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DECEMBER 2017

# Speaker

THE ART AND BUSINESS OF PROFESSIONAL SPEAKING

## Recipe for Research

**YOU CAN'T BEAT  
DATA-DRIVEN RESEARCH FOR  
BUILDING CREDIBILITY**


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# ***Making Data Deliciously Relevant***

THINK YOU'RE A  
THOUGHT LEADER?  
PROVE IT WITH  
ORIGINAL RESEARCH

BY JOSH PACKARD, PhD



**M**ost people who call themselves thought leaders really aren't. They're just opinion-havers with a microphone. A thought leader combines the right ingredients of industry expertise with data-driven research to produce cutting-edge insights.

If you want content that positions you as an indispensable source of knowledge, you need data on your side as well as story, experience, and industry expertise. In the immortal words of W. Edwards Deming, "Without data, you're just another person with an opinion."

Your audiences are increasingly data-savvy and understand the difference between scientific findings and personal anecdote. Below, I lay out the ingredients speakers should consider when integrating data-driven research into their business, based on our extensive experience at the Social Research Lab working with speakers who are adding proprietary data to "level-up" their talks to a C-suite audience or make a splash in a new industry.

## ➤➤➤ FOLLOW A GOOD *Recipe*

Data needs a storyteller to bring it to life with a human face and context. Like all good stories, data begins with a problem, a conflict that requires the problem to be solved, and a resolution. For example, maybe you talk about leadership and note that one of the key issues good leaders face is choosing the appropriate way to communicate difficult decisions to employees. That problem can be solved with some good research combining survey data with observations and real-world experience to create a powerful and effective decision tree for any manager or high-level executive.

Just as a soufflé won't properly rise if you don't follow the instructions, your research methods matter for getting accurate findings. Make sure you have the right sample and have expertly crafted questions. In other words, the poll you put on Twitter is not a reliable source of information.



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## INVEST IN QUALITY *Ingredients*

You don't have to be a data or methods expert, but you should have access to one. To offer something unique you'll need to invest, not just grab information from Gallup, *The New York Times*, or someone else's book. Establish a relationship with a high-quality research firm that can deliver unique, cost-effective research insights. There will be some startup costs, as with developing any intellectual property, but the return on investment is high.



## MAKE THE DATA *Digestible*

Your data is "firsthand." Your company contracted with "an independent research lab" to "produce original insights" or you have "proprietary data." Good research firms will be able to use story language to translate the numbers and have experience with data visualization as well as data collection and analysis. Work with your firm to discover deeper trends and how you can communicate them in digestible ways to your audience.


63% of listeners  
remember stories.

5% remember  
individual statistics.

Make your data memorable by  
being a data storyteller.

Made to Stick, by Chip and Dan Heath





90% of the data in  
the world today was created  
in the past two years.

IBM Marketing Cloud, 2016



#### STAY TUNED FOR ANOTHER SERVING OF DATA

Linda Keith, CPA, CSP, recently began a long-term proprietary research project with the help of Josh Packard, PhD, executive director of the Social Research Lab (SRL), to drive content for a new keynote and book. The project combines an industrywide survey and in-depth interviews with C-level executives in community banking to provide unique data. Linda and Josh will be documenting their experience and will provide a behind-the-scenes look at the process, costs, benefits, and lessons learned in an upcoming issue of *Speaker* magazine. Watch for it.



#### ADD SOME *Icing*



Sweeten the deal with potential additional research. Once people know you have data about their field, they'll ask all kinds of questions about demographic breakdowns and future trends. They'll ask: "Did you look at ..." or "Do you have data about ...?" If you know the answer, share it. If not, reply, "Oh, that's a really good idea. Let me look into that." Use it as an opportunity to continue the conversation with the client and potentially even book a new gig to share your results.