(U) "Signal v Noise" Column: Do We Need a Bigger SIGINT Truck?

(U) Once upon a time, two people formed a new business. "They built a small shed beside a busy road, rented a truck and drove it to a farmer's field, where they **purchased** a truckload of melons for a dollar per melon. They drove the loaded truck to their shed, where they **sold** them for a dollar per melon... As they drove back toward the farmer's field to get another load, one partner said to the other, "*We're not making much money on this business, are we?*" The partner replied, "*Do you think we need a bigger truck?*"* Sometimes more is just more, if you're not paying attention to what the metrics are telling you.

(U) This example is a pretty obvious demonstration of the need for *business intelligence*. The point of business intelligence is that "**what gets measured, gets managed**." If we don't have the right measurements available, we simply guess. In this example, the melon duo felt like they should just sell more melons to increase profits and to do so meant getting a bigger truck (don't confuse them with the facts).

(S//SI//REL) Throughout SID we often discuss what "a pound of SIGINT" costs or is worth. It's difficult, but not impossible, to figure out the value or cost of a specific pound of SIGINT. "Measuring lets us determine exactly what we can and can't control. Then what we can control, we fix; what we can't control, we either change or isolate. By measuring, we know where to spend our time and energy."** *Figuring out what to count across the Enterprise and how to obtain those count results from our SIGINT world can take hours, multiple tools, a variety of frightening pivot tables, multiple queries, a small army of "phone-a-friends," and possibly a registry action.* (I am not kidding.) Ironically, for an intelligence organization, operational business intelligence can be hard to come by.

(S//SI//REL) Recently I tried to answer what seemed like a relatively straightforward question about which telephony metadata collection capabilities are the most important in case we need to shut something off when the metadata coffers get full. By the end of the day, I felt like capitulating with the white flag of, "We need COLOSSAL data storage so we don't have to worry about it" (aka **we need a bigger SIGINT truck**), because getting the metrics for empirical evidence to review was so very difficult and, frankly, I'm still a little scarred by the experience.

(S//SI//REL) Without metrics, how do we know that we have improved something or made it worse? There's a running joke in the S3 community that we'll only know if collection is important by shutting it off and seeing if someone screams. That's one metric anyway, and sadly, the easiest one (and arguably the most effective) to obtain.

(S//SI//REL) So, in this year of decreasing budgets and ever-constrained resources, it's naturally more important to measure what we can to optimize our time and energy. Wherever you sit and whatever grade you clock in at, there are things you can measure to determine how *effectively* you are doing what you are doing. Start measuring today and set some new 2012 goals to improve your contributions. For a head start, I suggest reading "How to Measure Anything: Finding the Value of Intangibles" by Douglas Hubbard. As an added benefit, this skill will not only help improve our SIGINT business but also dramatically improve your EPA, resume, and ACE bullets! After all, it's one thing to *say* you need a bigger SIGINT truck, new tool, promotion, etc. and another thing altogether to *prove* it.

(U//FOUO) Have thoughts on this topic? Post them on the related Tapioca Pebble.

(U) Notes:

* (U) "Do you think we need a bigger truck?" (Source: http://www.hort.wisc.edu/cran/pubs_archive/newsletters/2002/news _2002_09_05.pdf).

** (U) Bethune, G. (1990). "From Worst to First: Behind the Scenes of Continental's Remarkable Comeback."

(U//FOUO) Standard disclaimer: All SID*today* columns express the views of the columnist alone and do not represent the official views of any NSA organization.