Impacts of Inappropriate Data Gathering in a Small Business

Robert Forto

School of Business, Liberty University

Authors Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Robert Forto. Email: rforto@liberty.edu

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Abstract

In a small business, data is money. If an organization does not understand its customers' and clients' needs, it will not effectively survive. Data collection tools are omnipresent. A company can collect demographic data from social media, customer data from buying choices using an online shopping cart, preference data from polls, and product or service interest through email newsletters. The problem lies when a business uses inappropriate data gathering techniques. How a Christian-led organization gathers and utilizes its customer and client data will determine the success of its business. Scholarly and biblical literature and scripture provide a framework for critically analyzing a real-world business problem regarding data gathering and implementing a solution based on Christian values. Informed Christian leaders can utilize tools that focus on servant-first leadership to build a community from within and outward while balancing faith and business.

Impacts of Inappropriate Data Gathering

In a small business, data is money. If an organization does not understand its customers' and clients' needs, it will not survive in business over the long term. Data collection tools are omnipresent. A company can collect demographic data from social media, customer data from buying choices using an online shopping cart, preference data from polls, and product or service interest through email newsletters. The problem lies when a business uses inappropriate data gathering techniques.

Ahmed and Pathan (2019) propose that data-driven decisions are used primarily for predictive modeling, identifying optimal learning patterns, tracking individual information, and research. Essentially, an organization attempts to answer five questions: who, what, when, why, and how a customer or client is doing something when they collect data. Unfortunately, depending on the gathering tool used, it is easy for a business to become lackadaisical in maintaining data quality, which becomes an ongoing problem for many companies (Azudin & Mansor, 2018). Furthermore, with the advent of the plethora of data collection tools, confidence in the data is low when organizations have vast amounts of legacy data or if their information is held in arcane software programs or other silos.

The challenges of improving data quality can be a formidable undertaking for a small business, and the cost of a lousy collection strategy is high and not just in terms of financial stake. Inappropriate data collection can result in under-reporting, reputational damage, missed opportunities, and high-risk decision-making. This ensures that the data gathering and storage do not take on a life of its own, generating irrelevant data that means nothing to the company (Bartlett, 2013). Utility and the accessibility of the information should be the primary objectives of any information strategy. An organization must have this information strategy and data plan

that allows for ethical management of current assets and anticipate what information can be gleaned from the project to compete in the marketplace (Bartlett, 2013).

A small business owner needs a thorough understanding of how data supports risk, marketing, sales, and profitability, along with the security of the data and privacy concerns that immediately become apparent once personal information is collected and stored on potential or current clients or customers. At the same time, an organization must be cognizant of how its competitors leverage their data and possible advancements that can be instilled to improve data quality and decision making (Bartlett, 2013). However, most small business owners wear many hats in their business. Most do not have the time or capital that intricate data gathering and statistical analysis procedures demand, so they begin to collect data, first in an easy non-committal way. This blossoms into a more robust effort as the business grows. This vast amount of data can become overwhelming and inexperienced organizations lose sight of their objectives (Ramakrishnan et al., 2012). Typically, small business owners put most of their effort into pursuing profitability focused on price, competition, and operational planning, with limited attention for strategic planning, the main objective being efficiency and cost reduction (Heikkilä et al., 2017). As a result, a small business can quickly overlook data security and collection methodology, and high-risk decisions ensue.

Instead of monitoring and developing the external relationships upstream and downstream, the organization can fail to improve the efficiency and profitability of its business data. While these are not instances of companies intentionally acting in bad faith, the consequences for their users are real, nonetheless. So how can an organization that espouses Christian values use data collection and gathering techniques ethically that meet its needs and align with building and nurturing relationships with its customers? The good news is that thanks

to technology, there are plenty of opportunities for companies to learn about their customers and their needs and regularly engage with them. Moreover, conversant Christian leaders can utilize these tools and focus on servant-first leadership to build a community from within and outward while balancing faith and business.

Christian Leadership in the Corporation

Merida (2015) posits that Christian leaders use their skills to the glory of God. Scripture advises Christians that the story of Solomon can be seen as a paradox of sorts. He was the wisest man ever, yet he made foolish decisions and destructive choices (Merida, 2015, p. 55). Solomon knew God's law, but he did not keep it. While he led a nation to a golden age of prosperity, peace, profitable trade, and a magnificent temple, he also let it decline and set it up for collapse.

The story of Solomon can be a parable for a small business and provides organizations with advice on how to operate their company and how it uses the data it collects responsibly. Solomon's rise to greatness is something to behold, but it was short-lived. His glory was under a cloud, destined to fade away (Merida, 2015; 1 and 2 Kings, 84). This responsibility lies on Christian leaders today. Organizations are responsible for conducting business ethically to keep their stakeholders and clients happy, especially in the advent of the *Internet of Things* and data collection methods that have become loosely regulated, it is easy for businesses to stray away from sound and ethical decision-making.

A Christian leader's first responsibility is to conduct their business along the lines of pleasing the Lord. The leader must not do so because of any reward he hopes to receive but because there is no other way (Thomas, 2018). Many failed businesses struggle to become leaders in their communities and reflect Solomon's conclusions in Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, "a person can do nothing better than eat and drink and find satisfaction in their toil. This too, I see, is from

the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the person who pleases

him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness, but to the sinner, he gives the task of

gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is

meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (*New International Version*, 1978; 2011, Ecclesiastes

2:24-26). A Christian leader's business and personal success comes from working and pleasing

God.

      While dynamic client lists, large profits, and satisfied customers may be included as a

part of the success, it is not the definition of success for Christian-led organizations. As Paul

wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "whatever you do, do it all for the Glory of God" (*New

International Version*, 1978; 2011, 1 Corinthians 10:31). Paul does not suggest that we will

always get it right as Christian leaders, but instead, he admonishes us to lead our business to

glorify God.

      Moreover, Geiger and Peck (2016) give the most expansive scope for leader development

by suggesting that those in the local church should become the leadership position within a

community, developing leaders for both the church and community. This focus reflects a broader

view of Christian leadership as those of influence should equip people to be leaders in various

aspects of life. Wherein Krispin (2020) posits the church is recruiting leaders to a mission more

significant than the business world offers. Whether they lead homes, companies, or churches,

their mission is always more prominent than the organization they lead. Taking these two critical

concepts into consideration, this composite framework provides outcomes for developing

individual Christians for effective leadership in various roles across organizational levels and

organizational contexts. In addition, the framework articulates the broad development needs

across different leadership roles (Krispin, 2020; Thomas, 2018). So how can Christian leadership and an ethical value system be used in a practical application for a real-world business problem?

Practical Application

A day-to-day survival approach may lead an organization to drift in their decisions instead of consistently adhering to a strategic objective (Levy and Powell, 2004; as cited in Ramakrishnan et al., 2012). Ultimately a company wants to be judicious in collecting affordable data that meets the business needs, but this can be difficult to anticipate for what purpose the data will be used or what data it will need (Bartlett, 2013). In addition, strategy is likely to involve maintaining and possibly raising the quality of the organization's data. So, what is a practical solution?

For a business to succeed today, it must go beyond selling products and services. Christian leaders develop guiding principles that help them face the challenges posed by business. First, the organization needs to build and nurture relationships with its customers. Customers today interact with brands more than ever before, whether by email, online purchases, or social media. Second, businesses should encourage feedback from their clients and customers, offer their opinions, and share their preferences because of these interactions. A company that fails to listen to customers has never been more detrimental to success than right now.

This author uses a scalable and intuitive, cloud-based customer relationship management solution that allows for integrations and application programming interfaces to create unprecedented opportunities for its company to act upon its clients' preferences and needs and ultimately create a stronger and more profitable relationship with its customers. The key is for this system to be data-centric and safe for the user and the client or customer, along with relying on a Christian-lead values system that fosters trust and long-term relationships.

Conclusion

Data collection can be a controversial and sensitive topic. How a Christian-led organization gathers and utilizes its customer and client data will determine the success of its business. Let's face it; when bad actors violate users' trust, it can damage the organization's reputation and give the appearance that any collection of data is dangerous and unethical. This can come from the small business collecting email addresses for a simple newsletter or demographics from an ad on social media. Or from larger firms with bigger budgets for customer relationship management solutions needs, there must be transparency and be even more careful with its data gathering and storing efforts (Maroufkhani et al., 2020).

When data is used discernibly, and for the greater good of society, it can be a powerful tool in creating positive change supported by the public. We have seen examples of good deeds, especially during the pandemic, where companies smartly and ethically used their client's data to nurture relationships that are more important now than before. Therein, there are plenty of opportunities for companies to learn about their customers' needs and regularly engage with them. Moreover, informed Christian leaders can utilize these tools and focus on servant-first leadership to build a community from within and outward while balancing faith and business.

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