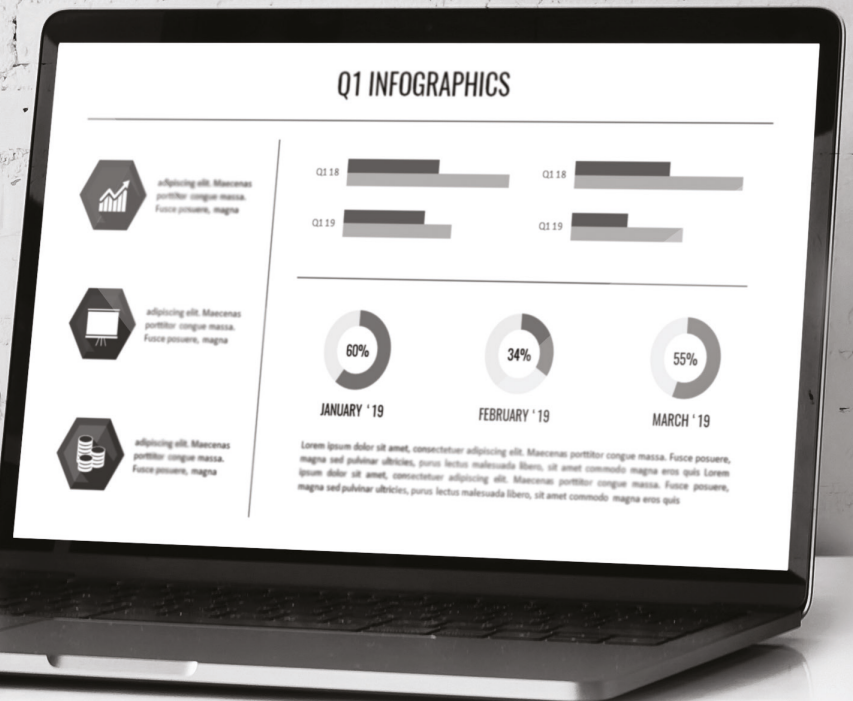


# DATA HAS A STORY TO TELL





# DATA HAS A STORY TO TELL

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eyeful  
INSIGHTS

Visibility

39.42

Organic keywords

25.8K

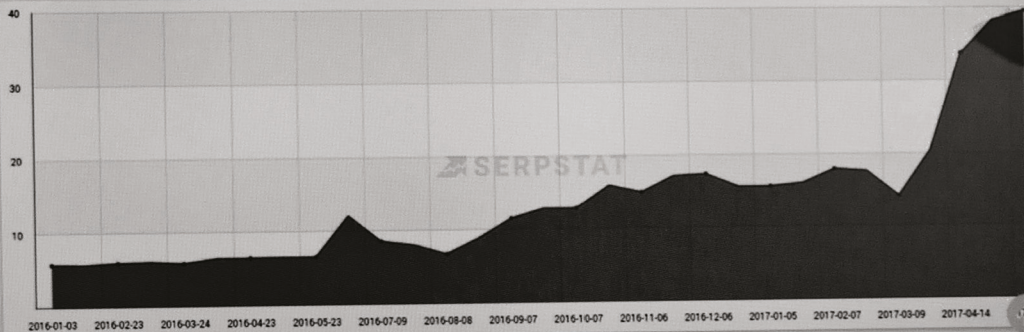
SE Traffic

122 841

Ads

992

Visibility



Organic Keywords

70K



“

THERE ARE THREE KINDS OF LIES: LIES,  
DAMNED LIES, AND STATISTICS

BENJAMIN DISRAELI

”



# INTRODUCTION

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As a business that has dedicated itself to the improvement of presentations for over a decade, we can say, hand-on-heart, that they are an area that is dogged with misinterpretation. Outside of the potential headline-grabbing miscalculations made by business leaders who really should know better, there lies the opportunity cost of misfiring presentations:

**Messages get lost...**

**Audiences are left confused...**

**Content is misconstrued...**

Misinterpretation is the measure by which we can judge the quality of business presentations. Sadly, using this yardstick, many high stakes strategic presentations fail to meet the mark.

**And then you add data...**

The threat of misinterpretation increases exponentially once data is added into the mix. The potential for confusion rises, the stakes increase and the spectre of misinterpretation cripples business leaders into either doing nothing or playing it safe.

Yet, as with presentations, when developed with a clear purpose in mind and crafted to meet the needs of your audience, data can be incredibly powerful. It can drive the conversations forward, spark debate and build a memorable connection between presenter and audience like nothing else.

Today, business leaders are equally blessed and cursed as they attempt to navigate their way through the plethora of data and content available at their fingertips. The purpose of this EyeFul Insights report is to not only highlight the benefits and potential pitfalls associated with presenting with data but to also point to a structured and powerful format to follow.

No matter what the audience or objective, data is a valuable presentation asset that can be called upon to turbocharge your message.

**Our advice? Use with caution and respect...**

# THE NEW DATA LANDSCAPE

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Data is ubiquitous. It pervades our personal life, providing analysis on our online presence, from our shopping habits to our eating and viewing habits. We are not only used to our phones recommending certain music, restaurants and shops based on the data we have amassed but tacitly happy to act on these data generated suggestions.

Data is not only being collected but also analysed and published on an unprecedented level. A recent study by Google suggested that 90 percent of the data that exists was created in the last two years. However, interestingly, the way most business leaders use this data and extract value from it has not changed one iota. This is despite some commentators calling data 'the new oil' - it is powerful, valuable and intrinsic to future business success if its value can be effectively and reliably extracted.

Data can be the foundation of powerful communication to shareholders, to employees, to customers, yet we're not using it as effectively as we might.

# FINANCE REPORT

ACCOUNT REPORT

DASHBOARD > INCOME

DAILY WEEKLY MONTHLY



## TOTAL INCOME

37.91%

31.86%

LINE ITEMS	16.15 M\$
SHIPPING	0.15 M\$
TAXES	0%
TOTAL	16.3 M\$



**90% OF DATA THAT EXISTS WAS CREATED  
IN THE LAST 2 YEARS**

**SINTEF DIGITAL**









Unsurprisingly, the concept of data has changed. Its very definition has morphed from something binary – a steadfast measure – to something open to interpretation and, where appropriate, to be challenged. As consumers, we are more (healthily) sceptical of data but also value it as a communication tool. The challenge facing business leaders is how to embrace the power of data without becoming a slave to its vagaries. Blindly putting one's faith in 'machine generated' data without adding some emotional intelligence into the mix is a dangerous game to play.

Too often, business decisions have been made based on 'the data' and subsequently proven to be flawed. Do business presenters really want to open themselves up to criticism or ridicule based on a few data points? All too often, the stakes are simply too high to take the risk.

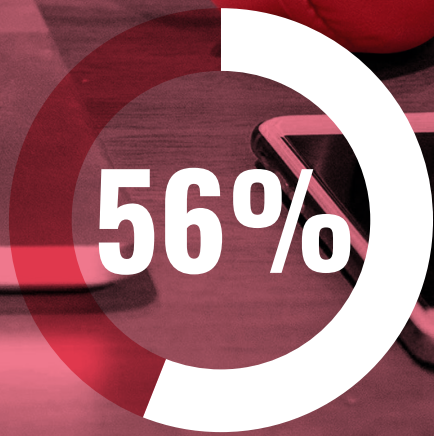
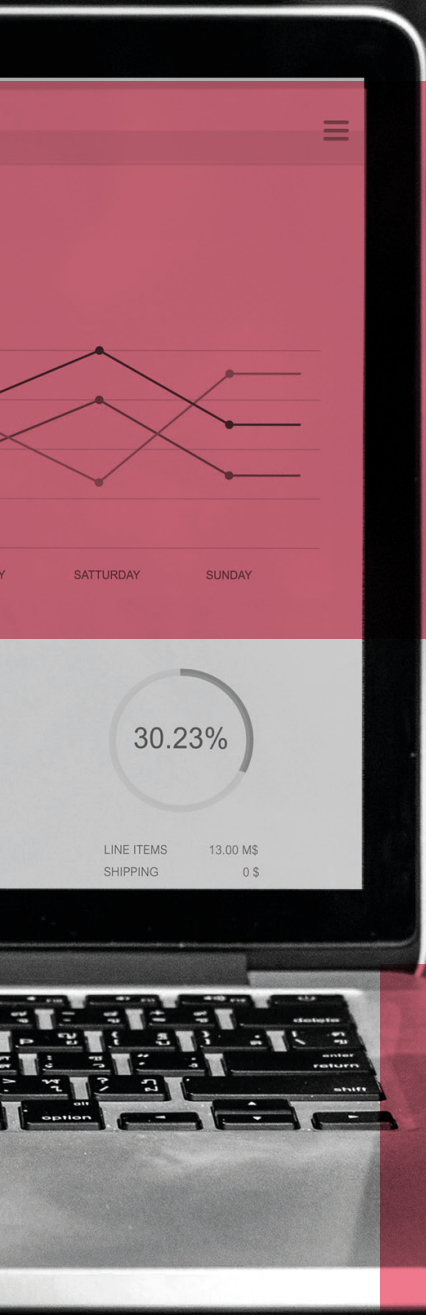
Ironically, the more access we've had to data, the less comfortable we feel using it. There's a sense that we can no longer see the wood for the trees – the quality of insight is inversely linked to the volume available.

# YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE FAITH

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Confidence plays an important role in the limited use of data in presentation stories. The reality is that despite being happy to rely on the recommendations of an anonymous data algorithm to decide which restaurant to dine in, the C-Suite continues to struggle to build sufficient confidence in their own company's generated data to find the story. This is despite having access to vast swathes of powerful and valuable data available to them, meaning that when most presentations pull upon 'dashboard data' to deliver a powerful message, they default to generic broad-brush statements and anodyne messaging.

These suspicions are supported by research. A 2018 KPMG report highlighted that **56%** of CEOs had little faith in their own data. It has been suggested that these concerns emanate from a communication gap between the C-Suite and the analytics community. The C-Suite defines data storytelling as a brief explanation in words, supported with data while the analytics community view it as data supported with an infographic. Either way, the lack of cohesion between these two parties means that much of the leadership communication happening today is lacking in integrity and confidence.



OF CEO'S HAD  
LITTLE FAITH IN  
THEIR OWN DATA

2017 GLOBAL CEO OUTLOOK,  
KPMG INTERNATIONAL



“

THE CFO OF TODAY IS THE STORYTELLER  
OF WHERE THE COMPANY IS AND WHERE  
IT'S GOING. THAT'S AN ART AS OPPOSED  
TO A SCIENCE

”

SANDY COCKRELL, GLOBAL CFO  
PROGRAM LEADER, DELOITTE

After all, you can't use information you don't understand or trust, which is a shame because data storytelling is quickly flying up the leadership imperatives.

If data plays such an important part in the way we live our lives, then how are we not harnessing its value and its power more effectively?

And as a result, the wrong actions are being taken. Insights are not being shared. Audiences are left wanting.

**In short, most data in presentations is woefully impotent.**

# MAKING DATA WORK FOR YOU

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## THE EMERGENCE OF THE DATA STORYTELLER

It's the age-old problem, if the quality of the data is poor, it will mean that the message is also fundamentally poor. This leads to confusion, a lack of faith not only in the presenter but also, more importantly, the message.

It's with this quandary in mind that the concept of a data storyteller has come to the fore, and large organisations and cutting-edge businesses extol the virtues of data storytelling.

But what does that really mean?

Well, what it doesn't mean is crunching the data and sifting through to find the message that you want. Data storytelling should never be about making the best out of poor data or misleading with statistics. Equally, it isn't about taking a 10,000 foot view that you would get from a dashboard. Dashboards are a summation, a culmination of data, but they do not tell a story. They are passive. They don't prompt an action.

**They are merely reporting.**





“

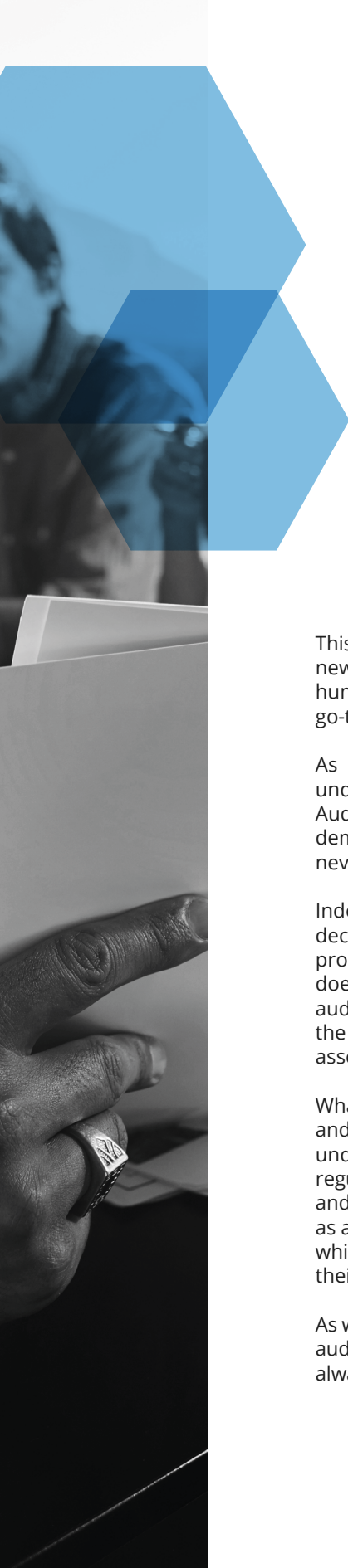
NUMBERS HAVE AN IMPORTANT STORY TO TELL. THEY RELY ON YOU TO GIVE THEM A CLEAR AND CONVINCING VOICE

STEPHEN FEW

”







This is the key difference between the old world view of data and the new world, where storytelling breathes life and insight into data. As human beings, we're hardwired to engage with stories – it's been the go-to method of communicating for thousands of years.

As with all communication, effective presentations rely on an understanding and empathy for the audience. As explored in Eyeful's Audience Heatmap concept, even the most factual of audiences demand a connection between presenter and audience which could never thrive on purely cold hard facts.

Indeed, purely data-driven approaches can be unintentionally deceptive depending on the audience's response to them. The proliferation of data, visualisation and storytelling techniques doesn't change that – content can mean different things to different audiences at different times. It merely serves to highlight the importance of humanising presentation content, and its associated data stories, to deliver results.

What great data storytelling does is help explain, enlighten, and ultimately engage an audience by demonstrating a greater understanding of the data. It goes so much deeper than simply regurgitating a list of facts. Great data storytellers do not view statistics and information as a set of dry content points. They recognise them as an opportunity to build a strong connection with an audience from which that audience can analyse, interpret and ultimately tie back to their own challenges or interests.

As with great presentations, the story never starts with the content; the audience comes first followed by the message – but the end result is always engaging, memorable or persuasive... or, ideally, all three.

“

WHEN NARRATIVE IS COUPLED WITH DATA, IT HELPS TO EXPLAIN TO YOUR AUDIENCE WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE DATA AND WHY A PARTICULAR INSIGHT IS IMPORTANT...

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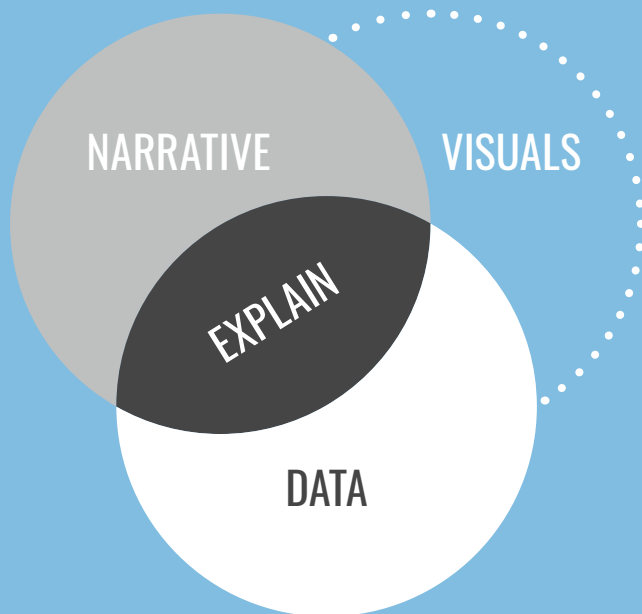


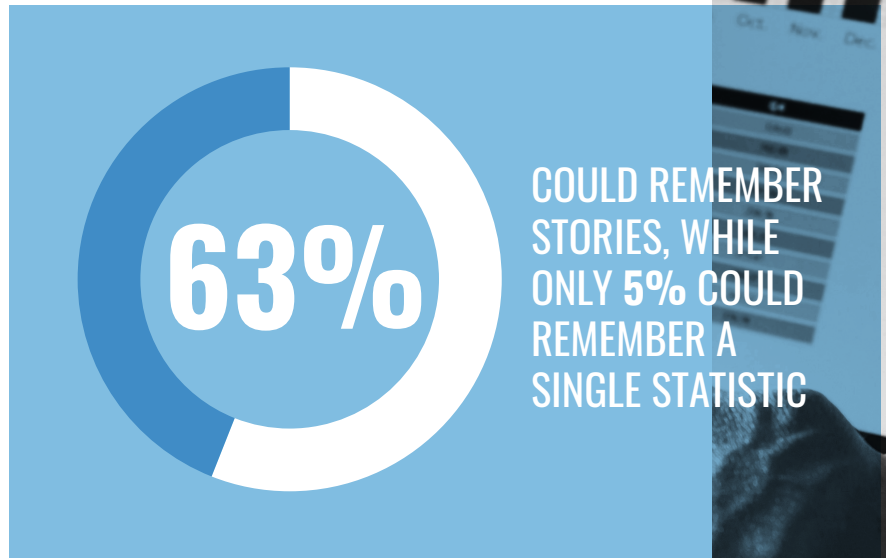
By virtue of its interpretation and communication, powerful storytelling transforms data in a way that resonates with them and prompts them to take action. By doing this effectively, it helps you drive the narrative and prompt the changes within your organisation that are so vital in today's competitive environment.

Of course, data storytellers do not have to have an intimate knowledge of SQL to interrogate and interpret swathes of data to make a difference. Their impact is demonstrated by a greater confidence, understanding and acceptance of the messages being demonstrated through data. It goes back to the basics of presentation communication – 'show, not tell' – and a respect for the three key elements of data storytelling: data, visuals and narrative.

In terms of visuals, an easy trap to fall into is to assume that data storytelling is the same as data visualisation. Charts and infographics will have visual impact and communicate a limited set of content to an audience but they rarely deliver a powerful and long-lasting message. They are merely visual punctuation marks in the process, not the whole story.

The inclusion of the narrative into the mix allows you to communicate insights in a much more compelling way than data in isolation ever will. Brent Dykes, Director of Strategy at consultancy firm Domo (@analyticshero), highlights the power of each of these elements working together.



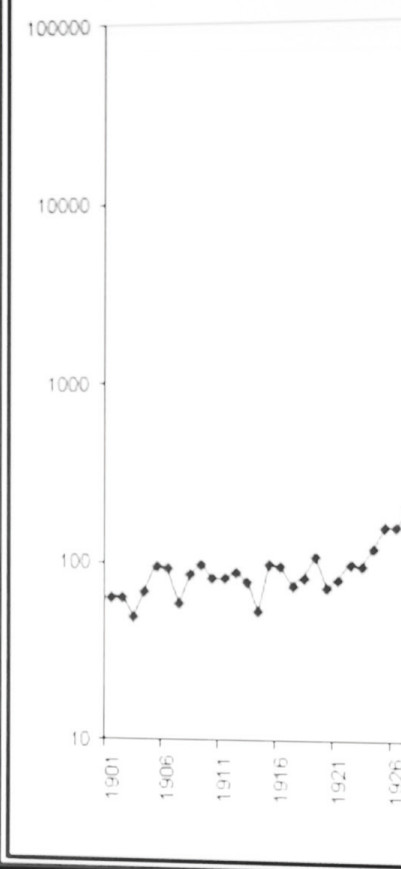


There have been numerous studies that point to the impact and power of stories. We know from our own experience that stories are not only more naturally engaging than data, but can also prompt levels of emotion and connection that pure stats fail to deliver. Stories have been used for millennia to share information - why stop now?

Yet, perhaps the biggest impact of stories within data presentations is the simple fact that they are more memorable and thus more likely to be shared. This 'stickability' was well publicised by Stanford professor Chip Heath ('Made to Stick' author) who shared his study that found **63%** could remember stories, while only **5%** could remember a single statistic.

It's compelling stuff...and building a compelling narrative into your data presentations is a vital ingredient that cannot be overlooked. That said, data storytelling is more than simply matching a narrative to a set of data.



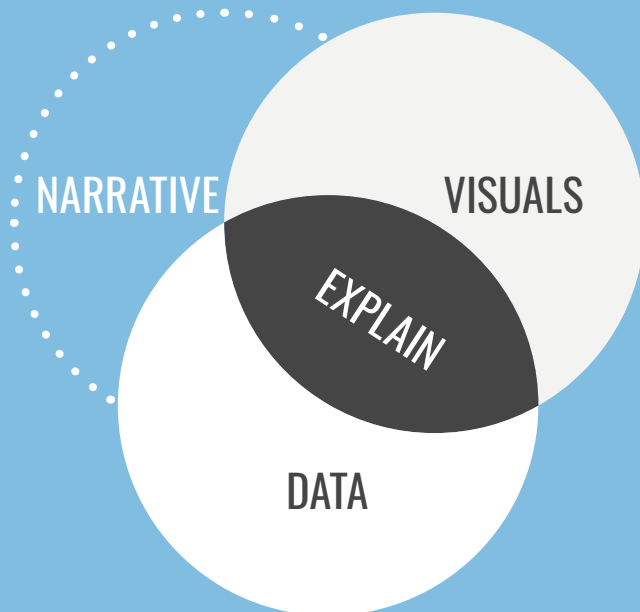




“

WHEN VISUALS ARE APPLIED TO DATA,  
THEY CAN ENLIGHTEN THE AUDIENCE  
TO INSIGHTS THAT THEY WOULDN'T SEE  
WITHOUT CHARTS OR GRAPHS...

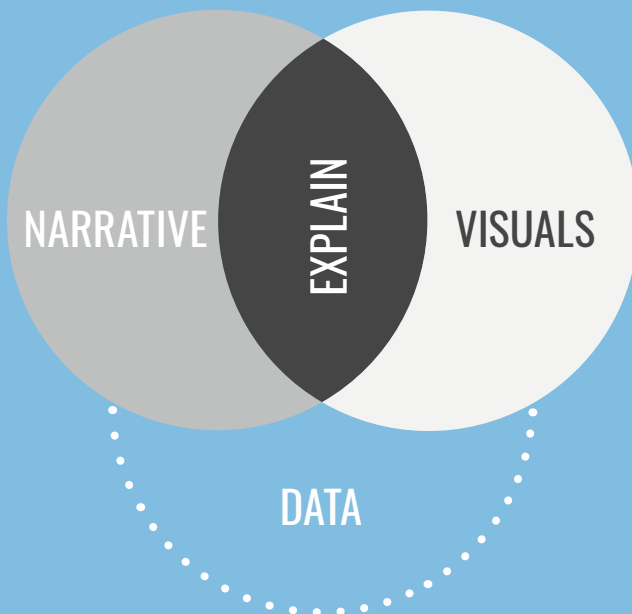
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FINALLY, WHEN NARRATIVE AND VISUALS ARE MERGED TOGETHER, THEY CAN ENGAGE OR EVEN ENTERTAIN AN AUDIENCE

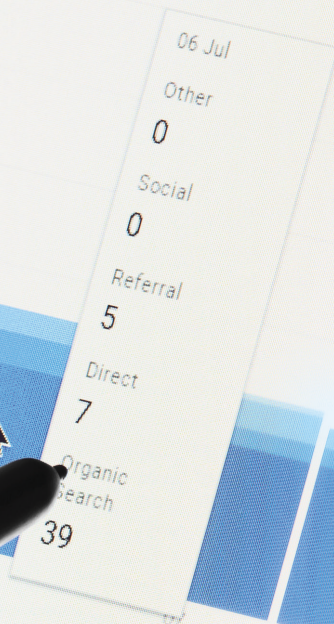
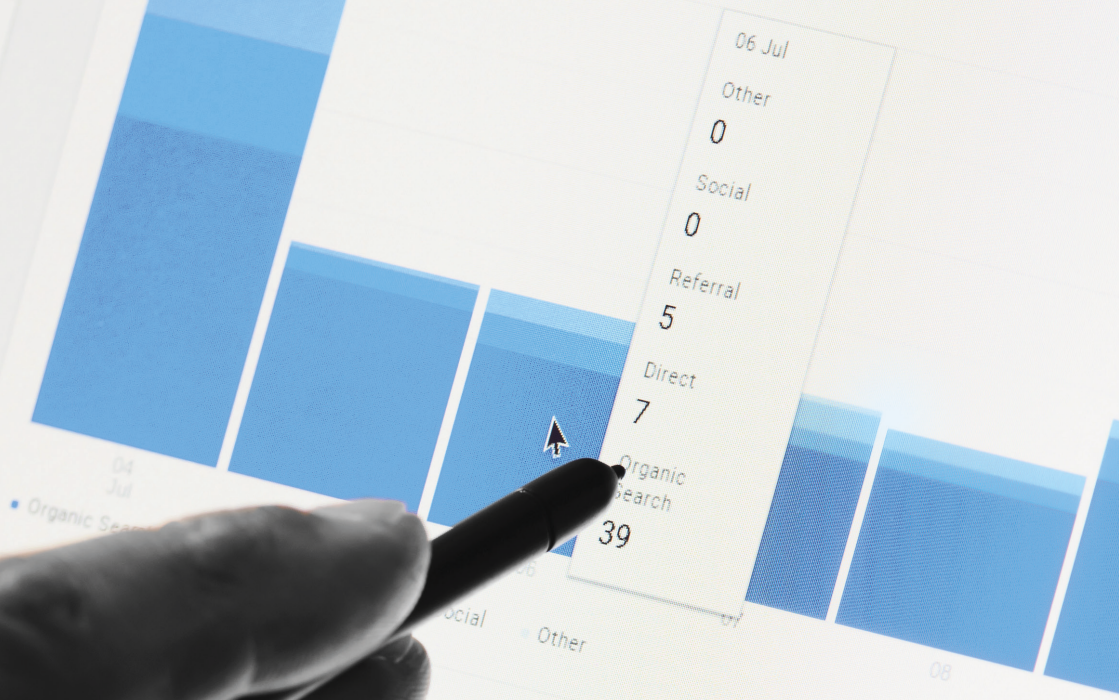
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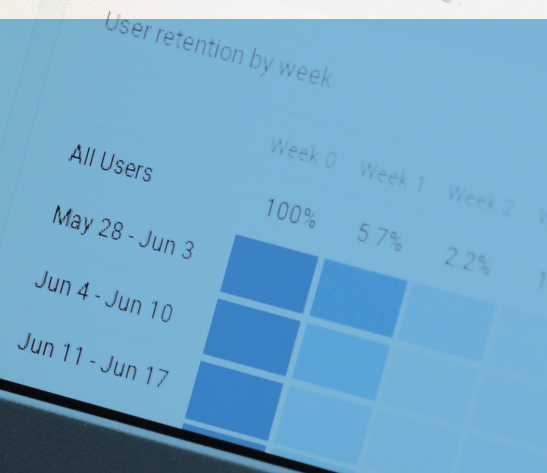
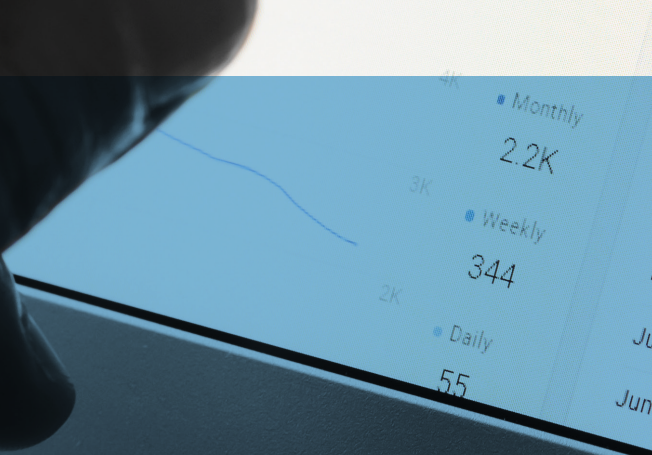


Referrals



over time?

How well do you retain users?



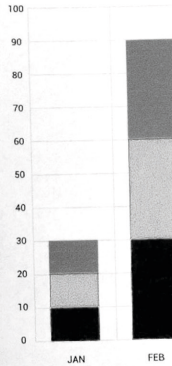
“

WHEN NARRATIVE IS COUPLED WITH DATA, IT HELPS TO EXPLAIN TO YOUR AUDIENCE WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE DATA AND WHY A PARTICULAR INSIGHT IS IMPORTANT...

”



### Our company



### Business items



### EXPERIENCE

**POSITION TITLE** for company tid  
Present  
Short description of the position and the responsibilities you had in this position.

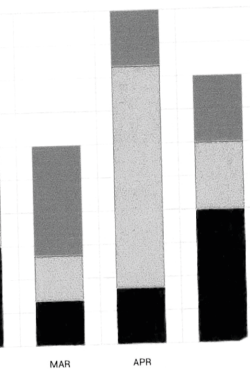
**POSITION TITLE** for company tid  
2013 - 2016  
Short description of the position and the responsibilities you had in this position.

**POSITION TITLE** for company tid  
2012 - 2013  
Short description of the position and the responsibilities you had in this position.  
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**POSITION TITLE** for company tid  
2003 - 2010  
Short description of the position and the responsibilities you had in this position.

### REFERENCES

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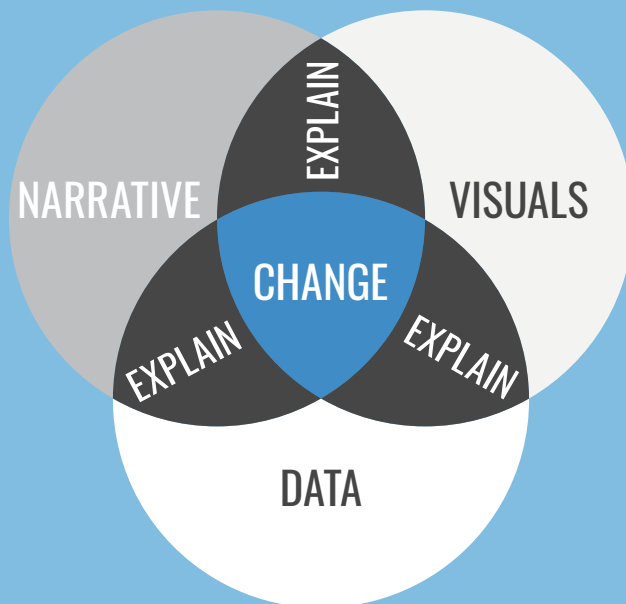


Eyeful has always held the unshakeable belief that presentations are only of value if they prompt an action from the audience. The introduction of data into the mix doesn't change this one iota – great presentations engage and enlighten audiences and provide the foundation for explanation. Vitally, the combination of these elements forms the ideal environment for change to happen.

It is this prompt to action that should underpin the actions of any data storyteller – what change can I prompt as a result of not only the data but also the format in which I am sharing it?

As such, data storytelling has little to do with infographics – it's about humanising the data, embedding it within your business, engaging audiences and prompting them to do things differently as a result. That's the real value and impact of a business data storyteller.

So, data storytellers should approach the sharing and imparting of insights in much the same way that the best presenters do with their own message. Have structure. Visualise it, yes, but only once you know what your message is. The focus should be on imparting a message to an engaged audience, not simply making things look a little prettier with charts and interesting infographics.



## WHAT NEXT?

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In summary, we've never had access to more complex and potentially powerful data than we have today. This naturally poses both a challenge and an opportunity. Unfortunately to date, the hype and potential surrounding big data has had seemingly little impact in terms of delivering true quality communication. Audiences are increasingly left befuddled by the potential insights afforded by data rather than being given the tools to understand and gain greater value from it.

As such, it is the responsibility of every leadership team in organisations, large and small, to not only understand the value of that data, but then work hard to build a story that harnesses that power to engage and prompt the appropriate action from your audience. Failing to deliver on this simple measure means that a powerful tool – data – will continue to go underutilised and misunderstood.







There are some simple steps to improve the likelihood of data becoming an important and regular part of your communication strategy:

## **1. REVIEW THE CULTURE WITHIN YOUR BUSINESS**

Culture plays an integral part in the way a business communicates, both externally and internally (ref. Eyeful Insights - 'The (Hidden) Power of Presentation Culture'). The inclusion of data as part of the communication mix merely serves to up the ante.

If your leadership team view data with suspicion or cynicism, the wider business are likely to respond in a similar fashion. As such, a data story will need to reference external proof points to address the cynicism and demonstrate the relevance to your audience. It will likely be a 'slow burn' to build confidence and respect for data so building it into your general communication is a logical step.

Equally, if data is used religiously to reiterate key messages and drive the strategy of the business, finding new ways to communicate the insight will have greater long-term impact. For many data-led organisations, data can define a certain set of behaviours (for example, delivering against a predetermined set of KPIs while strategic imperatives remain unfocused) so crafting a data story that supports the longer-term plan can be incredibly powerful.

Fundamentally, taking a measure of your business culture and building a data story that addresses the needs of your audience is key. The art, as with all presentations, is knowing how far and fast you can incorporate this new element, data, into your story.

## **2. LOOK FOR THE STORY, NOT JUST THE DASHBOARD**

Finding valuable data is one thing. Crafting a format within which it engages and connects with an audience is another.

For data stories to deliver value, the data element needs to seamlessly thread its way through the narrative. Eye catching visualisations and snapshot moments of data may provide short term interest and deliver a tactical response from the audience, but they are unlikely to prompt a longer-term engagement.

The persuasive power of data is best harnessed when it becomes part of a recurring message. Rather than rushing for the quick headline grabbing outlier data points, look to use data as an answer to more fundamental questions facing your audience: 'so what?' and 'what's the point?'. This will move your narrative beyond the simplicity of data analysis and actually form a human bond between presenter, data and audience. The net result will deliver a believable call to action that your audience can follow to deliver your intended results.

### 3. MINE YOUR DATA SMARTER

In some businesses, identifying and sourcing the right data is akin to finding a needle in a haystack. Such are the challenges of today's 'big data' organisation. As such, the temptation is always to collect and analyse large swathes of data rather than focus on the important or relevant information – it's the classic volume versus quality debate.

Communication will always strain under the weight of too much information. In much the same way that too much content is the root cause of 'Death by PowerPoint' (audiences can live with the concept of bullet points...it's when they multiply into countless lines of irrelevant text for no reason that the issues arise), data stories need to remain focused to deliver results.

#### **Analysis paralysis is an all too common issue with data stories.**

Take time at the very beginning of the process to clearly identify what is it that you are looking to communicate and then mine accordingly. We have vast swathes of data available at our fingertips, so it is imperative that we approach the process in as pragmatic and considered a way as possible. In much the same way that great PowerPoint presentations are crafted from paper-based storyboarding, start your data story on paper first.

“

ANALYSIS PARALYSIS IS AN ALL TOO  
COMMON ISSUE WITH DATA STORIES

”











## FINAL THOUGHTS

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LinkedIn is a phenomenon. It's meteoric rise to be the most important B2B networking platform in the world owes much to its ability to harness the value of data. If anyone understands the value of data, it's LinkedIn.

Yet LinkedIn recently highlighted that they face a challenge that is familiar to a lot of organisations – finding the right set of skilled people. Their biggest skills gap? The ability to communicate clearly.

It would seem that LinkedIn is no longer desperate for data analysts or IT experts – the world is awash with them. Instead the missing part of the puzzle is great communicators, be this through harnessing the power of data or elsewhere within the organisation. It won't surprise you to learn that LinkedIn are not on their own – Eyeful continues to grow as we are called upon to support organisations that are unable to untangle themselves from the content and data mire.

The ability to communicate value through to content and data is not a given.

Moving forward, every organisation, large and small, needs to have a strategy in place that not only identifies the power of its growing data assets but, more importantly, creates a culture where it is embraced and harnessed to deliver real, clearly communicated, value.

**Your data story starts here...**

## RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

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*'Made to Stick'*, Chip & Dan Heath, Arrow (2008)

*'Storytelling with Data: A Data Visualization Guide for Business Professionals'*, Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic, Wiley (2015)

*'Information is Beautiful' (New Edition)*, David McCandless, Collins (2012)

*'The Presentation Lab: Learn the Formula Behind Powerful Presentations'*, Simon Morton, Wiley (2014)

Brent Dykes - @analyticshero



54%



## **ABOUT EYEFUL PRESENTATIONS**

Since 2004, Eyeful Presentations has built an enviable reputation as a world leader in the business of presentations.

Through expert research, testing and innovation, they help blue chip clients across the globe get the very best from their business presentations. This is achieved by implementing their proven Presentation Optimisation™ and Blended Presenting™ methodologies to ensure that every presentation has a clear, engaging story, a strong call to action and stunning design.

Their UK HQ is the home of Eyeful Labs, Europe's only dedicated centre of presentation excellence and the base for Eyeful's consultancy and training practice alongside a European team of dedicated presentation designers and digital practitioners.



## **PRESENTATIONS ARE TOO IMPORTANT TO NOT BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY**

Eyeful was founded in 2004 to address a problem that befalls organisations of all sizes – poor communication at key moments.

It might be a must-win pitch, a high stakes shareholder engagement or strategically important internal conference...whatever the event, presentations play an intrinsic part in their success or failure.

**Optimising these engagements is where Eyeful step in.**

Understanding the fragile mix of elements that ensure presentation success is why, after all these years, we're still at the forefront of making communication work for clients across the globe.

The growing collection of Eyeful Insights papers is another example of this thought leadership in action. To learn more about our work, visit:

**[www.eyefulpresentations.com](http://www.eyefulpresentations.com)**

