

# Marketers' Qualitative Insights Get Lost in Big Data Noise

As information grows, it can become harder to break through to customers

**INTERVIEW** | **APRIL 2018**

**Ross Benes**





An interview with:  
**Adam Kleinberg**

CEO  
Traction



As more ad dollars get spent digitally each year, advertisers find themselves obsessing over the **data in their campaign reports** and centralizing **how they access data**. Adam Kleinberg, CEO of ad agency Traction, spoke with eMarketer's Ross Benes about how advertisers can overlook qualitative insights when they focus too much on data.

**eMarketer:**

How do you feel about advertisers **increasingly focusing on big data**?

**Adam Kleinberg:**

There are several problems with this notion that all decisions in marketing today should be informed and driven by data. First of all, the notion of using data to support decisions isn't necessarily a new phenomenon, right? We've always looked at how do we understand data about consumer behavior to inform decisions about what channels we market in. What has changed in the marketplace is the enormous amount of data that's available and created every day.

**eMarketer:**

What do you think people misunderstand about data?

**Adam Kleinberg:**

Too often it is assumed that data is the same thing as insight. But without understanding, data is just noise. In fact, data can confuse and paralyze when it's more difficult to interpret.

**eMarketer:**

How does data paralyze advertisers?

**Adam Kleinberg:**

In advertising today, it is simply becoming harder to break through and to reach the customer. There are a million ways for people's attention to be divided, so brands are less able to rely on advertising alone and they're **focusing more on customer experiences**.

**“Too often it is assumed that data is the same thing as insight. But without understanding, data is just noise.”**

**eMarketer:**

Why does the industry’s focus on data bug you?

**Adam Kleinberg:**

Something that annoys me is that [advertisers] get lumped together as data-driven organizations. The notion of data is a lot of different things. You have all of these different systems and they don’t always talk to each other. Having the right person in the right place to access the data is difficult.

Certainly, we have an attraction to decisions that were made or supported by data. It is not like I am anti-data. But I'm more of a fan of information, and sometimes that comes from quantitative data and sometimes it is more qualitative.

**eMarketer:**

What types of qualitative information do you rely on for marketing purposes?

**Adam Kleinberg:**

Qualitative information may be a conversation or an observation. I may interview someone and they say something interesting. I may observe people’s shopping habits to examine their buying behaviors. There are all kinds of research techniques you can use to get more unfiltered, real responses from people.

At the end of the day, insight comes from customers, whether you gather information by talking to somebody or observing them or by recognizing a pattern in the spreadsheet. They all have a really important place in helping brands provide value to their customers.

Interview conducted on April 13, 2018