

# THE ART OF DATA

*Give any two data analysts the same sample and – in theory - they should derive the same insights. But true insight requires more than number crunching. It requires a little art.*

"If data is essentially about facts – and truth comes from facts – then why would there be differing results from the same base data?" says Data Insights' managing director Carmen Vicelich. "The truth is there are many things you can do with data, but real, meaningful and actionable insight requires more than just a data sample and a fancy toolset. And gleaming those meaningful insights is what we call the art of data."

## MORE THAN NUMBER CRUNCHING

The ubiquity of analytics tools has brought with them a laundry list of visualisations – charts, tables and graphs – that can be incorporated into reports. But, Vicelich says with these tools the focus is on data exploration, not on aiding a narrative. "Finding those insights, the ones that are plots to the story that the client needs to be told, is significantly harder than crunching numbers," she says.

"The insight only comes from knowing which questions to ask. Which crumbs or data nuggets to follow, and down which path?"

Vicelich says there are three main principles that govern these inquiries.

- Relevance: What is the problem that needs to be solved? How should the outputs be presented so the story is understood?
- Requirements: What needs is the data addressing and what strategy will the outcome and

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- result achieve?
- Results: What does success look like? What outcome is being measured?
- How can actionable insights be delivered?

Despite technological advancements that have seen an increasing amount of human roles replaced with machines, we humans aren't obsolete yet. Even IBM's Jeopardy-winning artificial intelligence Watson would have a hard time making useful recommendations from data. "He may build a data model successfully, but he likely wouldn't be able to bring the data to life to tell a story," says Vicelich. "The problem is that data is not black and white, and so

much depends on the problem to be solved and how you approach it." The art, says Vicelich, is in finding the right question to ask – and doing so quickly, without losing the opportunity or having it become redundant – and empowering that



Carmen Vicelich

data to tell the story and convey what action should be taken as a result.

## GOLDEN GUT

Netflix CMO Kelly Bennett talks about the 'Golden Gut' – that in Hollywood, where they have access to all kinds of rich data about who buys movie tickets and where, the decisions on which movies to make and likely future successes are a combination of data and gut instinct. Vicelich says marketers need to take a similar tack.

"It's about factually combining what you do know, with instinct of what you think you know, to investigate and validate through the data," she says. "Just as the film industry found the formula for

successful film-making involved forging an emotional connection with people, marketers need to find a way to connect their data with creativity, so that we can connect product to consumers as people.

"Insight doesn't need the perfect algorithm or the perfect 'gut'. Insight is making the complex simple and using data to tell the story so you can make a data based decision that supports your strategy."

## BALANCING ACT

While both gut instinct and data factor into great analysis, Vicelich says it's a mistake to rely too heavily on one or the other. She likens the skills for finding the

right information and displaying it well to curating an art exhibition. "It takes being able to combine the commercial experience to model and code to identify which mysteries to follow – with the art of telling a story in a meaningful way to convey the insight.

"No two-customer data sets are equal. While the frameworks and

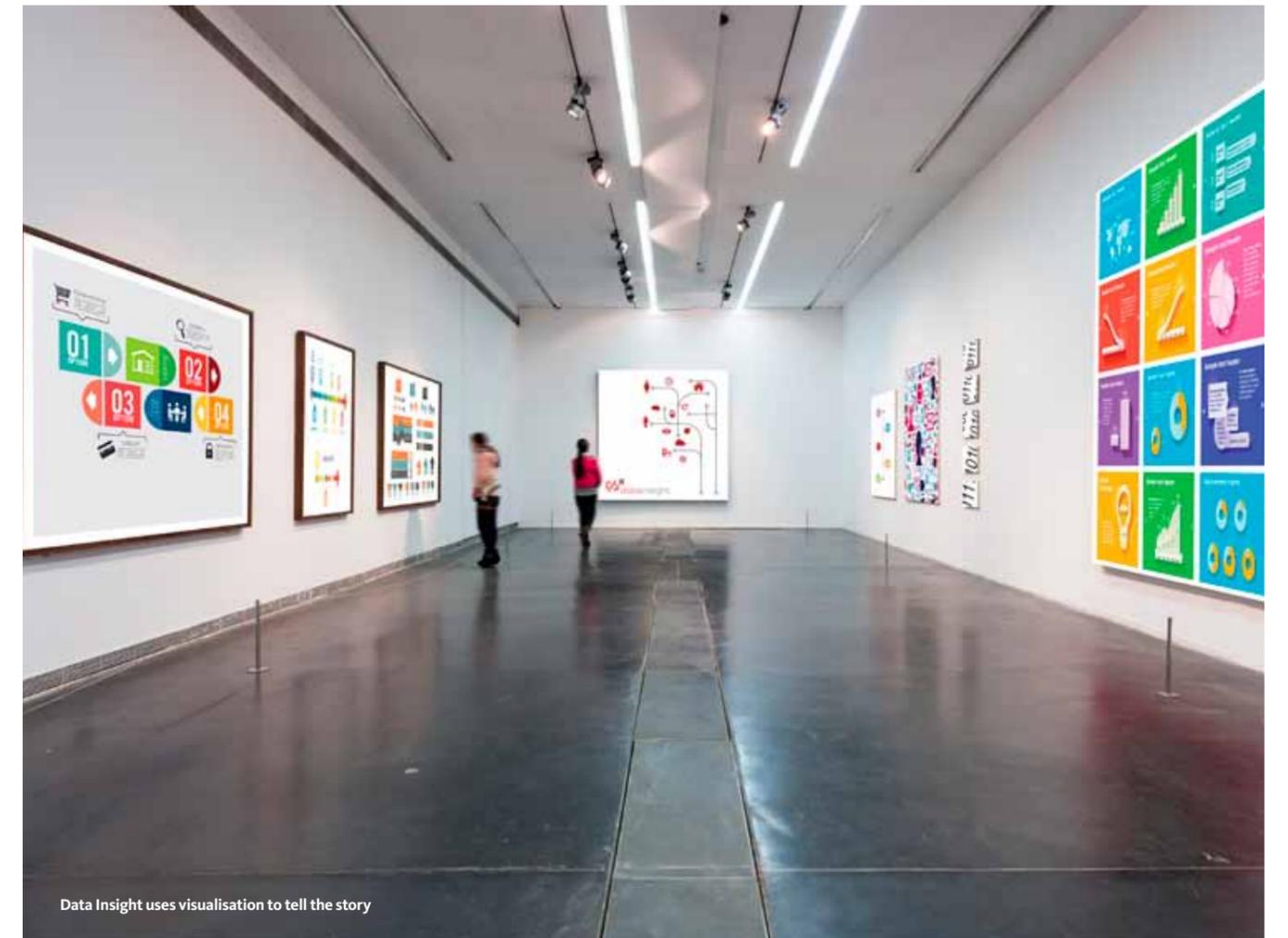
principal techniques used may be repeated, it's up to us to look at the clues and weave the story. The same can be said of how we turn numbers that are customers into personas into stories that are actionable insights as marketers."

Data is really just numbers, and that's perhaps why it gets relegated to the back room – away from the

'sexy' above the line campaigns and glamorous apps garnering all the attention. But Vicelich says through data, the unexpected truth and authenticity of the world around us is revealed. "Data can uncover human behavior that we may not see. And when you combine that with human creativity and imagination, it can result in

something magical." And that, she says, is the art of data.

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Data Insight uses visualisation to tell the story