, and analysis work this way:

Current Web site data collection methods and analysis rely primarily on user actions such as page requests, clicking on pictures, sending email, or filling out forms. Log analyzer tools summarize this data as counts, most requested pages, exit-and-entry pages, popular paths traveled, visitor counts, referrer counts and so on. (p. 32)

To have a complete profile, the quantitative findings (the opportunity and means components of behavior) that Richebacher mentions should be smartly combined with motivational profiles, generated by state of the art qualitative methods of profiling customer motives (Yeager, 2003). This would be the best of all possible worlds. In fact we are a long way from that Disney-like world.

### **Just the Facts**

Once you realize that you have a persuasive situation to deal with, you look to resolve it. Motivation follows some general structural parameters, but each motive is unique in the relationship of its component parts. Like fingerprints, we all have them, but each is unique. We need to profile those parts to know how to connect the facts into a convincing story so we can intervene persuasively.

Some of the more obvious components of any motive are:

- Your situation, context, or problem (all synonyms) that you are in.
- Your role in that situation (solo choice, shared choice, etc).

- Your goal in that situation (i.e., your motive, what you want).
- Your goal criteria – the desired features and benefits related to the goal.
- Your perceived choices in the situation (brand a, brand b, brand c, ...)
- Your anticipated outcome (obtaining what I want)

These components are characteristic of any motive. Those components are *facts*, and these kinds of motivational facts are a good place to start fact-finding. This kind of fact-finding, used by the most persuasive of professionals, is not based on probabilities. It is based on, well, persuasive *facts*. To understand any given motive you must have in hand this minimum list of facts in order to find out what will be persuasive. Web designers shortcut this necessary fact-finding process because they think in computer terms instead of motivational terms.

We need a comprehensive perspective on the three elements of behavior or the consequences can be quite costly in real world terms. Board rooms across the commercial world routinely entertain the presentations of computer specialists. As we shall see below, these computer specialists have little or no understanding of how motivation works. Essentially, they have no idea of the difference between designing systems that are computer friendly versus user friendly.

Instead, the desperate need is for computer systems, such as data mining systems, that are user friendly. Computers should adapt to people, not vice versa. Years of observation in the board room show that people are force-fitted to computer design limitations. Quantitative methods are computer friendly. Zip codes and family incomes fit nicely into computer quantities. In contrast, qualitative motives do not easily reduce to numbers. The cost of lost competitive opportunities to measure motives effectively can be measured as broadly as the success or failure of major advertising campaigns, or even of entire companies.

*Quantitative* methods are well established for measuring opportunity and means. And quantitative tools tend to improve gradually as new methods are developed. Most marketers and market researchers are regularly using quantitative packages such as SPSS and its *cousins* found among web site analytic algorithms. These kinds of tools (opportunity and means) give us the big picture of the entire forest. Subsequently, we have to turn our attention to the trees, the specifics of customer motives. *Qualitative* tools have recently made their own innovations as the result of the more sophisticated tools of psycho-linguistic analysis of customer motivation. It is now routine to discover *why* people believe that something is worth wanting (Yeager, 2002).

*Qualitative* methods need to be employed, sooner or later, in any campaign since the key to success is reading the customer with a very accurate eye. Superior motivational profiles can now provide qualitative information that is as hard-copy as marketing's quantitative tools. This has been a major advance for marketers. The simple reason: high confidence in motivational profiles - when combined with quantitative data - are the catalyst that insures a market segment will actually pay off to its full potential.

### **Matching Tools to the Task**

That being said, it would seem that not everyone has received the message of using the right tool for the right job. We all believe in using the right tool for the job.

Right? Wrong! At least that's the impression an objective observer gets upon surveying the marketing scene in the world of e-commerce. Demographic tools crunch numbers at the macro, sociological level of data, and in the process have evolved into the darling of the e-business number-crunchers: micro-demographics. A great deal of costly and fruitless work is being done with this type of tool. Micro-demographics, as a tool, rely on the notion that if we can gather and warehouse enough detail about someone in a database, we can convince them to buy more of our stuff. This is often seen in practice as a modern marketing tool trademarked by the belief that "the more data the better!"

This is the modern marketing way. Don't get me wrong. I crunch numbers too, and modern computing capacity gives all of us plenty of numbers to crunch. I just have this quirky need for my analytic tools to make sense for the task at hand, and the corporate bottom line is always at issue when I, or any other consultant, do it. For instance, convincing people to change their minds is a motivational issue that demographics cannot handle any more than the Hubble Telescope can find germs.

Psychology, especially psycholinguistics, works at the microscopic, germ-level scale of individual decision-making. For instance, a simple decision such as selecting a restaurant for dinner can involve more cognitive-emotional, motivational moving parts than a modern automobile. All of those parts are equally as out of sight as is the engine of a car. Decision-making naturally resonates with these micro-scopic psychological techniques of research. However, to misuse any quantitative or qualitative techniques roughly equals using a screwdriver to pound on a nail. The results will be unproductive and ineffective. The main reason: motivation has a distinct linguistic architecture that cannot be found in a database constructed out of historic e-commerce behavior.

Nonetheless, I see my colleagues use micro demographics as though this tool is effective for anticipating motivation. Wrong again! Without all three ingredients, no behavior can occur. Thus we have to measure all three aspects of behavior with the proper tools to know everything relevant about our prospect's ability and motivation to buy.

In spite of the need, the field of information technology routinely miscasts the problem and the tools needed for an effective solution, by erroneously expecting quantitative tools to reveal qualitative motivational information. Stodder (2004), editor of *Intelligent Enterprise*, describes what data management and web designers are attempting to do, "Quite often improving business efficiency is the primary reason for building a data warehouse" (p. 21).

Regardless of the intent, automation and technology are so imbedded within the industry mind-set that there is simply neither perceived role nor is there, in common use, a viable automated tool usable for measuring human motivation in a direct, qualitative manner. Stodder (2004) clearly reveals that the means used to estimate motives is, essentially the inferior, indirect, and grossly misleading tool of statistical inference (inferred from web activity). However, inference is a poor substitute to direct, qualitative inquiry about motivates.

Direct inquiry simply and directly asks an individual, "What do you want?" Data warehouse designers prefer to infer motives based on an erroneous and naïve understanding of the nature of motivation, as we shall see. Stodder (2004) helps us frame the current customary approach that uses ineffective inference by quoting a company representative. The representative cites the efforts of a major corporation's, (i.e., NCR),

data warehousing effort to be responsive to customer service issues: “The company (NCR) is working on... the ability to do data mining and run scoring models that reveal ‘propensity to buy,’ for example, and send the results to assist in tactical decisions” (p. 23).

“Propensity to buy” refers to an inferential, probability solution based on fragmentary quantification. “Tactical decisions” means that the automated features of the web site, based on quantitatively based inferences are supposed to prompt users in such as way to persuade them to buy a product or service from that site. Measuring motives is psychological in nature, but as we have seen above, it is only one of three types of measures of marketing relevance. Measuring opportunity and means are the other two, non-psychological, main ingredients and those ingredients require demographic or micro-demographic tools. If you erroneously mix and match the psychological versus non-psychological tools to measure these three crucial causes that drive buyer behavior, you are going to waste a lot of your own time, money, and effort.

The essential differences:

- Defining motivation is a detective-like process of building a convincing psychological case out of persuasively relevant facts and emotions.
- Programming data bases is inherently a gambling-like process where one takes a chance with probabilities.

### **Ineffective Beliefs**

Database designers do routinely use micro-demographic, statistical data in an attempt to persuade web users to make purchases. The essential misunderstanding behind this flawed use of inferential tools in the data processing industry is this: no one reading this paper, who is also married, decided to get married because their spouse fit a statistical probability profile. People do not decide quantitatively.

Quantitative tools inherently cannot directly measure qualitative, linguistic, motivational phenomena. Quantitative schemes cannot parse a sentence for motivational architecture while up-to-date qualitative schemes routinely can and do parse the language logic of motivated decision making. The aim of qualitative, motivational measures is to find persuasive rationales for advertising and other persuasive applications.

People get married at the personal, decision making level for very specific, emotionally validated motives, which contain inherent psycholinguistic architecture. People use cognitively complex qualitative-linguistic algorithms to prioritize perceived possibilities. Those motivational processes juggle wants, choices, features, benefits, and consequences in non-quantitative ways. People decide in non-statistical, language-based mechanisms that are not captured by any statistic, indirect scoring system, algorithm, data mining, or data processing system yet invented – as we shall see. Period.

Today, e-commerce and gee-whiz computer capacity allows us to not only know and record someone’s zip code and income. With micro-demographics, we now can know their sock size, their car brand, if they lick their postage stamps on both sides, and whether they like their coffee decaffeinated. Does any of this detailed, micro-demographic profile of someone’s history tell you how to persuade this person, say, to switch from a Japanese luxury car to a European luxury car? Absolutely not. It offers no clues to motivation.

Micro demographics can give us a great deal of detail in such a profile, but micro-demographics is “clueless” about motivations. Micro-demographics gathers detailed data that profiles, essentially, historic behavior and activity, not current motivation. With the advent of e-commerce, a great deal of that data is captured real time in computers for eventual processing. Nonetheless a lot of my colleagues are using micro-demographic details such as those mentioned above in forms such as data mining routines as if it could really profile motives. Wrong again!

If you knew all of those details about me, or anyone, you would not know how to get me to switch my coffee to the high octane stuff or switch my preference for anything else. Just because computers can do amazing amounts of work with databases doesn't automatically make the results mean very much in motivational terms. Throwing terabytes worth of bits and bites at motivation has the practical effect of shooting an elephant with a b-b gun. Remember that “best of all possible worlds?” Walt Disney may be spinning in his grave.

### **Behind the Scenes with Data Designers**

The way data mining and data warehousing work are to assemble the data in computer-friendly terms to process information about what people do on-line. For instance, Richebacher (2001) in a feature article from a major publication in the field, *Intelligent Enterprise*, cites the need to know the customer but defines the desired form of knowledge in terms of computer technology, not human motivation. His description of the context is classically *marketing* oriented in focus and is on target: “...every firm needs to accomplish similar things and know: who its customers are, how to track online surfing and shopping habits, how to manage content, how to change advertising and promotion strategies, and how to develop personalization” (p. 33).

His definition of the problem is on target:

What do you really know about your web site customers? If you think you're getting enough data from your server logs, think again. Typical server logs don't give you enough information to support important strategic decisions. And without a complete customer view, you'll be left guessing about user behavior. (p. 31)

However his definition of a solution misses the motivational target. His idea of motivation is defined in terms of keystroke data that identifies who, what, when, where, and how, but does not come close to identifying *why* (i.e., *why* is synonymous with motive). Here is his definition of a machine-driven solution that simply skips over the issue of human motives to focus, instead, on what computer technology offers as a *Procrustean Bed* solution to motivational profiling:

Developing personalized Web content or personalized messages requires the integration of financial, operational, and statistical information. It means knowing what customers have seen and done, not just during the current visit but in a historical context, online and offline. Personalization is based on segmentation, pattern recognition, and the detection of

behavioral shifts. Without a complete customer view, you are left guessing instead of personalizing – a shaky approach at best. (p. 35)

Clearly he “detects” the issues of opportunity and means in his narrative, but mistakes data manipulation of keystroke histories as being the equivalent of motivation. “Activities” are mistaken for motives. “The crux of the matter is that knowing individual customer identities is insufficient: knowledge about their behavior is what counts – we want to define their *activities* [italics added]” (p. 33).

Activity is *not* motive. This is the inherent limitation of using the wrong tool (i.e., computer technology) to measure something that is outside the capacity of the computer’s role (i.e., motivation). Computers become the technological tail that wags the dog of human behavior, which has no comparable amusements in Disney World.

Here is Richebacher’s (2001) definition of motive:

*User Motivation:* If a web site is primarily goal-directed, such as a search site, summarization at the visit level will be important. But if the goal of the site is to measure enduring involvement, cumulative measurement is more appropriate. (p. 33)

User motivation is seriously misperceived by being defined as site visits and repeat visits. From a psychological point of view, it is hard to imagine a more erroneous idea of motivation. This definition of motivation has about as much illumination as the dark side of the moon. Clearly this kind of thinking is “inside the box,” literally the computer’s box. Remember GI-GO? Garbage In – Garbage Out. It is, indeed, “Garbage In” if you assume that a whole lot of quantitative information about customer computer-surfing behavior will predict their future buying behavior. You will get “Garbage Out,” the other end of your effort if you kid yourself that you know much of anything about motives based on a keystroke record.

### **Computer Capability and False Efficiency**

People don’t make choices based on their keystroke patterns. People choose because they *want* something. Keystrokes do not tell you what people *want*; they only tell you what they *do*. Just look around the planet and you will see plenty of evidence that there is often a huge disconnect between what people want and what they do. Who *really* wants to be the designated driver at a social gathering? Nonetheless, people do what they don’t want to do. That is human nature in action.

Micro-demographics do not tell us as much about motives as some think it does. But internet designers are constrained, by conventions, to use computer friendly solutions that mislead the marketer. Before you really figure out how people are persuaded to make choices you need to know what they want, not what they did in the past. Gathering reams of statistical data on overt behavior is not the same as predicting behavior based on motives. Motivation does not resemble quantitative data. Language-driven motivational profiles are relational phenomena in the way that nouns and verbs in a sentence relate to each other. When linguistic relational phenomena are parsed to find persuasive ad copy, the profile resembles the graphics seen among the nodes and relationships involved in neural nets.

Nonetheless, Richebacher (2001) demonstrates that the information technology field has not recognized this fact. For instance, it is common practice in data warehouse designs to fracture text, selected by a web surfer, into unrelated kaleidoscopic fragments. Those fragments are actually arbitrary artifacts of numbering schemes resembling Likert scales. The reason for doing so is based on the necessity of computer parameters for the data to be machine friendly. However, machine friendly is hardly effective in psychological terms.

As for the fallacious practice of *numbering* text: “Why would you want to do that? Text values are hard to analyze. By converting them, into numerical indicator values, it becomes easier to analyze the data” (p. 33).

Comparatively, this is like assigning a sentence’s structure a “1” for the subject, a “2” for the predicate, and a “3” for the object. Now you have the numerical values of 1, 2, and 3, but you have lost what the sentence *means*. This happens because, typically, data designers worry over machine capability rather than psychological relevance. Perhaps this is understandable in that few, if any, are behaviorists. Richebacher (2001), a computer guru, continues to compound this very non-motivational data-base design process with further kowtowing to the needs of the computer. “The dilemma of defining data at this binary level is a proliferation of variables and consequently greater storage needs” (p. 33).

Given the way codes are invented for computers, his problem is easy to recognize. It would be like attempting to arbitrarily code every picture in the Library of Congress – so compromises are required – given an inauspicious starting point for the design issues.

Finally, he clearly disqualifies these computer-driven considerations altogether, demonstrating this machine design perspective as being completely unrelated to the state of the art in motivational profiling: “The disadvantage of this method is that by not keeping the raw data, you are prevented from verifying or restructuring the data at a later point, and the additional processing might slow down a Web site.” (Richebacher, 2001, p. 34)

The demonstrated state of the art in motivational profiling is psycholinguistic in its features (Yeager, 2003). By separating stimulus from response, as web designers intentionally do for computer design rationales, several things happen. Context is lost between stimulus and response; an artificial number is assigned to “characterize” the response; the conceptual-numerical characterization of the response is an indirect measure that is removed from the original response; and the resulting data, in turn, makes it impossible to reconstruct the essential components.

In motivational profiling, reconstruction of parsed components is necessary in identifying persuasive strategies with direct linguistic techniques. The reconstruction process in psycho-linguistics is akin, in its role, to cross-checking grade school math to insure a correct answer. Without the whole persuasion strategy intact, motivational analysis becomes merely a well-intentioned exercise in futility.

Up-to-date psycholinguistic motivational profiling methods are incompatible to web current *conventions* in designing data warehousing, micro-demographic analysis, and web personalization strategies. Still it is fair to ask, “Could computers do the job of qualitative measurement?” Yes, if designed correctly with the requirements of motivational profiling in mind. Motivational profiling requires that the raw data of customer responses be kept intact in the form of stimulus-response text analysis.

Otherwise the researcher loses the context of the motive and its meaning, which are crucial components that all marketers need to succeed.

The simple fact is that by erroneously using all this amazing computing power, which is cheap, you actually might as well be using the Hubble Telescope to look for germs. Effectiveness in identifying motives is sacrificed for the false efficiency of computer power. With meaningless quantities representing original text, marketers have let the computer paint them into a corner. The marketers now have numbers that are motivationally meaningless.

### **Institutional Momentum and Guesswork**

Demographics and micro-demographics, being of large scale, are the wrong tool to use to find the nearly invisible micro-psychological factors that cause, a decision, a change of mind, a choice of any kind. To measure micro-psychological stuff you need microscopic psychological tools; tools geared to the micro events that go on behind the eyeballs. Psycholinguistic coding of motivational strategies does not resemble anything currently being used in data base designs (Yeager, 2002). You have to think *small*. If you think *small* is irrelevant, keep that thought in mind the next time an itsy-bitsy flu virus keeps you in bed for a week or two.

Persuasion is based on the *very* small, nearly invisible psychological micro events that cause a mind to change. Those persuasive micro events are encoded in the language used by an individual as he or she spontaneously expresses himself/herself in ordinary dialog. Persuasion is best measured by tools such as “transformational grammar,” which provides a microscopic view into the choices people make via the tools of linguistics (Bandler & Grinder, 1975). Quantitative database analysis has its role, but the role must fit the task. Database analysis is not the tool of choice when it comes to motives and persuasion. Surely, the bust of the dot-com bubble should have given all of us just a smidgen of skepticism about things of a digital nature. You need the right tool for the job. Otherwise, you might as well put all that money you are wasting on databases into a container, set fire to it, and toast a marshmallow or two. At least your snack would be hotter than your marketing approach.

Then why do companies spend huge fortunes on data warehousing and data mining? The simple answer is “because they can.” I know. I know. I annoy my office staff too, with that kind of talk. Some say: “All that computer work must amount to something special, wouldn’t you think?” Not really, at least not when it comes to motives and persuasion. I think very few folks in the IT department have heard of the saying: “Give a carpenter a hammer and everything looks like a nail.”

As you have seen in the words of the web designers themselves, they are hammering away at motivation with the wrong tool. This is the way they have learned to do it and those ways are now ingrained in their engineering designs. As a rule, data bases encode human behavior as conventionally and sloppily as most teen-agers choose their wardrobe. In contrast, I want my tools to fit the job. I do not use a demographic sledgehammer to crack motivational pistachios. I rest my case.

## Keeping the Dots Connected

The old fashioned way to persuade folks, before computers and demographics, was to throw a lot of persuasive spaghetti against a target audience in a focus group. The spaghetti would take the form of guesses regarding what would be good ad copy. Swamp the prospect with samples of ad copy then see what conceptual spaghetti would stick. Today, that same idea travels under the label of “micro-demographic personalization.”

The average focus group was, then and now, an often-dysfunctional tool. The focus group was not especially good at reliably finding persuasive spin, then or now, because too many practitioners used it like an exercise for reading tealeaves or faces in the clouds. That is, well, they were just plain *guessing*. Guessing is a very low tech and low quality methodology.

Data mining is no different than ill-conceived focus groups just because its guesses are about motives on a vastly grander scale. Data mining still uses correlational models as a major tool – correlation is a guessing tool. Correlation is not about causes or proof. Guessing is still *guessing* no matter how fancy your guessing might be. My grandmother could have told you this for free in spite of her not having a master’s degree in marketing.

If you want to make a buyer like and want your stuff, you must *ask* them *what* they like and *how* they go about liking it in terms of their persuasive decision strategy. Simple. The trick in motivational matters is to keep the dots in the mind of the customer connected once you ask about their motives. Compared to computer practices this would seem an alien undertaking. But it can be done. A question as simple as: “so, what do you want in a digital camera?” can provide answers directly from the horse’s mouth. It is not especially hard to design such questions into the appropriate place in a click-stream process and to keep track of them. You will obtain context and motive in the answer. The trick is in recognizing that you have to do it within the required parameters of text analysis rather than unrelated computer design issues. Web designers have not yet reached this realization.

So why do internet designers misuse tools and extract and process all sorts of indirect, warehoused, micro-demographic information? Also simple: erroneous beliefs, leading to crude coding schemes that are perpetuated by institutional momentum. Activity is believed, among web designers, to be the equivalent of motive. Activity can be gathered automatically, but gathering motives requires the ugly feature of dealing with those organic beasts called humans instead of neat clean machines. We have to ask what they *want* instead of tracking what they *did*.

The resulting machine-based logic behind ordinary database rationales is that “If Joe Sixpack bought this kind of thing before, he is *probably* going to buy something like it later, right?” Wrong! This common, silly belief is no different than the medieval philosophers who argued for decades, in very sophisticated terms, over how many teeth were in a horse’s mouth based on something written by Aristotle. No one had the savvy to go out to the barn and examine the horse by looking into the horse’s mouth. Ask your customers to say “Ahh” if you really want to know about motives.

Today, web designers also avoid looking in the horse’s mouth and, instead, calculate personalization strategies on the false notion that we have captured something about motivation with databases. (Buy something from Amazon.com and you will see how you are endlessly prompted based on your past purchase). The psychology of

personalization has psychological and architectural limits that make it impossible to acquire motives via the keystroke artifacts of previous decisions. You can't repeal the law of gravity nor can you repeal the laws of psychology by adding a computer to the task.

The basic belief underlying all of this is: "If I can keep track of what happened in the past, I can know what is going on now." Observe how well that kind of prefabricated logic works the next time you see some bumptious person try to pick up a date at the office. All those demographically gathered prefabricated and historically validated one-liners from Miss Manners about sounding sexy are going to bounce off the prospective date like water off a duck. Previous behavior is not motivation. Period.

There is a lot of erosion between any one given decision or choice and predicting its connection with future behavior. The big reason is *context*. Politician, Tip O'Neil noted that: "All politics is local." Similarly I have noticed that: "All motivation is local." Motivation is completely dependent on its operational context.

### **Uncle Homer versus the Brooklyn Bridge**

Take a moment. Think about the presumption that one can effectively connect past behavior to future persuasive rationales with a database correlation that is out of context. Here's an example. Let's say, while surfing the web, you buy an ugly necktie for your Uncle Homer and that information goes into a huge database.

How realistic is it to assume you are really interested in ties if your real interest is in, say, annoying your least favorite uncle? Then when Uncle Homer dies, you still have cookies in your computer system that automatically prompt you - until the end of time - about ties you will, hopefully, want to buy from some ugly-tie catalog. This is not persuasion. This is imposing. This is the dot-com version of spaghetti against the wall - as in *e-spaghetti*.

This harassment will occur time and time again despite the fact that you will never, ever buy another ugly tie. You can chalk up this computer-generated problem to *the law of unintended consequences*. That law, in this case, fails to recognize a basic fact: motivated behavior is a current-event, context-dependent phenomenon that *only means what it means according to its immediate context*. Be aware that your context is your relationship with Uncle Homer, (or was until he died) not with a remote database.

If you have a lot of data *severed from its context* - as you do in huge databases - you really have nothing much of value that would relate to motives and persuasion. Actually, what you have is *behavioral archeology* - *an analysis of what you did - not what you will do or what you want, or your local and shifting context*. Similar to an IQ score, previous behavior may suggest that you are smart or not, yet still not tell you what, specifically, you are good at, or predict what you will do.

Massive databases do not pick up on the context of your intent to annoy Uncle Homer; they only record your keystrokes, which in the end will annoy you if you keep getting unwelcome prompts about ugly ties. Those prompts are based on your implied interest in ties, or so the database suggests. As we can see, there is not a lot of interest in ties, per se.

Still the database will be instructed to keep tossing options at you (more spaghetti) in hopes that a lucky guess will get you to buy some more items. It is much simpler and much more effective to invite Joe Sixpack or Jill Sixpack into a conversation

and *ask* them what they want. If they don't want ties, but they do want cheaper home delivery of pizza, the marketer knows what to do.

But computers and databases lure us with the siren song of their false efficiency while they blissfully set us up about solving the wrong problem with the wrong tool. Well, you *can* argue that it is kind of cheap! Still, if you told your mom you were doing this, would she be proud? Or would she ask you what every other mom would ask as she swats you on the head: "Would you jump off the Brooklyn Bridge just because everyone else is doing it?!"

The most overlooked fact, missed by all those clueless, dateless folks at the office social (and by databases) is simple: "If you ask someone the right questions the right way, they will tell you exactly how to persuade them." That cuts out a lot of erroneous inferences about motives. Then the trick is to know how to read that information so that you connect the dots in a persuasive way. As you can tell by the large population of lonely hearts in the world, this is a neat trick that few master. What they want and what they do are *clearly* disconnected.

### Summary

Most folks need tools that are suited to help with the tricks of gathering persuasively effective insights. With the right tools, you correctly connect the dots to the task, such as with decision modeling, persuasive profiling, or motivational profiling that captures the micro-psychological details that change minds from "NO I don't want your stuff" to "Yes I do want your stuff" (Yeager, 2003).

The basic trick requires separating your tools according to their functions. Separate them according to whether you are attempting to understand; *which of the three crucial causes of any behavior are at issue*. Lieutenant Columbo always searched for them: *motive, opportunity, and means*. No one will buy anything unless they have a motive, an opportunity to obtain the product, and possess the means to obtain it. Demographics tell us nothing about motive. The demographic role relates to opportunity and means. Opportunity deals with such realities, as storefront location or cyber-space access while means has to do with micro demographic items such as income and age and such.

If you *must* think of persuasion in terms of databases, quantities, and statistics to make yourself happy, try this idea. By definition, if you think in terms of the "bell curve" of persuasiveness, only a small percentage of us at the third or fourth standard deviation are really good at persuasion in a systematic way. Others rely on luck if they don't have a good set of tools. In a perverse reality, many folks could not persuade a hungry dog to eat a bone or persuade a teenager to leave a body part unpierced. In behind-the-scenes computer processing terms, the equivalent of a doctoral dissertation's analytic effort is routinely spent on a \$10.00 or \$20.00 web purchase with the intent of enhancing the marketing of products and services. Wouldn't it be smart to find tools about persuasion that match the task at hand? "*Maybe* they will buy something" is much different from "What will make them *want* to buy?" Computer driven correlations of the database kind only account for a minor fraction of buyer behavior.

*Asking* what causes a purchasing impulse, when done correctly, will find out *everything* about buyer motives and, in turn, cause something useful and persuasive to happen. The fact is that very intelligent data base designers routinely miscast computer

tools in their ill-conceived psychological marketing efforts. The fact that this routine mal-practice throws such a long shadow over web marketing practices, tells us how late in the day it is for marketers in search of effective tools.

Customers want things and we have to find out how to satisfy those wants, motives. That is the job of psychology. Also, customers have to be able to afford things, means and to have access to the things they want, opportunity. Knowing about means and opportunity is the job of database demographics. The bottom line requires that tools must be selected for their righteous role, not their cheap and easy availability.

It should not surprise many of us that the industry has an erroneous mind set. We might take a useful frame of reference from Business Week's techno guru, Stephen Wildstrom (2004). Wildstrom provides a bit of skeptical perspective:

In the summer of 1994 the Internet was still mainly an academic plaything. ... I've learned a lot in 10 years, during which I hope I have gotten better at my task: helping you use technology more effectively in your work and life. ... During the craziness of the late 1990s, I was more skeptical than many, but not skeptical enough about an industry and an economy based largely on wishful thinking. (p. 25)

Some words of wisdom are worth mentioning. The first one, obviously, should be "always trust a web designer to be clueless about motivation." Since automation seems an inevitable aspect of modern life, that skepticism will reap many benefits when you ask, "How does your design for my web page factor in the issue of motivation?" The blank look will tell you volumes. You will have probably averted the digital equivalent of purchasing the Brooklyn Bridge. With budgets shrinking faster than un-sanforized boxer shorts, it is comforting to know one can spend wisely.

Another implication worth keeping clearly in mind is that "no behavior occurs without motive *and* opportunity *and* means." Any assessment of *any* behavior in *any* context is subject to effective parsing according to this simple but profound tripartite framework.

One more implication is that all behavior is motivated – *all* the time, *every* time there is a behavior to observe and record. It stands to reason that discovering the motive with the right tool will save a lot of wasted effort and false impressions about what kind of data has actually been gathered and what it means. Knowing which tools to use to gather motivational data will provide the early adopters of qualitative web-designs with a competitive advantage.

Another thought is that computers, with all their efficiency at gathering data, can be as misleading as a used car salesman. The crucial issue is not efficiency at solving the wrong problem. Rather, the crucial issue is effectiveness at solving the real problem. Computers need to adapt to humans, not vice versa, in the struggle to "customerize" services in a very competitive world.

Psychology shows how to romance the customer. Demographics, if mis-applied to motives rather than means and opportunity, efficiently crunch a lot of conveniently generated, often irrelevant, numbers. Those marketing efforts that use the wrong tool set will not be effectively romantic to the customer, not in the slightest. So, pick the tool that fits the task. That will work wonders for the bottom line.

Again, I rest my case. Really, this time.

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**Article Citation**

Yeager, J. (2005). Databases don't measure motivation. *The Qualitative Report*, 10(1), 163-177. Retrieved [Insert date], from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR10-1/yeager.pdf>

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