Column: **You Betcha**

Title: **Driving Without a License**

Would you hand a non-driver the keys to your Ferrari?

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Yeah, I know. You don't own a Ferrari. Life is unfair. But cut me some slack, because this analogy points out exactly what happens when you hand a non-researcher the keys to your shiny new CRM marketing analytics system. Ditchski, at best.

"But hold on," you say, "the software sales team said anyone can drive it." Yah sure. And gorillas wear snowshoes and Siebel's going to be the only CRM software company left standing. Of course, technically they're right. Anyone can drive it. And anyone can kill themselves (and perhaps your company, too) if they get behind the wheel of your marketing analytics software without knowing what the hell they're doing.

Beyond the sales spiels, let's understand something about these thousand horsepower, thirty gear analytics vehicles placidly named "marketing automation." And I'm not talking about the "marketing automation with training wheels" type applications that run direct marketing campaigns. I'm talking about thoroughbred analytical research apps that slice and dice fast enough to cut off your fingers if you're not careful—or even your head.

Analytical research relies on statistical analysis—which means you need primo research statisticians (among others) to practice it well. From knowing what information you need, to how to acquire valid data, to analyze data in order to flush up the true meaning, to how to interpret rather than misinterpret or over-interpret data—research statistitions are essential to good research. And while marketing automation is a powerful tool in their hands, it does not come close to replacing what they do.

The solution? You guessed it. Treat your marketing automation app like a Ferrari and put a trained statistician behind the wheel. That, and remember what the poster above my desks says, "Data, when tortured long enough, will confess to anything." You betcha.

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