



Finding Good Data in Bad Sources

As an information professional I am confident I know how to source the right information to answer a client's question. I know how to clarify their initial question to make sure I am indeed going to provide the information they need rather than what they told me they need (the gap between the two can be large). When I source the information, I know how to judge if it is fit-for-this-purpose, if it has integrity and quality. I know how to merge data and information from different sources to tell a story and share the answer in the way that has the most impact for the client.

But do I put all of that into action when I read the news and have my own questions – or do I let my own biases play without check? Just recently I read a piece (and apologies I cannot recall the precise source) about listening and hearing others with diametrically opposing views to our own, because not everything people with whom we may ideologically disagree, say will be without its own merit. It really struck a chord, and I acknowledge that often there are certain people to whom I do have a totally closed mind.

And if I am guilty of only looking and reading sources for my own information and education with this bias, do I subconsciously do that too when I'm searching for information for clients?

Is there some balance, some useful nugget hidden in a poor-quality document or source, that I miss because I am doing this? How can I think more outside the box and bring a less judgmental approach to my data-gathering activities? For instance, I may find a badly drawn graph and dismiss it entirely although there might be elements within the graph that are reliable. But this data has then been mis-used.

After reading those few sentences it has given me pause for thought to check myself and not be too quick to dismiss data and information wholesale because I don't think the supplier is good or because the graph is badly done. Instead, I shall be opening my mind to the possibility that some good may be there to find and capturing that too.

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