



Data- and Data-Anger Management: The Five Stages of Cleansing

■ WITH THE ROSY-FINGERED DAWN OF SUNRISE DATES CREEPING OVER THE HORIZON, you're faced with taking your enterprise on an odyssey toward clean data. Before you can even dream of synchronizing with trading partners, or integrate multiple data sources, or targeting with seamless efficiency, your foundational information needs to be cleansed and coded.

It's not easy. Let's take your customer data, for example. Sales, master file maintenance, IT, marketing systems, syndicated measurement, trade promotion, consumer insight, retail merchandising, in-store promotion — they all touch that thing you call "customer."

And all these tributaries flow into the same data pool, with everyone — and no one — maintaining it.

HOW CAN YOU CLEAN THIS POLLUTED STREAM OF CUSTOMER CONSCIENCE? We have identified five formal stages that each CPG manufacturer goes through before it can even begin the process.

1. DENIAL: "This can't be happening!"

Your head of sales will defiantly state, "We know our customers better than anyone else." Being close to your customers does not mean that your customer data is close to right. Your master file is a slave to your own lack of consistency. How many ways do you identify "Wal-Mart?" *Wal*Mart, Wal Mart, Wal-mart, Walmart, WM?* It's time to face it — head on.

2. ANGER: "Who did this?"

Trying to track the 25-plus banner names of Kroger, or seeing 100 variations of 7-Eleven would get anyone upset. Before you tear your people apart, however, please realize they are torn between data maintenance and moving product. As their superior, what gets you angrier, anyway — low data quality — or low volume?

3. BARGAINING: "We can fix it ourselves."

"We can put in a training program," you think. Many others do, too. Go on and deploy your resources to formalize a strategic plan to ensure everyone inputs the word "STREET" the same way. Now, *there's* a real value-added activity. Meanwhile, your competition is out increasing market share. Do you want good spelling — or good *selling*?

4. DEPRESSION: "This is a disaster!"

The more customers you have and the more data inputs you gather, the bigger the problems. Nothing feels worse than customers telling you that your view of them is wrong. They want you to have a hierarchy that reflects the way they view themselves. But you don't, and it never seems to be right. Bummer.

5. ACCEPTANCE: "OK, we need help."

Life is moving too fast. Thousands of stores open and close each month. Retailer and wholesaler hierarchies and relationships change constantly. You can't keep up. I know, I know. Reach out to those who understand your situation. They've been there. *They know your pain.*

IF YOU THINK YOUR SITUATION ISN'T REALLY ALL THAT BAD, PREPARE YOURSELF FOR AN INTERVENTION. Because if you *don't* need one, you'll be the only exception we've seen. Meanwhile, get to Stage 5 as quickly as possible. Then, you can begin your journey to recovery. ■



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