



Data Quality – the Silent Killer of Your CRM System

by Dave Whiteside, Director, Client Growth & Success, CLIENTSFirst Consulting
featuring Jennifer Reichenbach, Director of Operations - CRM, Pittsburgh, Simpleview

The American Heart Association refers to High Blood Pressure (hypertension) as the “Silent Killer”. The reason is that high blood pressure typically has no symptoms until after it has done grave damage to the heart and arteries, and most people do not even know they have it.

Similarly, poor data quality can have an equally detrimental effect on your CRM system. In a well-managed CRM launch, before the rollout, data is ideally cleaned up prior to importing it into the system. But over time, without regular checkups and maybe some preventative “medication” ([Data Stewarding](#)), the silent killer goes to work.

According to the **Dunn & Bradstreet Data Driven Marketing Trends Survey 2017**:

57%

rank improving data quality the #1 obstacle to marketing success.

17%

of the executives surveyed felt their organizations had very good data.

30%

cited they had poor data.

What are the most challenging obstacles to data-driven marketing success?



Source: Data-Driven Marketing Trends Survey by information in partnership with
Dunn & Bradstreet and Ascend 2. N= 158 Data Quality Benchmarks.

Common estimates are that without dedicated data quality maintenance, **up to 30% of an organization's contact data become outdated or incorrect each year.**



Contacts in the system are people, so they do what people do: they get married and divorced, change jobs and relocate, some retire and some pass away. That's life. **So, if your CRM has 10,000 contacts, statistically at the end of each year, up to 30,000 may have dated or incorrect information.**

Of course, no organization plans to have bad data. But lack of a plan to maintain good data is, in fact, a plan to assure bad data.

Jennifer Reichenbach, Director of Operations - CRM, at Simpleview's Pittsburgh office, agrees. She and the Simpleview team work with hundreds of destination marketing organizations across the globe who use [Simpleview's CRM](#) every day.

“Keeping data clean is critical for the successful use of CRM and for the overall success of your DMO,” said Jennifer. “A system is only as good as the data that lives in it, and your sales and marketing efforts are impacted by the quality of your data and your ability to ensure that you are following up on the right opportunities with the right people at the right time.”



“Data cleansing is a task that is likely not high on your DMO's priority list, but it should be,” said Jennifer. “For example, taking the time to scrub your visitor data insures that you are only marketing to prospective visitors who truly want to hear from you, that you are compliant with all international regulations regarding email marketing, and that you are presenting them with the information that is valuable to them.”

“DMOs need to make a pro-active, ongoing commitment to reviewing and cleansing their data on a regular basis to ensure that information is current and correct and that outdated or incorrect information is corrected or purged from the system,” said Jennifer.

“The same can be said for all of your other customer and stakeholder data,” added Jennifer. “A regular review and cleanup of meeting planner, tour planner data or partner information goes a long way to keeping your organization running at top efficiency.”

WHAT TO DO

It's easy to become overwhelmed after evaluating the scope of a CRM data quality project. There can be so many issues that it can be a challenge to figure out where to even start. Obviously, you can't tackle them all. But don't despair. The thing to remember about data quality is that it will never be 100% - but it doesn't have to be.

The best strategy is to focus on the most valuable information and divide your data quality project into manageable pieces.

BALANCE COSTS AND BENEFITS

ASSESS THE MESS.

Just like with a medical condition, an accurate diagnosis is critical. Without it, you may waste precious time on ineffective treatments. For CRM data problems, start with a [data quality assessment](#). This will let you know the scope of the issues and help you come up with an effective treatment plan.

TREAT CONTACTS DIFFERENTLY.

Different contacts in your database likely have different value and should be considered as separate groups. For instance, for a small subset of key contacts such as top customers and prospects, it will be important to have complete and correct contact information. This segment of contacts often receives different types of communications, and the business loss of one of these contacts likely has a higher level of consequence. When one of these contacts at a major resort or convention center changes jobs, it may have a lot more business impact than when an individual in a smaller town doesn't get your newsletter. Focus on the top contacts first and work from there. Additionally, use contact types or categories in your CRM to mark these key contacts with some type of indicator as "strategic" or "high priority" so it is easily recognizable by all users.

GO AFTER HIGH IMPACT DATA.

Often you may find that there is a certain subset of bad data that is causing the most serious problems. Maybe bad email addresses are causing key communication bounce rates to spike. Focusing on this type of data can be particularly impactful for improving delivery rates of important communications or invitations that are critical to marketing success.

FOCUS ON KEY STAKEHOLDERS.

If you are working on enhancing CRM value and adoption for a key group of system users, begin focusing on the contacts they care most about. People frequently review these records, so any incorrect data will be noticed. Be sure to clean these records before training users because if the data is bad, system adoption will be challenging.



Working with these subsets of data can make a dramatic difference – and will also give you a feeling of accomplishment that promoting data quality is indeed possible.

DEDICATE RESOURCES

Once you have scoped and prioritized your data quality projects, you must dedicate the necessary resources. This includes not only investing money but also committing the necessary time and staff. There is no magic bullet for data quality. Good CRM data requires good people. Ongoing attention by trained and dedicated [CRM data quality professionals](#) (sometimes called data stewards) will be essential. Organizations that fail to focus adequate resources on their data will find that marketing effectiveness falters and user adoption falls.

Jennifer agrees that it's important to assign someone to own the task of data cleansing.

In a larger organization this may be the person who is your CRM administrator. In a small organization you may choose to assign that task to an individual in each department who has to take ownership of their data quality.

"There also need to be scheduled timelines for your data cleanup efforts," said Jennifer, "and the required time set aside will vary depending on the current state of your data, but as you continue to follow concentrated efforts, you will actually find that the amount of ongoing time you have to dedicate to data cleansing and consolidation will go down."

For organizations that don't want to hire internal resources, it's now easier than ever to acquire trained and experienced data professionals. Outsourced Data Stewards offer organizations the option of having trained CRM data quality resources who can serve as part of their team whenever they need them – without having the expense of training, supervision, benefits and office space.



SIMPLEVIEW STORY

A client contacted their Simpleview Analyst thinking that there was something wrong with CRM because around 10% of the emails that they sent as part of a recent meeting planner marketing campaign bounced back as undeliverable.

During the course of investigating the issue with the client, the Analyst discovered that the contacts on this list were from a spreadsheet import from a trade show that took place over three years ago. In reviewing the list, the Analyst further noted that the last updated date on a vast majority of the contacts where delivery failed was over two years ago. Diving further, the Analyst then "Googled" quite a few of the contacts where delivery failed and found that they had moved on to other positions over a year ago, so their email addresses were no longer valid.

As a result, they were able to determine that what likely happened here is that these bounces occurred because the meeting planner email addresses no longer existed. This story demonstrates how bad data can impact CRM success.



FOCUS FOR IMPACT



When you first find out that you have a data quality issue, the diagnosis may seem dire. But once you put a treatment plan in place, you will start to feel better almost immediately.

The most important thing is not to waste time. Instead you need to focus.

DATED DATA:

Some organizations start with the irrelevant or outdated data found during the initial data assessment. While many people may think that you should never delete records from your database, this isn't always true. If you have contacts who are not connected to anyone in the organization, are not on any lists and don't have current activity, at a certain point, it may make sense to remove them from the system.

INCOMPLETE DATA:

Next, spend time to research the missing information for key contacts and add it to the records. To help identify changes to shared data, it can be helpful to add a link or other notation somewhere in the record regarding who made the change, when the record was researched and the location where the correct data was found.

INCONSISTENT DATA:

First, ensure that the organization has a consistent style and document it in a [Data Quality Standards Manual](#). Then, fix existing data inconsistencies to ensure that all records conform. Most importantly, be sure to share the standards guide with users to minimize future inconsistencies and the creation of duplicate records. Creating a Data Quality Standards Manual takes some thought, so be prepared to spend some time on this and involve key stakeholders to ensure you get their buy-in.

BOUNCES:

Start with the largest or most frequently used mailing and event lists and identify the emails that have bounced. Research those contacts and either update their information or remove them from the lists.

DUPLICATES:

You can search for duplicates in several ways. Start with duplicate email addresses since, for most records, an email address can be a unique identifier. Then perform additional searches and research and merge the dupes, filling in any missing information. To prevent the creation of future duplicates, train users on the benefits of utilizing CRM features that allow duplicate identification during contact entry and can assist in filling in contact information to minimize data entry.

[Simpleview CRM](#) has several pre-built reports that go a long way towards cleaning up duplicate data, which is the easiest of data to clean.

At the Account Level, there is a Duplicate Report that will provide a DMO with a list of potential duplicate accounts. It also offers the ability to merge these duplicate accounts into a single new master account record. "What happens from time to time is that users will neglect to search CRM for an existing account before adding a new account record, so scrubbing your database of duplicate accounts needs to be done on a regular basis," said Jennifer. "In a few mouse clicks, this report will clean up that account data in no time. There is a similar report at the contact level for cleaning up that contact data."

Several other features exist within the Simpleview CRM for DMOs looking to clean up their data, whether upon entering data, or as part of maintaining data, such as when staff changes take place.

These features can be implemented by DMO staff, or DMOs can request support from Simpleview as part of their support hours allotment.

GETTING HELP FROM A PROFESSIONAL

While all of this preventative maintenance can be helpful for dealing with less serious data quality conditions, at a certain point you may find yourself with a critical data quality condition that requires help from a trained professional.

The team at [CLIENTSFirst Consulting](#) has more than a decade of experience helping Clients [assess data quality](#) projects and come up with effective strategies and plans for eliminating bad data. Additionally, our team of trained, outsourced [data quality professionals](#) can be enlisted to work together with your internal team to cost effectively clean and maintain your data on a full-time or project basis.

Additionally, dedicated Simpleview [CRM Analysts](#) can also help to tackle more complicated data cleanup projects.

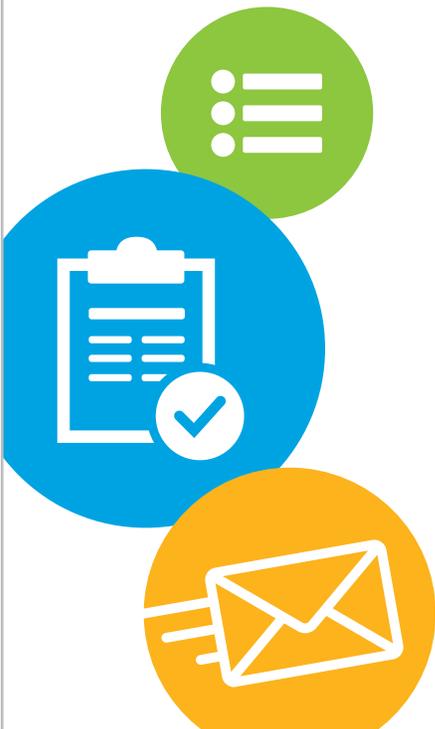
“Your Analyst is an expert in providing the framework, recommendations and detailed approach for more complex data cleanup projects and can enlist the help of a CRM Developer to work their magic to clean up large amounts of data with a few lines of code,” says Jennifer. “For example, we can help you identify all of the contacts that live in your PR/Media database that have not written an article about your destination in the last three years. We can also help to identify all the meeting profiles in the meeting sales user group that have no leads associated with them or provide you with a list of all of the accounts that do not have any open traces in the last year.” Customers can use their CRM Support hours for these types of projects.



CLIENTSFirst SUCCESS STORY

A client reached out to the CLIENTSFirst team because they had a critical mailing that needed to be executed under a tight timeline. The problem was that the list they wanted to use, containing more than 20,000 contacts, was several years old, so they knew that the data was outdated, and deliverability would likely be compromised.

CLIENTSFirst evaluated the data and put a plan in place to quickly and cost-effectively clean the list, resulting in a 95% deliverability rate.



A CRITICAL CLEANUP CONSIDERATION: COMPLIANCE



Today, bad data doesn't just impede system adoption and business development. Regulatory issues are driving data quality to a critical level of importance not before seen. International laws and regulations require good data to facilitate compliance and impose serious consequences and penalties for violations. So knowing your data is clean and complete can become a legal problem in addition to a business problem.

The [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#) and the [Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation \(CASL\)](#) are two key regulations that mandate data quality. CASL went into effect on July 1, 2014 and seeks to protect Canadians from spam by imposing fines of potentially more than \$1 million for violations. GDPR is a new European Data Protection law that goes into effect on May 25th, 2018 and has significant penalties and fines up to 4% of an organization's annual revenue for non-compliance.

These new regulations put more responsibility and compliance obligations on companies. If your CRM has email addresses for contacts in Europe or Canada, you are at risk, so it's a good idea to take action now to avoid penalties later.

FINAL DATA CLEANUP CONSIDERATIONS

Successful CRM systems require an ongoing commitment to data quality. While at first, maintaining clean data can seem daunting, the good news is that data quality success is not only possible, it also results in long-term CRM and marketing success.

If you develop strategy and put a data quality plan in place, you will see your organization and your business grow.

ABOUT | DAVE WHITESIDE, CLIENTSFirst Consulting

Dave Whiteside is Director of Client Growth & Success at [CLIENTSFirst Consulting](#).

Dave's focus is helping the company and its Clients grow and succeed. With more than 30 years of sales and marketing experience, Dave shares his extensive knowledge of marketing technology and experience in enhancing revenue and Client experience.

Known for his deep knowledge of business development processes and technologies such as CRM and competitive intelligence, Dave is well-respected for the high level of service he provides his Clients who call on him regularly for advice.

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