

WHY THINKING BY NUMBERS IS THE NEW WAY TO BE SMART!

Forget all that reading the label and murmuring appreciatively. Forget the swilling around your mouth and spitting out. Forget drinking at all. Here's what your wine tastes like.

The quality of your glass of wine equals 0.00117 multiplied by winter rainfall plus 0.0614 multiplied by the average growing season temperature minus 0.00386 multiplied by the harvest rainfall. Then take away 12.145 and there you go. With this equation Princeton economics professor Orley Ashenfelter has started a revolution in the wine business. And given a glimpse of one of the coming big ideas.

Ashenfelter's claim that you can value a vintage without drinking it is the opening story in *Super Crunchers* by **Ian Ayres**, the latest in a wave of popular maths and stats books that have followed the great success of *Freakonomics*.

Ayres argues in this lively and enjoyable book that the recent creation of huge data sets allows knowledgeable individuals to make previously impossible predictions.

Supercrunching:

- **is the future of marketing** – using millions of pieces of data to discover exactly what a particular consumer is likely to buy next and exactly which words to use when selling to them;
- **it is the future of teaching** – as data analysts work out what teaching methods will succeed with which pupils and which won't;
- **it is the future of sport** – as baseball managers reject traditional scouting and pick players based only on stats and soccer managers follow suit;
- **it is the future of healthcare** – as doctors follow protocols devised by computer;
- **simply put, it's the future!**

Computers have been around for a while, so why is supercrunching a coming idea only now?

First, it is because technological development has been necessary. Supercrunching requires large amounts of data to crunch and that means computer storage space. Now cheap storage is growing as rapidly as processing speeds have for years.

Second, there is the internet. The ability to access and share data is growing all the time, making data analysis far easier. Ayres settled on the title for his book by putting a number of different titles up in Google ads, then seeing which one attracted the largest number of hits.

And thirdly, there has been cultural resistance to overcome. Supercrunchers don't just believe that data is as good as expert judgment; they argue that it is far better. To persuade medics that they are better off using computer protocols than exercising professional discretion is hard.

Gone are the days of solely relying on intuition to make decisions. In this brave new world of equation versus expertise, Ayres shows us the benefits and risks, who loses and who wins, and how supercrunching can be used to help, not manipulate us.

"A lively and yet rigorously careful account of the use of quantitative methods for analysis and decision-making....

Both social scientists and businesspeople can profit from this book, while enjoying themselves in the process."—

Dr. Kenneth Arrow, Nobel Prize winning economist, and Professor Emeritus at Stanford University

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