



The Intelligence Revolution for Churches (Part 2)

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Over the past few months I've introduced the Intelligence Revolution and put it in the context of the broader Information Age. I've provided a working definition (The Intelligence Revolution will help us better understand the world around us; will improve our decision making to enhance our health, safety, and peace of mind; and will enable companies to better serve us based on the correlation and analysis of data from the interrelation of people, things, and content), I've identified the "power" and the "danger" of the Intelligence Revolution, and last month I started to answer the question of what the Intelligence Revolution will mean for each of our churches. However, last month's column used a specific example to demonstrate the risks we face if we are too aggressive in collecting and correlating data about our congregants. What are the more positive ways that large churches can consider using big data?

Revisiting the Danger

Last month I started by making the point that most churches are too small to ever have the data or the capabilities to fully participate in the Intelligence Revolution. But to consider how large churches could potentially leverage big data, I referenced an article by Michael D. Gutzler in the Spring 2014 issue of *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*. In the article,

titled "[Big Data and the 21st Century Church](#)," the Lutheran pastor made the claim that "data collection and analysis could be the key to providing a deeper faith life to the people of our congregational communities." As I introduced the approach that Pastor Gutzler advocates, I'm guessing that many of you became increasingly uncomfortable. His approach would correlate personal information (in-

cluding derived assumptions about personal income) with giving, attendance, and commitment to spiritual growth, amongst other data points. His goal was to identify the actions that the church could successfully take for specific families to draw them more deeply into the church.

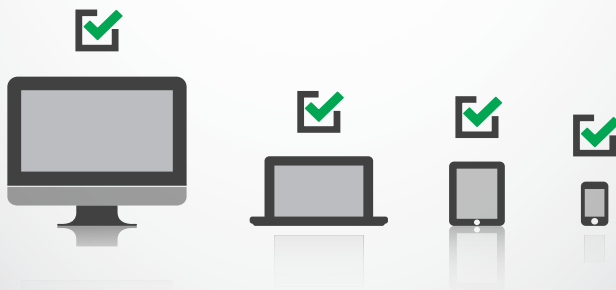
A few weeks ago, I discussed the article with a Christian friend who has been the data scientist for a major retailer, the chief data scientist for a big data consultancy, and is currently the manager of data analysis for a major web-based service. The approach Pastor Gutzler outlined concerned her, I think in large part because of its reliance on personally identifiable information (PII). Increasingly, regulations are being crafted and enacted to protect PII, especially in light of the growing threat of fraud and identity theft. The high profile cases of credit card data theft from retailers, e-mail and password theft from online sites, and the very broad theft of information from Sony should make it clear to all of us that we risk the reputation of our churches (and by extension, Christ Himself) the more that we collect, store, and correlate information about people that can be personally linked back to them and potentially used to their detriment. But I think she was, as many of us were, also concerned by the types of information being collected and the inferences being made from it. Would we be embarrassed if our constituents found out about the information we're collecting and how we are using it? If so, then our actions likely aren't bringing glory to God.

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Searching for the Power

Then is there anything good that the Intelligence Revolution can do for large churches? The answer will depend on the church, but I think there's some potential.

Whenever I talk to businesses about the Intelligence Revolution, I emphasize that they start first with the mission of their business. Is there any data that, if available, could help them to better serve their customers in accomplishing their mission? Likewise, each of us should start with the mission of your church. I know there are different views on the mission of the church, so I won't try to lay out a comprehensive definition that all readers can agree to, but I'm guessing we all can agree that the Great Commission is at least an important part of the church's mission. In their book *What is the Mission of the Church?*, Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert summarized it down simply to this: "the mission of the church - as seen in the Great Commissions, the early church in Acts, and the life of the apostle Paul - is to win people to Christ and build them up in Christ." This follows directly from Christ's own words in Matthew 28:18-20

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

If we just start with this as at least part of the mission of the church, what data could help us in our Gospel outreach efforts, and what data would help us to build our people up in Christ? Many churches reflect these two dimensions of their mission as the outward facing and the inward facing aspects of their mission, and I'm guessing that the data that we could use will correspondingly come from outward and inward sources.

For decades, churches have used external sources of data to learn more about their city and how they can best reach the unchurched and the lost. The Intelligence Revolution is rapidly increasing the sources of data that are available. Demographics, crime data, addresses of certain types of businesses and facilities, all of these sources of data are becoming increasingly available and

searchable. George Barna, who has long been a source for the church of information on national and global trends, has even introduced customized reports on 96 cities and 48 states.

However, to help our congregants grow in their knowledge of God and their ability to observe all that Christ commanded, we likely need to look inside - at the data that we have about our own people. What are their abilities? What are their desires? Where do they live and work? In what ways and in what settings do we touch them today? How do we leverage these opportunities and create additional ones to build them up in Christ? If we have a large enough population, we should be able to anonymize the data for our analysis and decision making. On an aggregate basis, what do we know about the people who attend the early worship service and how should that

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affect our interactions with them there? What do we know about those in our singles ministry and what opportunities can we create for that group to help them mature and grow? Obviously, this isn't fundamentally different from how we make decisions today, but the potential promised by the Intelligence Revolution is that we will have more data and greater ability to work with it, so that we can be more precise and make decisions with greater confidence, helping our churches be more successful in achieving our mission, all to the glory of God.

It is my hope and prayer that these articles will encourage you in your daily walk with Christ. As 1 Peter 4:10 teaches us "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

Russ McGuire is a trusted advisor with proven strategic insights. He has been blessed to serve as an executive in Fortune 500 companies, found technology startups, be awarded technology patents, author a book and contribute to others, write dozens of articles for various publications, and speak at many conferences. More importantly, he's a husband and father who cares about people, and he's a committed Christian who operates with integrity and believes in doing what is right. Learn more at <http://sdgstrategy.com>





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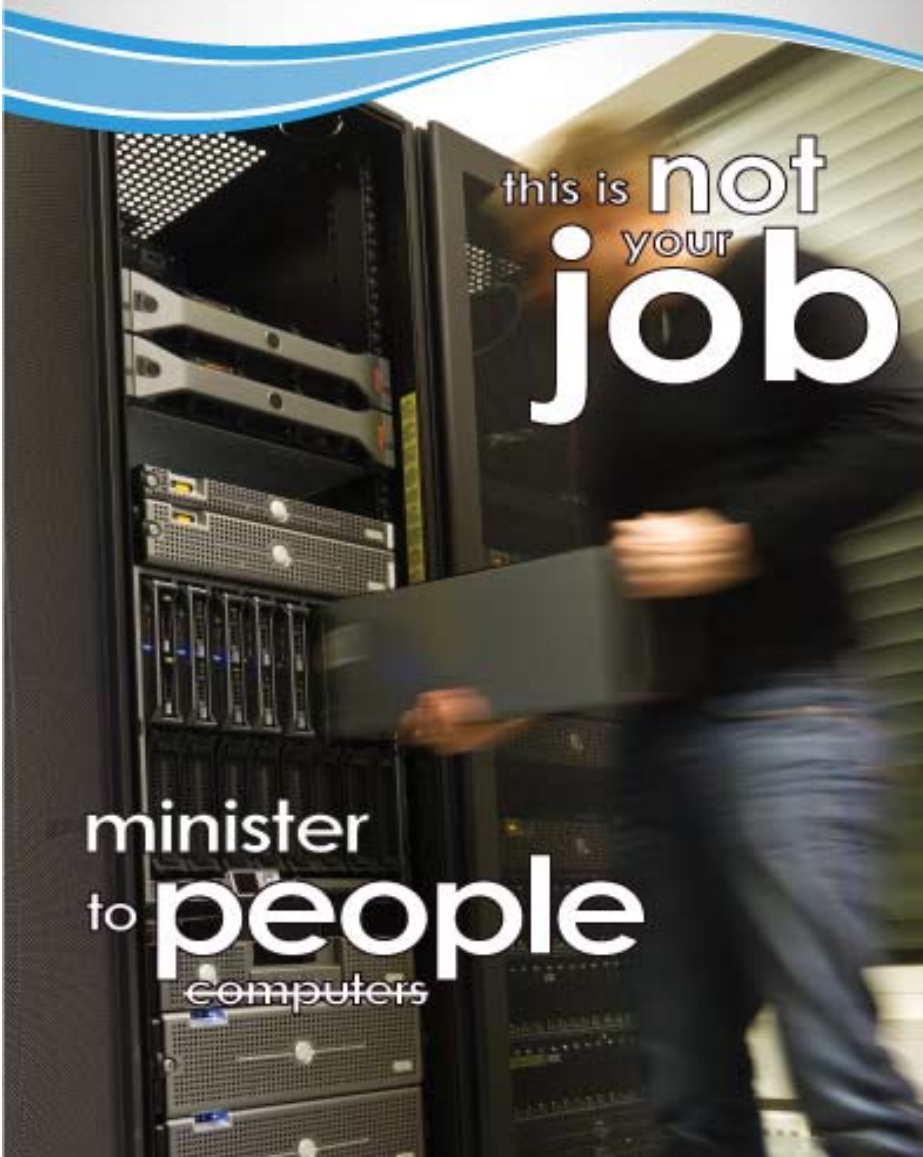
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