

## **General Mills Data Strategy Case Study and Sample Dashboard Design**

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July 17, 2021

### **Best Practices**

Dashboards are a useful tool for business users to monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) of their company. Well-designed dashboards are pleasing to look at while clearly displaying the data. Dashboards for executives tend to display data at higher levels of aggregation compared to individual contributors.

The most important goal of a dashboard is to truthfully and functionally communicate the KPIs. Dashboards should convey the measure of interest “most accurately in the shortest time possible” (Wexler et al., 2017). Dashboards usually highlight one measure of interest over others by use of color or another visual element.

Wexler also states some best practices for the visual display of a dashboard are to use sufficient white space, easily readable but visually appealing fonts, and an appropriate layout to provide clarity. Some chart types are easier to interpret than others. Pie charts and circles make it difficult for users to accurately interpret relative values. Purely decorative elements should be avoided.

Dashboards should be tailored to each category of user. Executives are interested in different measures than individual contributors. The CEO may be interested in average sales across each segment and total profits while a business analyst may be interested in drilling down into finer details such as the performance of individual products. Each dashboard should answer the questions of interest for each intended user.

### **Summary of Company**

General Mills is an international consumer packaged-goods company who “manufactures products in 13 countries and markets them in more than 100 countries” (Fusaro, 2016). Fusaro states that the company is divided into three main operating segments which include U.S. Retail,

which accounts for most of their profit, International, and Convenience Stores and Foodservice. He also states they have five large global categories consisting of ready-to-eat (RTE) cereal, convenient meals, snacks, yogurt, and super-premium ice cream. RTE cereal accounts for a large portion of General Mills sales. In recent quarters, General Mills has held four out of five of the top cereal brands (Shroeder, 2020).

General Mills, like all companies, is interested in keeping the company relevant to consumers, especially younger generations. The current CEO, Jeff Harmening, is reported to have been responsible for turning the company towards more natural foods and for removing artificial ingredients from children's cereal in recent years (Fusaro, 2016).

Big Food companies have lagged behind other retailers in collecting data on customers but have recently begun to realize the benefits of big data. Data can be used to group consumers into marketing segments and determine how to tailor campaigns (Bradlow et al., 2017). One study identified two major segments of RTE cereal consumers, "Healthy Choosey", a group that chooses cereal perceived to be healthy, and "Basic", a group concerned with a good-tasting quick meal (Lee & Lee, 2007). While most of their products are sold through supermarkets rather than to consumers, which makes data collection more difficult, the pandemic has boosted online grocery shopping which has made data more widely available (Shanker & Ren, 2021).

General Mills created a new Consumer Insights group after they realized much of their decision-making was based on external research and wanted to shift to internal data collection (Fitzgerald, 2015). The group works with marketing and other departments to identify the company's datasets, such as the marketing mix, and hired an outside data visualization firm to create visualizations. Their vision is to improve the company's performance by using data

insights to create deeper connections with their consumers (General Mills Adds Leadership, 2020).

In 2019, General Mills attempted to increase consumer data collection by requiring scans of grocery receipts to award Box Tops for Education points (Levitt, 2021). The hope was to gain insights with association rules by capturing what other products were purchased along with cereal. However, this approach failed because consumers felt their privacy was violated. General Mills also uses social media to collect data.

### **Sample Dashboards**

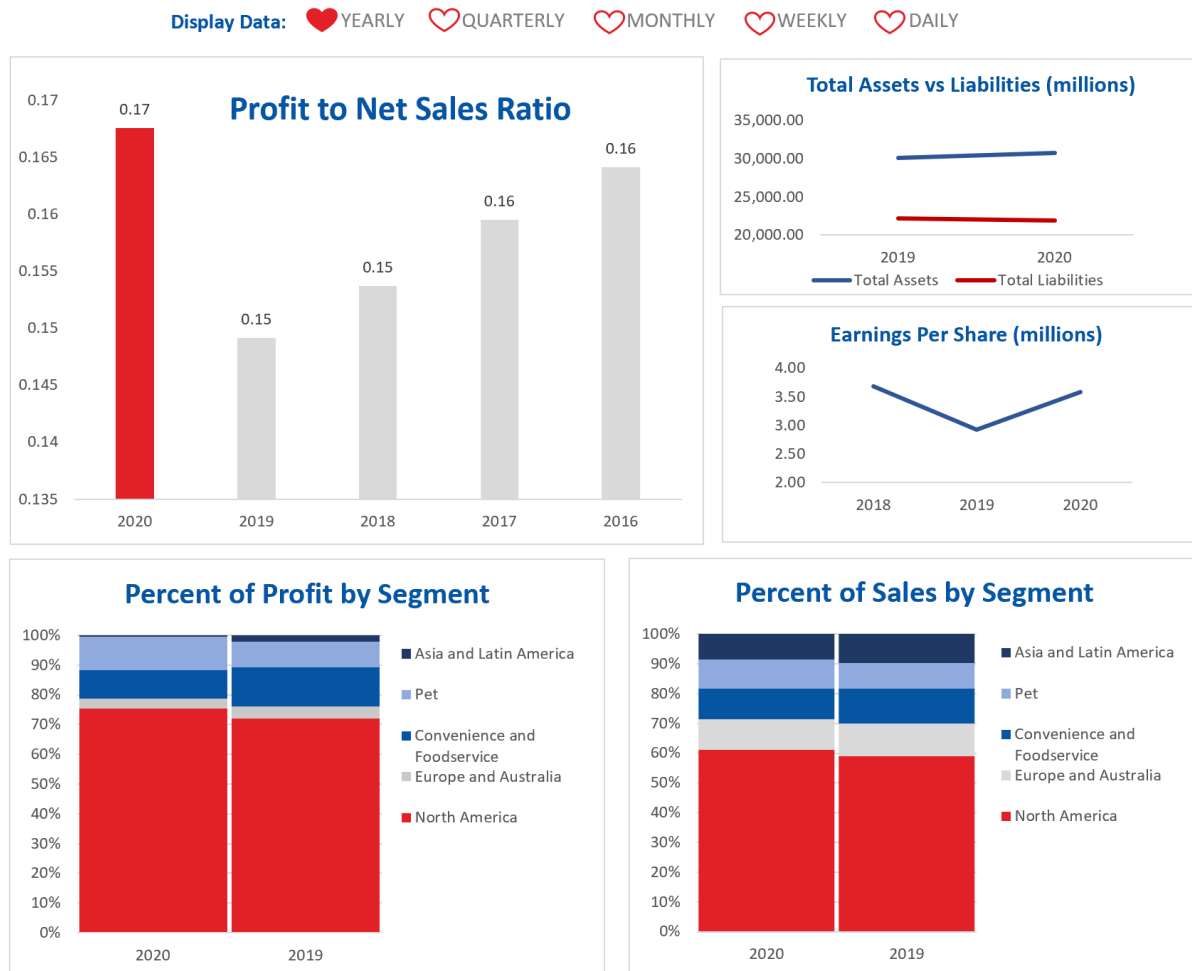
Sample dashboard for different users are included below in Figures 1-3. Data is obtained from General Mills 2020 Annual Report to Shareholders (General Mills, Inc., 2020) unless otherwise noted. The CEO dashboard includes data about sales and profits for the entire company as well as profit and sales broken down by segment. Data about assets and liabilities and earnings per share are also included.

The brand insights manager dashboard includes net sales by division for the North America segment. It also includes periodic data about sales and profits of the segment compared to data from the entire company. Artificial sample customer satisfaction data for each division is also included.

The analyst dashboard includes data regarding cereal sales by brand for General Mills and competitors (Burrows, 2018). It contains periodic sales data for cereal compared to the entire North America segment. It also includes detailed customer satisfaction data aggregated by time period.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

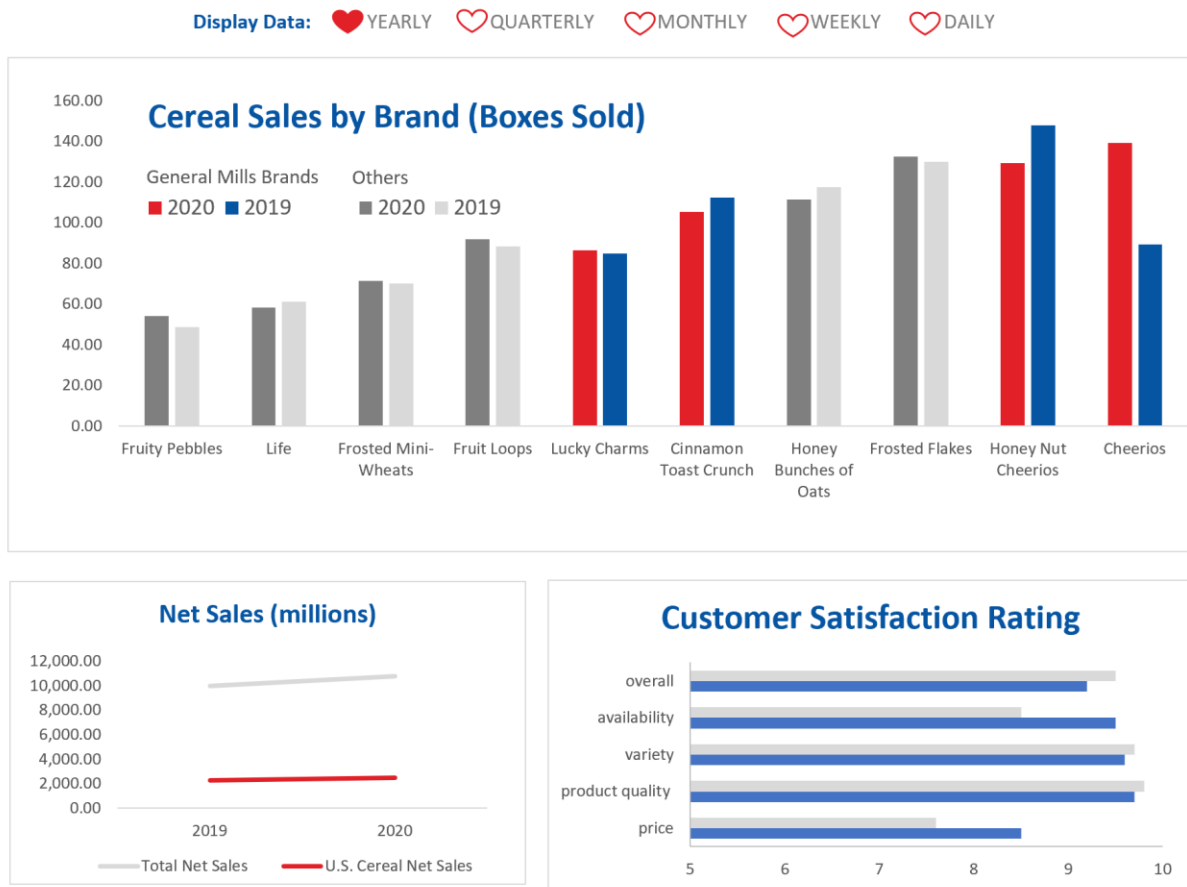
General Mills is an example of a large corporation that has recently begun to realize the value creation of big data. Companies like General Mills need to be mindful of customer reactions to data mining business strategies as in the case of Box Tops for Education. Cereal manufacturers have also been criticized recently for marketing sugary foods to children and placing products at children's eye level (Harris et al., 2020). Data analytics may reveal strategies that can temporarily increase sales but may be harmful overall to the public image. Data should be leveraged to develop responsible brand strategies that create long-term value while improving customer satisfaction.

**Figure 1***CEO Dashboard*

**Figure 2***Brand Insights Manager, North America Retail Dashboard*

**Figure 3**

*Consumer and Market Intelligence Analyst- RTE Cereal, U.S.*





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