



3 April 2014

## Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: What General Motors teaches us about data collection

If you change a data collection form, change the form number or version number! I expect GM wishes they had changed the part number when they modified their ignition switch.

According to Chris Isidore (@CNNMoney April 2, 2014: 12:02 PM ET) the switch was redesigned in 2006 by GM engineers, but "*[t]he fact that the part number wasn't changed prevented federal safety investigators, and even some GM employees, from figuring out what caused the accidents. Accidents declined in newer vehicle models, but investigators could not figure out why, since there didn't appear to be any change in how they were manufactured.*"

Any of you in the business of data collection have dealt with form changes and, no doubt, have been mired in discussions as to whether the changes rise to the level of warranting changes to form numbers or version numbers.

The decision is a no-brainer when the changes involve addition of new items or the deletion and rewording of old items. But what about cosmetic changes, like correcting a misspelling or changes in punctuation? What if the only change is in the ordering of items or only in the instructions for completing a form?

Changing the form or version number carries its own overhead. Data people are resistant to making those changes if the changes are "minor".

In reality, there is no such thing as a minor change – as discovered by GM.

Change the form number or version number and make those numbers part of the data system in relation to any form change, even if the change is "minor"!