

# The DATA-DRIVEN story

*Conceiving it, launching it  
and taking it home*

# **THE DATA-DRIVEN STORY: CONCEIVING IT, LAUNCHING AND TAKING IT HOME**

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# CONCEIVING THE STORY

## *Finding great ideas:*

- Pay attention to beat reporters.
- Ask: How often does *that* happen?
- Create daily/weekly/monthly habits.
- Read and emulate others.

# CONCEIVING THE STORY

## *Identifying and obtaining data:*

- Read the law – not just the stuff for FOIA.
- Fight back. Seek the IT people.
- Follow the regulators. Get what they're getting.
- Trust the Basics: Nexis, OIG, GAO, academia/government studies.
- Use IRE and NICAR!

# CONCEIVING THE STORY

## *Choosing and building the team:*

- Assign the story:
- Time peg?
- Build the team: Story editor + reporter + lead producer
- If bigger scope, + more researchers or reporters?
- Will the data need to be fact-checked? Copy edited?
- If there's video/audio or rich media content, video producer?

# CONCEIVING THE STORY

## *Special considerations for small newsrooms:*

- Everyone's a data reporter.
- Ask these questions early: What's the story? Source, age, reliability, time scope? Do we need to talk to an expert?
- No data hand-offs.
- Google Drive and Spreadsheets are our friends.
- Empowering the newsroom with Skillz trainings.

# THE REPORTING PHASE

## *Organizing the reporting/Make a game plan:*

- Who's collecting what data?
- Who's calling for comment?
- Who's drafting the text? Who's writing what?
- Who will keep the ball rolling? Assign a lead producer.
- Don't fall into the traps of an evergreen timeline. Set benchmark goals.

# THE REPORTING PHASE

## *Organizing the data analysis:*

- Identify the records needed.
- Take stock of your competitive situation.
- Over estimate the time you think the analysis will take.
- Once you are farther into the data, run the analysis like it was the final one for publication.
- Be as obsessive with the data and the interactive fact checking as you are with reporting.



# THE REPORTING PHASE

## *Juggling data work with shoe leather:*

- Identify choke points in the reporting and data.
- Think about the best allocation of resources.
- Start writing something as soon as your story is beginning to take shape.
- Let the data inform the reporting and vice versa.
- Create a timeline for both the reporting and analysis and try to stick to it.

# THE REPORTING PHASE

*Keeping on track/managing the bosses:*

- Be careful about sharing analysis too early.
- Still, don't hoard information.
- Use a backout schedule.
- Build in some go/no go deadlines.
- Share a “lessons learned” memo after publication.

# THE REPORTING PHASE

*Visualizing the data/Interrogate the project:*

- What's the story we're trying to tell here?
- Do we care about shareability?
- Is this story best told through a static or interactive presentation?
- Is this a project we'll want to open-source?

# BRINGING IT HOME

*Framing the story and preparing to write:*

- Be rigorous about the frame, is every part necessary and nailed?
- Consider scope, impact.
- No waffling – prove your case.
- Embrace the gray.
- Identify culprits clearly.
- Tell readers what you don't know.

# BRINGING IT HOME

## *The drafting/editing process:*

- Settle your themes – and don't forget them.
- Outline, outline, outline.
- Clear, concise language. Kill “-ly” adverbs.
- Don't forget the humans.

# BRINGING IT HOME

## *Bullet-proofing to reduce legal risk:*

- Do not wait to “confront” subjects .
- Consider an “FYI” to key subjects along the way.
- Consider registered letters or emails to verify data.
- Consider read-backs of key portions of your story to key sources.
- Develop a system for legal review.

# BRINGING IT HOME

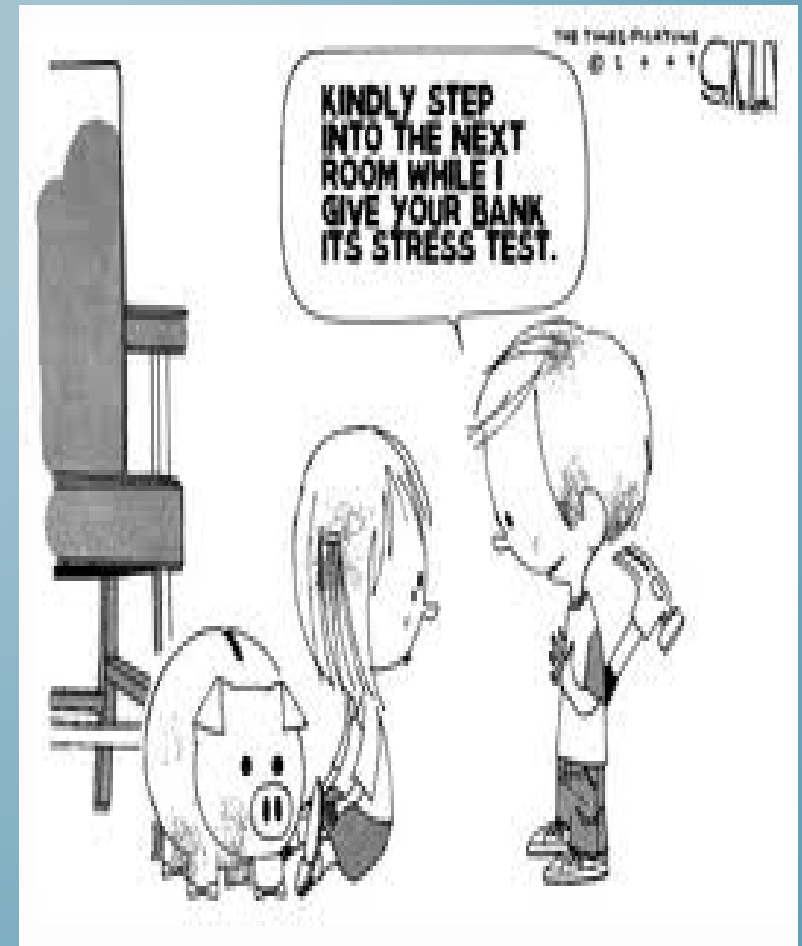
*No errors – the fact-checking process:*

- Source all your data.
- Don't let fact-checking be an afterthought.
- Expect fact-check errors and build in time to address them.
- Don't have a fact-checker? Try a colleague.

# BRINGING IT HOME

## *Stress-testing your data for final publication:*

- You want to be the one taking the harshest look at your data.
- Think about how your most unreasonable critics would react.
- Think about every possible limitation of your data.
- Take a day a week of publication just to spend with your data.





# BRINGING IT HOME

## *The final gauntlet to publishing:*

- Not making errors is all mindset.
- Fact check the data and interactives as much as story.
- Everyone will have their hands on the story, make sure yours are the last ones.
- Print out copies to check all facts and #'s.
- You may feel like this guy, but its better to feel like him before story publishes, not after.



# ***CLOSING THOUGHTS AND TIPSHEET***

**[https://www.dropbox.com/s/  
4ssdr6izmyirqh5/DATADRIV  
EN.ire.june2014.docx](https://www.dropbox.com/s/4ssdr6izmyirqh5/DATADRIVEN.ire.june2014.docx)**

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## ***CONCEIVING THE STORY***

- *Finding great ideas*
- *Identifying and obtaining data*
- *Choosing and building the team*
- *Special considerations for small newsrooms*

## ***THE REPORTING PHASE***

- *Organizing the story*
- *Organizing the data analysis*
- *Juggling the work with shoe leather*
- *Managing up*
- *Keeping everything on track/building a backout schedule*
- *Visualizing the data*

## ***BRINGING IT HOME***

- *Framing the story and preparing to write*
- *The drafting/editing process*
- *Bullet-proofing to reduce legal risk*
- *No errors – the fact-checking process*
- *Stress-testing your data for final publication*
- *The final gauntlet to publishing*
- *Closing thoughts and Q&A*