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Data Storytelling: Big Data's Next Frontier

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If you're looking for a business prediction for the year, here's one: *"Data Storytellers will be in high demand."*

Many self-proclaimed business gurus are predicting that 2016 will be the year of "Big Data". For those unfamiliar with the concept, big data is a general term for the processes and automated tools related to the search, capture, storage, curation, analysis and visualization of data.

Often used synonymously with predictive analytics, big data is about making sense of data in ways that improves decision making confidence, enables trend identification and leverages information in means that provide new insights—insights that can be used to do such things as fight disease, prevent crime and deliver a business edge.

At the moment, however, there's a "big" gap in the practice of big data-competent "Data Storytelling".

To be sure, businesses will spend millions of dollars this year in the development of the big data infrastructures needed to house and crunch data. But, I'm predicting that few dollars will be spent in the development of the talent required by these businesses to give the resultant data analytics much meaning or context. Data storytelling is about providing businesses with the meaning and context that can be derived from data to drive breakthrough thinking.

Here are 5 tips to establish the necessary data storytelling environment for your business:

1. **Create the role:** With the correct technical infrastructure in place, the next step towards building a rich data management environment, one that can be readily mined and able to be leveraged for competitive gain, is to recognize the need for professionals to be on-staff that are charged with excavating the data and cultivating the stories that make sense of it.

2. ***Integrate the talent:*** With the role defined, the organization must then dedicate the time and effort to best leverage it. The data storyteller must be involved in the business to a sufficient level in order to do their magic. This means being invited to participate in many strategy-setting, marketing, sales and creative / advertising activities where the organization's data assets are best applied.
3. ***Extend value with tools that dazzle:*** The data storyteller needs automated presentation tools to craft and deliver their best stories. Look to fortify the position by providing tools that will serve to dazzle the target audience. The use of animation, video and other multimedia will not only make the information derived from your data "pop" it may help you to absorb grab it's meaning and implications.
4. ***Institutionalize Data Storytelling:*** Make data storytelling part of your business processes. Extend the way that you run your business so that data storytelling becomes simply "what you do"-ensuring that the practice will not become an afterthought one that is used only when you remember to use it.
5. ***Teach others to tell stories, too:*** Extend the thinking about how data analytics can be leveraged by teaching others in the organization to use the techniques of data storytelling, as well. When you do, you will shift your business culture towards one that deliberately cultivates, thoughtfully manages and derives great value from its data assets.

To close, staff members with titles like "data storyteller" will emerge on the scene this year—it's already beginning to happen. But, the reason that you care about embracing the trend is not driven out of a need to be "hip and with it." Indeed, you must embrace the concept because you want to ensure that your firm's "big data" investments yield the greatest results.

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