



# THE DASHBOARD ACCORDING TO JADE

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I am recounting the story of a consulting engagement that brought me back to the offices of an advertising firm where everything was stylish: the address, the furnishings, and the people - especially the people. Especially Veronique and Jade, who had started their careers in advertising as what I would call fashion models.

I had left the first meeting in this space feeling smiled upon. It recalled me to the feeling I had years ago, when a highly-polished Lufthansa staffer upgraded my transatlantic flight to business class, merely on her whim.

On returning, however, I had no reason to expect continued favors. Veronique had shown herself to be familiar with my particular craft. Jade had a charming general skepticism. I had said nothing to dispel their mistaken impression that I had first-hand experience of their modeling trade. Surely, in the intervening weeks, they had revised their opinion of me downward. I entered the meeting room wearing a slight reserve that, along with a sport coat, is my default traveling outfit.

Reserve quickly melted. Veronique and Jade both greeted me warmly after their respective fashions. Andrew and three others from the Lottery were already there, and we quickly got down to business.

First, the agency recapped what they had been doing. I got the impression of four different initiatives, using different combinations of media. Some seemed fairly specific to the big-bloc jackpot games. Others were more general-ly about how it was cool to play the

Lottery. The others already knew about the content; this was mostly to recap the timing of the efforts.

Next, I showed what I had produced since our first meeting, namely: one Excel workbook.

"This workbook has two kinds of tabs that you normally see: one is an interactive chart, and the other is a table. There is a chart and a table for Powerball, and a chart and a table for Mega Millions. For each game, the chart and the table are linked: what you do to one affects the other. These are what they call Pivot Tables and Pivot Charts, in Excel."

Glancing around the room, I could tell that some were familiar with these Excel tricks and others were not. "I use these because I am convinced that they provide really great access to information, with very little effort. If you are not already familiar with them, this is a great opportunity to get acquainted. No time you spend with these things will be wasted. Once you get used to using them, you will wonder how you got along without them. They are well documented; there are plenty of tutorials out there on the Web. For now I will just show you how to adjust the Powerball chart to look at what interests you."

I showed them first of all a draw-by-draw history of Powerball, from February 2012 to the current day.

"The chart shows three things: the jackpot for each draw. The sales for that draw. And the prediction of sales for that draw, if things continued as they were during the baseline period. The prediction is the open red circles."

Then I showed them the chart below.

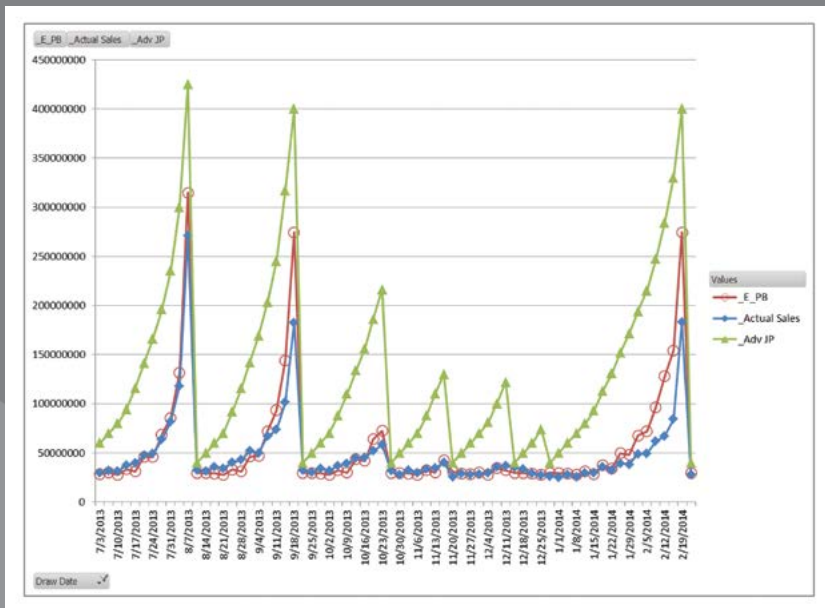
Or one very much like it: what I am showing here is sales rolled up nationally, rather than just for Andrew's state.

"The peak at the right is the Powerball jackpot run of February 2014. You notice the green line- that's the jackpot- is a lot like the two at the left. These are all jackpots that got to \$400 million or more. You see the open red circles: that's the sales prediction. On the two jackpots that got to exactly \$400 million, the prediction of sales for the last draw is the same, and the actual sales are about the same. They are both low compared to the prediction. And look at the four draws before the last one. The jackpot is growing, but compared to September 2013, sales are really lagging for jackpots above \$200 million in the February run."

We got into a discussion about what this meant and what impact advertising might have had on it. We got into some detail about the timing of advertising efforts and the practical issues of mounting a big effort on short notice, then we came back to what an effective effort might look like next time.

Andrew framed it: "So if we get into the market to promote the jackpot when it reaches \$150 million, we expect the actual sales to track closer to the prediction from then on out? And if we wait a couple of draws, we expect to see a lift when the ads come in?"

But Jade quickly responded: "That's if the problem is, they don't know. Then you tell them, and aha! from one day to the next they know. But what if the problem is, they don't care? You talk about jackpot fatigue. We can probably



address that when the jackpot is low. We may not be in the market at all with that kind of message, when the jackpot is high. So how do we get credit for that, in this kind of measurement?”

Veronique agreed: “They will know about the jackpot if they care. Only.”

“And another thing,” Jade continued. “We are looking here at Powerball, and talking about advertising the Powerball jackpot. But what if we are having a more general effect? What if we were talking about a different game, or no particular game, and still got people to care? How do we get credit for that?”

I was a little puzzled by Jade’s preoccupation with “getting credit,” and it must have showed. Veronique called for a short break, and took me aside. “You see,” she said, “it is one of those advertising effectiveness panics. Everyone is under pressure to show measureable results. We want to use your thing to measure effectiveness. We trust that you have built it well. But Jade is right: it does not make sense to look just when and where we are spending money. It is more a thing of people’s attitudes. We should measure what we do. Have you looked at how they measure attitudes? Scale one to five, love it to hate it? Which face is like your face?”

She briefly pulled a face that did not, to my mind, much resemble those confused androgynous faces you see on surveys.

“Which fundamental emotion were you expressing just then?”

“Disgust. Was it not convincing?”

“No”

“Must be the botox.”

Jade and Andrew returned from the coffee corner with the rest of the crew, and we reconvened. Evidently they had been talking about the same issue. Andrew summarized.

“I think we all agree that our efforts for the Lottery ought to affect peoples’ attitudes. And we don’t trust that that the surveys we have seen measure attitudes with much sensitivity.”

Jade snorted and made a convincing “disgust” face.

“The work we are seeing from Dr. Wade does not claim to measure attitudes, but just to show how people are responding to current conditions in a particular game, compared to how they did at some earlier time. I am not sure that this is going to help us show the effectiveness of advertising.”

“And why are we trying to move peoples’ attitudes?” asked Jade.

“So they will spend more.”

“Do we really care when they spend more, or on which game?”

“Well no, but it seems like we have a better chance to show an effect if we’re very specific.”

“Is that true?” she asked, looking at me. “Couldn’t you just build a predictor for every game, all the time, and add them up to say, here is the status quo for the whole operation today?”

“I could do that,” I said. How to do it was clear, but where Jade was going with this was just dawning on me.

“Wouldn’t you think that the very first thing that will change, if people feel just a little differently about the Lottery, is something about how they play? Rather than something they say? I mean, I might play the Lottery for years and say, ‘Playing the Lottery really isn’t worth the money.’ I might play now more often than I used to, but that’s not going to change what I say about it. I might not even say that I’m playing more. I might not even know that I’m playing more – why would I be tracking that?”

“So you’re saying that what a person does,” Andrew ventured, but found his sentence completed by Jade as “is more likely to change than what they say about what they do, or say about how they feel.”

Over the next minute or two, various ones of us pointed out various ways in which changes in people’s spending seemed likely to reflect changes in their feeling. Everyone seemed confident that their combined efforts could cause people to part with more money than they otherwise

would have. No one suggested that they could cause people to express measurably more positive things, without also spending a little more under the same objective conditions. Then someone said, "Wait a minute. How did we get to use sales as a measure of marketing success? What if we get a stretch of bad jackpots?"

I exchanged a glance with Veronique. This was the test of what I had managed to communicate.

"Jackpots vary, and other things too," said Jade. "But if we can say what would have happened last year, we can see whether this year is different."

This formulation seemed to satisfy everybody. "Of course," said Andrew with a smile, "if there is progress, it will be due to everybody, not just us."

I quickly supported this. "What I do helps us measure where we are, and if something has changed we can probably say what. But maybe not why."

Jade laughed. "I'm happy to be a team player if we have a fair way of keeping score."

As I anticipated, building an all-game dashboard turned out to be straightforward. It lives now on a site where everyone who wants to can see it. Andrew tells me that he sees pivot charts every week now. He also says that having a precise picture of "how things were last

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year" has really focused the discussion of jackpot fatigue. More about that, another time.

Another thing: I have never determined whether Veronique or Jade ever for a moment believed that I had been a player in the modeling trade. We are very comfortable with this ambiguity. ■

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