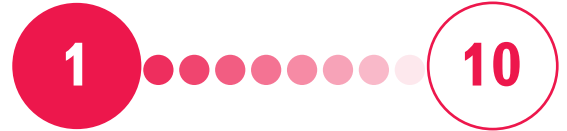# Experian™
Data Quality

10 top tips guide

Data quality can seem like a daunting task, but it's really all about having the right people, processes and technology in place.

These 10 simple steps will help you focus your efforts and build an action plan of how to approach this massive challenge.

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One: Start at the end

When you look at data quality, it's vital to start at the end. Think what your objectives are, what you want to do with the data, what it will be used for. Your objectives impact on the amount and type of data you need. Typical applications might include order taking, fulfilment and delivery, billing, reporting, cross-selling and up-selling to existing customers, and prospecting for new customers who share a similar profile to your existing customers. Knowing what you are aiming to do at the beginning will help you ensure you capture all the fields you need to do it, and that you have the ability to capture the data across all customer touchpoints. Considering your objectives and starting at the end ensures your data is fit for its intended purpose.

Two: Consider the data elements

There's much more to a customer or prospect record than a name and address. This is just the starting point for a whole host of additional information that can enrich your relationship and help you communicate with them more effectively. A great starting point is to gather the data you already have and to decide upon its relevance. Analyzing your current data should indicate where you have gaps and what additional data is needed. The key point is to think about everything you might want to know about a customer or prospect, so that you can build the ability to collect this information into your data systems and processes from day one, even if the data itself is accumulated over months or years of ongoing customer communications.

Three: Measure data quality

No matter how good the systems and processes you put in place to capture data across all customer touchpoints, it is essential that you have a way of measuring the quality of the data over time. Every year in the US,

> 2.5 million people die
> 2.2 million people get married
> 40 million people register new addresses with the USPS

And just as alarmingly, business data decays by 37% each year.

With statistics like these, it's clear that your data quality processes must include provision for updating your customer and prospect data on an ongoing basis. The good news is that there are established ways of doing so. Suppression sources for consumer and business data can identify consumers who have moved, died or asked not to be sent direct mail, helping you to ensure that data that was clean and accurate on the day you captured it, remains so over time. Data quality is a journey, not a destination.

Four: How to get from here to there

Benchmarking is a key part of any data quality program. If you are in the process of putting a good data quality program in place, you should be able to examine where you are now, establish where you would like to be at given points in time going forward, and then assess your performance against those targets, three months, six months, a year, two years down the line. If your current processes are in a poor state, there may be too much to tackle all at once, so identify the areas that are having the biggest negative impact on the business, and prioritize those. Experian Data Quality can provide you with a data audit document to assist with this and advise you on your strategy going forward.

With improved data quality procedures in place, you will be able to assess how much your data quality has improved over time against the targets you set for yourself.

Five: How to secure buy-in

Many data quality projects fail because they do not gain the necessary support from all relevant stakeholders in the business. It is not always evident to people why data quality matters, and how it can affect the bottom line. The fact is, customer and prospect data affects everyone in the organization, from the CEO down. Education is vital to get everyone on board by explaining what's in it for them.

Think about the key drivers and the pain points for all the key stakeholders of the business, and then show how the data strategy will help to improve things. If a manager is challenged to reduce costs, explain how a coordinated data strategy will reduce the amount of returned mail, and so help achieve their aims. For the hands on users, appeal to their competitive nature by rewarding those individuals and teams that show the greatest improvement in data collection or data entry. Buy-in will only come when you make data quality relevant to your audience.

It helps too, when you are planning your data strategy, if you can target some highly-visible areas of the business where there are gaps in the data quality and where people working throughout the business will be able to see some quick wins. And of course, once these quick wins have been achieved, communicate them internally so that everyone can see the benefit of the data quality program going forward.

Six: How to win support for the investment

A good data quality program is an investment in the long-term success and profitability of your business. Like any investment it needs to be justified to those holding the purse strings. Connecting the proposed investment to the company objectives and to the five areas below should act as a good business case for investment.

> Reputation
> Revenue
> Cost
> Profit
> Compliance

Consider how improvements in data quality will affect these key areas.

Seven: Put effective processes in place

A data strategy alone is not sufficient in ensuring your organization's data quality is upheld. Putting processes in place to capture, clean and maintain data will provide clear guidance on how you aim to achieve your goals and clear instructions to those working with you. Ensure that everyone in the organization is trained in the importance of maintaining good quality data, and hold regular review meetings to ensure that your data quality processes are up to date, efficient and effective, and remain so.

Eight: Use technology

The challenge of maintaining accurate data can sometimes seem like a daunting one, but the technology is out there to help you do it. Most companies now have enough computing power sitting on the average desktop to make the most of the sophisticated software that can help ensure the accuracy and quality of your data. The technology you implement should be tailored to your specific organization; concentrating on your business needs will give you a more sophisticated and effective solution. Tools are available to help you:

> avoid potential data pollution
> manage data decay over time
> profile and segment contacts
> suppress those who won't respond

The tools are out there, there is no excuse for not using them.

Nine: Have you improved?

With a good data quality system in place, some of the improvements may be evident for everyone to see. But to ensure you are getting a return on your investment, you should measure and report on the performance of your data quality program on an ongoing basis.

There are some key metrics that will help you see how well, or otherwise, you're doing including:

Customer satisfaction - if your data quality really has improved, this should be reflected in improved customer satisfaction scores.

Speed - are you saving time capturing and cleansing data, and executing campaigns? Do you have systems in place that can measure how long these activities take now, and how long they took last year, or the year before?

Accuracy - if you have benchmarked where you started out from, and where you are now, you should be able to see improvements in the accuracy of your data reflected in a reduction in the amount of returned mail, and in the volume of people you need to mail in order to achieve a given response. If your mailings are better targeted, you should also see an improvement in your response-to-conversion ratio.

Ten: Start again

When everything seems to be running smoothly, and your data quality program seems to be doing its job, it's easy to let up. Don't. Revisit your initial objectives to see how your results are improving, review the process regularly, and make sure the key stakeholders are kept fully informed of your performance. Data quality can't be left to look after itself; it simply doesn't work like that. But stay on top of it, and your company will reap the benefits.

About Experian Data Quality

Experian Data Quality has built up exceptional market coverage assisting customers with their unique data quality challenges. We provide a comprehensive toolkit for data quality projects combining our market leading software with a vast scope of reference data assets and services. Our mission is to put our customers in a position to make the right decisions from accurate and reliable data. The size and scope of data management projects varies considerably but the common factor in all ventures is unlocking operational efficiency and improving customer engagement. We see the potential of data. Whether it's in enabling ambulances to be sent to the exact location of an emergency or supporting financial organisations to ensure they remain compliant against regulations - data accuracy makes all the difference to service provision.

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