

E-BOOK

The 5 Hurdles of Master Data Management



Contents

On Your Mark. Get Set. Go!	03
The Five Hurdles of MDM	04
Hurdle 1:	
Getting Wrapped Around the Axle With Your Tools	05
Hurdle 2:	
Losing Focus on Your Ultimate Business Goals	08
Hurdle 3:	
Chasing Perfection	12
Hurdle 4:	
Getting Fixated on the 'Golden Record'	15
Hurdle 5:	
Trying To Boil the Ocean	18
The 'Runners-Up'!	22
Crossing the Finish Line	24

On Your Mark. Get Set. Go!

So you have convinced your management team of the need for master data management (MDM), and you're off and running!

Not so fast.

If we were to liken MDM to a track-and-field event, it's more likely to be compared to a hurdling event than to a simple marathon. Why is that? Because like any business process, there are intricacies that get in the way — hurdles, if you will.

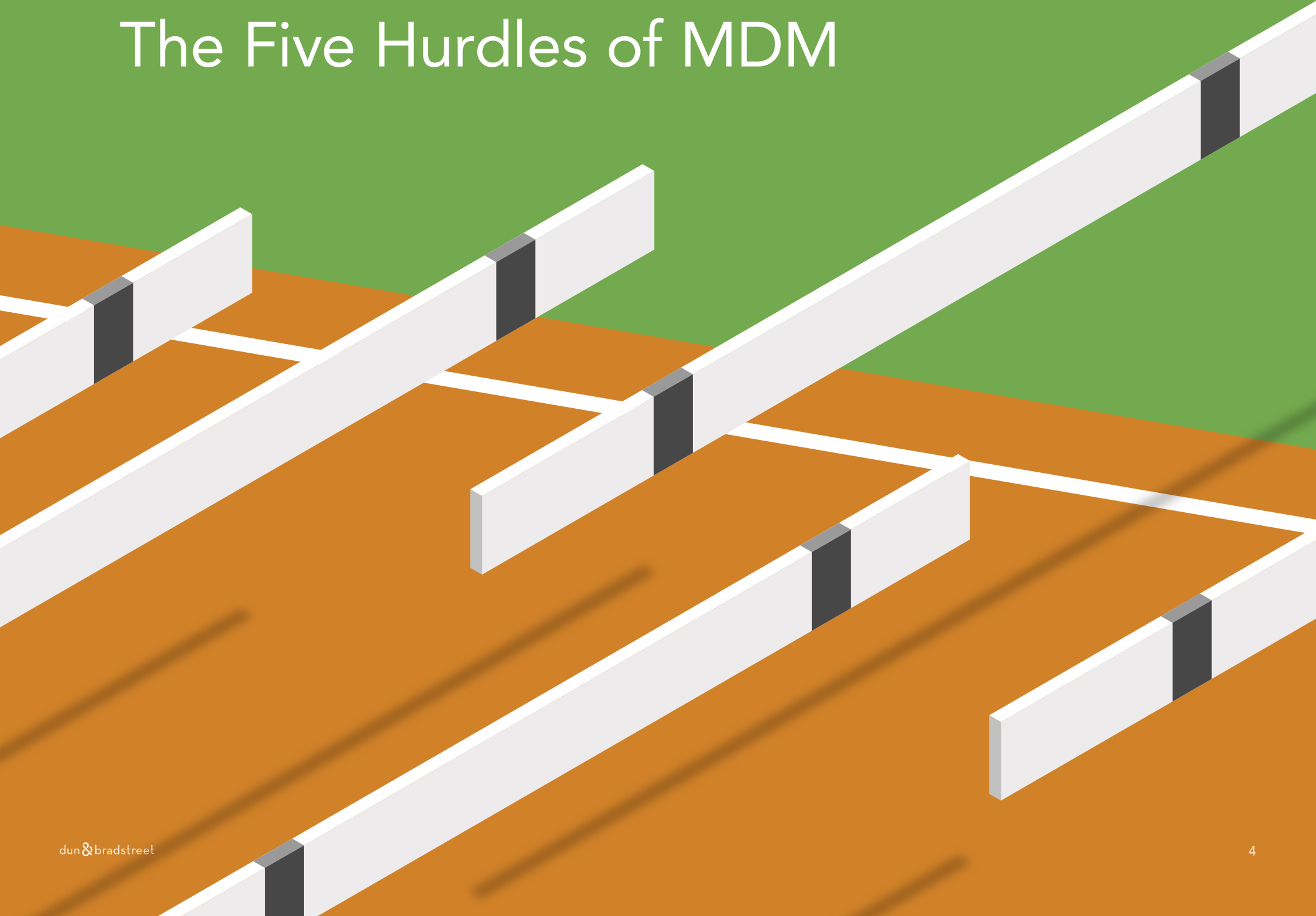
Two of Dun & Bradstreet's data experts have identified some of the biggest hurdles they've come across that get in the way of master data efforts.

As you embark on your master data journey, you'll want to think like a smart runner, pacing yourself and being on the lookout for these hurdles. Be prepared — don't let them trip you up and take you out of the race. There will be many rewards to be realized once you reach the finish line.

This eBook is meant to help you reach the finish line.



The Five Hurdles of MDM



HURDLE 1:

Getting Wrapped Around the Axle With Your Tools

The phrase “wrapped around the axle” conjures up the image of a frustrated wagon driver whose reins have gotten tangled in the undercarriage. That image, in fact, does accurately evoke its literal meaning in days gone by.



Today we're more likely to define the expression as meaning something such as being confused by something to the point of paralysis or getting sidetracked by small, irrelevant issues. This is a germane thought when it comes to the practice of data management.

Focusing too much on our tools and not enough on the underlying data is one way that we can get sidetracked or wrapped around the axle. While tools play a significant role in a master data management solution, they should not be our primary focus.

To explain this point, compare business leaders and their approach to data management to runners and their approach as they prepare for a race.

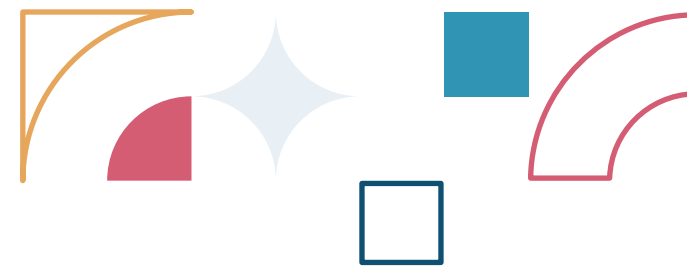
Experienced runners prioritize fundamental aspects of the sport: They stay hydrated, eat the right foods, do proper warmups, and get a good night's rest before the race.

However, some runners, usually amateurs, prioritize their gear over their training. They place great importance on expensive running shoes and nylon shorts and neglect their preparation. How many new runners feel that they've accomplished something just by buying new equipment only to see it languish in their closets after a few short uses?

While investing in equipment is essential for a good runner, it shouldn't be prioritized over investing in oneself. After all, the gear alone doesn't determine the race's outcome; it is the runner's training and preparation that have the greater influence.

Just as a runner who fails to eat and sleep properly before a race may stumble right from the starting block, having impressive technology with shiny new tools doesn't guarantee success if the underlying data is flawed from the outset or proper emphasis isn't placed on the health of the data.

Adopt the mindset of a smart runner. Prioritize your data above all else. Think about the overall health of your data first. Ensure that your data is relevant, accurate, clean, appropriately mapped, and up to date. If it's not, all the fancy gear in the world will not overcome the hurdle of that poor data quality, and it will not fulfill its promise of getting you to meet your MDM objectives.



LESSON NO. 1:

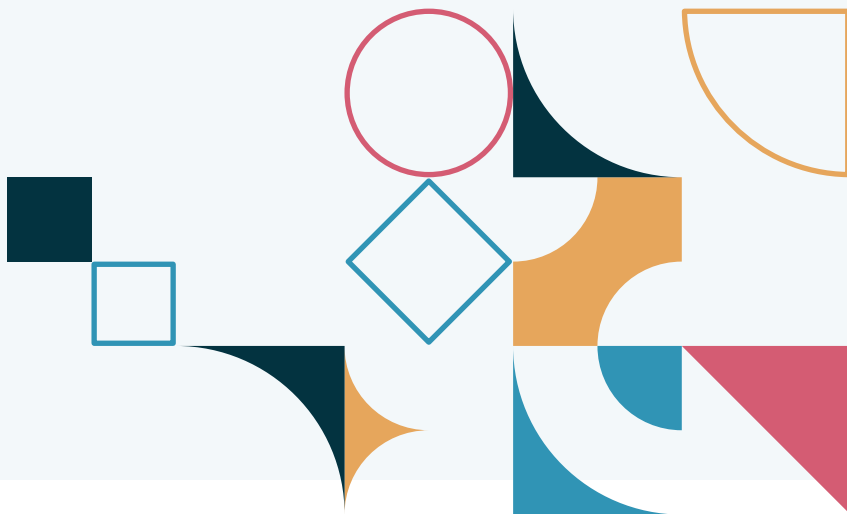
Think like a smart runner.
Focus on health over
equipment. The success of
master data management
ultimately depends on good
data, not just fancy tools.



HURDLE 2:

Losing Focus on Your Ultimate Business Goals

Participating in the race — not winning it — is often the ultimate objective for most runners. Runners take up the sport for many of the benefits it provides, such as better health, endurance, goal setting, and enjoying the outdoors.





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I was about to run my very first race. It was only a 5K and my goal was finishing with a reasonable time (yes, I should have quantified “reasonable,” but I lacked empirical data), but it was still a big deal to me.

I arrived at the race and started to talk with a fellow runner. I mentioned it was my first race and lamented the mid-July heat and humidity, after which she offered me some advice. She held up three fingers and ticked them off one by one as she said:

Rule No. 1, stay alive.

Rule No. 2, avoid winding up in the medical tent.

Rule No. 3, cross the finish line.

Of course, this unexpected advice was delivered tongue in cheek, but it also held some important perspective: The goal for most 5K racers isn't to win or even place, but rather to punctuate a steady journey toward a healthy life. The objective, then, is to finish well (in one piece) in order to continue on that journey. Likewise, the goal of the MDM program is to make progress toward supporting the company's business objectives by building systems and processes that enable data-driven decisions.

Just as the race isn't the ultimate objective for most runners, the master data program is not the ultimate objective for most businesses either.

Try to think about what the original goals were that motivated your organization to embark on its master data journey. If those goals are not clear, identify them.

Step 1:

Identify an organizational champion, preferably someone from the business side who can provide genuine business metrics.

Step 2:

Document your use cases. (This is essential.)

Step 3:

Align with the business key performance indicators as you define how you will measure success. This goes beyond mere numbers of records in a database or the removal of duplicates. It involves understanding what the business truly wants to accomplish, whether it's to grow the business, improve operational efficiency, protect the business from risk, or a combination of all three.

Finally, your business goals, use cases, and performance metrics must be shared with the entire team. It is not sufficient for only the project manager and leadership team to be aware of these objectives and how you are tracking them to accomplish your goals. Teams should display them on dashboards and (when in physical offices) monitors, include them in team meetings and presentations, or provide regular email updates. The aim is to make it nearly impossible to overlook these aspects, ensuring that everyone on the team truly understands what is driving their efforts and how the business is benefiting.



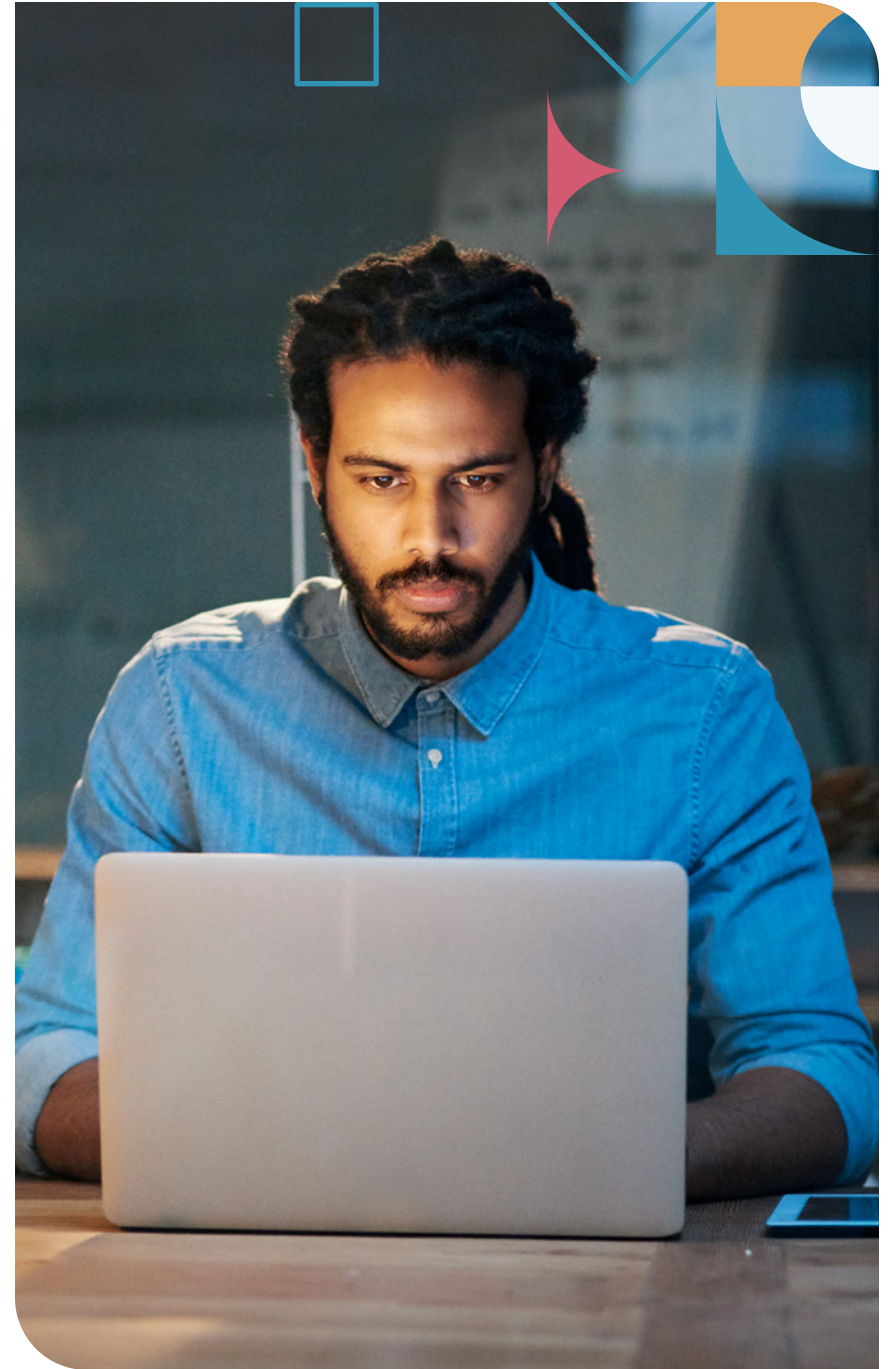
Think Like Your Customer Is Always In the Room

Many customer experience teams adopt a mindset of “the customer is always in the room,” to help focus their efforts on projects that benefit the end user. Likewise, compassionate pharmaceutical companies have been known to place a chair labeled “patient” in every conference room, serving as a reminder to prioritize what is best for the patient.

Adopt their mindset and think like your user is present in the room whenever possible. Better yet, get that internal client (the actual user of the systems — not just their management) in the room, physically or virtually, early and often. This feedback will provide clarity and perspective when making complex decisions.

LESSON NO. 2:

Master data in itself is not a business objective. Consider the original goals that led the organizations to embark on the master data journey in the first place. Think about what it is that you want to be able to accomplish by mastering your data and how you will measure success.



HURDLE 3:

Chasing Perfection

Consider this scenario: You have a data table with 10 million rows, and it is 99.9% accurate. This means that one 1 of every 1,000 records may have a defect of some kind.

If your marketing team asks for a random sample of 1,000 records from this table, what are the chances of including a defective record in that sample?

A) 0.1%

B) 63%



Many of us are surprised to discover that there is an approximately 63% chance of ending up with at least one defective record in that sample of 1,000.

The lesson that we can learn from this example is that we often place an excessive emphasis on striving for data perfection, but even when we do this — when we drive our error rate to just 1 out of 1,000 — our ability to achieve perfection, even in a small subset of our data, is nearly impossible. There is still a 63% chance that a random 1,000-record set is going to have at least one error.

The notion of achieving absolute perfection can hinder progress in areas that can bring greater value. Many companies want to achieve perfection before moving on to the next step in the process, but in reality, your data will never be entirely flawless, especially at scale. Systems will encounter occasional failures, and you won't have complete control over every aspect all the time. Moreover, processes will never be flawless either. The world around you will change, and adjustments will be necessary.

It soon becomes evident that the costs associated with chasing perfection can quickly accumulate and outweigh the benefits. Therefore, it is important to have a plan in place to ensure that your data, systems, and processes are up to date. Without a plan, you risk stagnation while others surpass you.

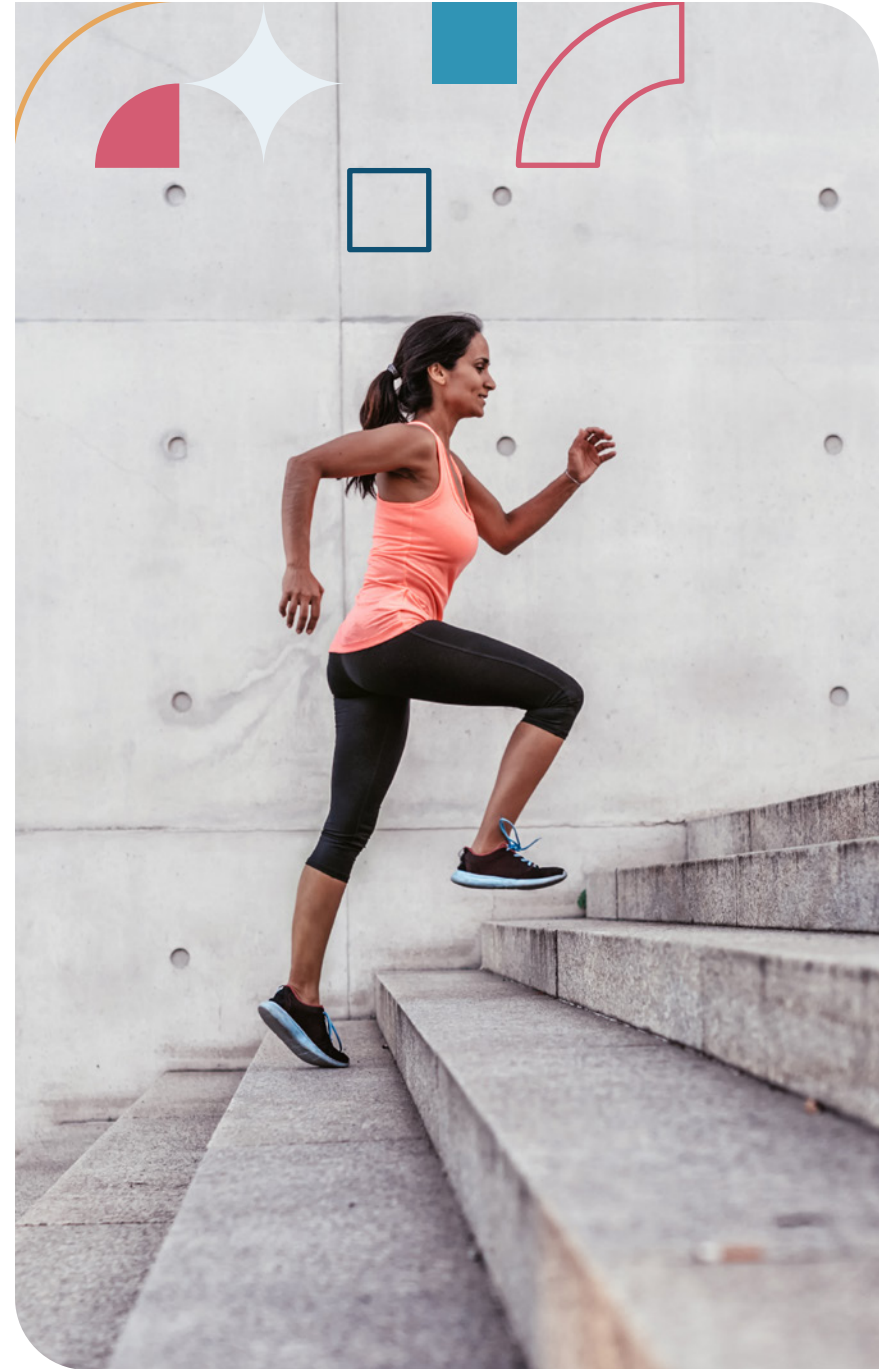
Your plan should not be fixated on achieving perfection. Rather, the focus should be on incremental improvement—building bit by bit where feasible and cost-effective. To do this, it is crucial to prioritize your efforts. Determine where you can derive the most value and demonstrate rapid progress.

Always evaluate the costs and benefits before undertaking any project. Otherwise, you may find yourself unhappy months down the line, having spent a significant amount of money without achieving the desired outcomes.



LESSON NO. 3:

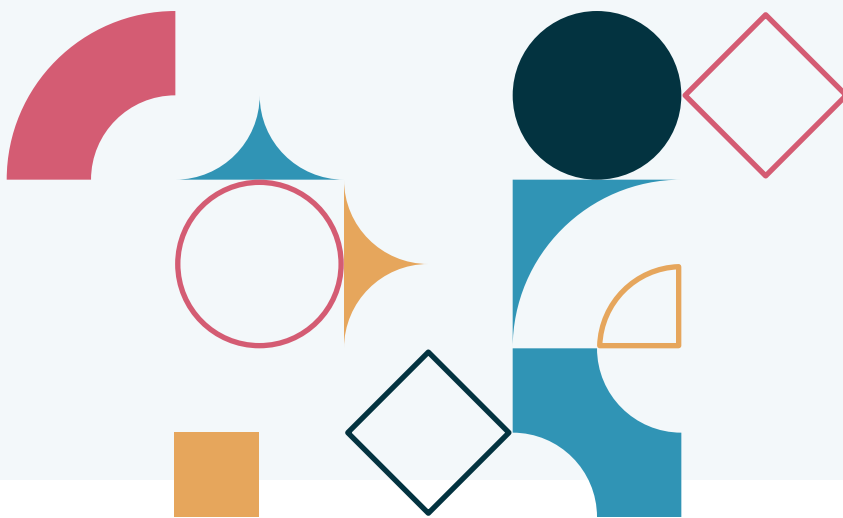
Progress lies in continuous improvement, not in chasing perfection.



HURDLE 4:

Getting Fixated on the 'Golden Record'

The golden record! The single, authoritative, and trusted version of a data entity or record within your organization. A consolidated and complete view of an entity. No duplicates, no inconsistencies, and no errors across multiple sources or systems. The single source of truth for data analysis, reporting, and operational processes. The great enabler of improved customer relationship management, effective marketing campaigns, accurate financial reporting, and streamlined business operations!





The concept of the golden record is like data nirvana. However, what often hinders its implementation is when teams adopt a rigid perspective on what the golden record should look like and what it should encompass.

When there is a belief that there should be only one perfect name, address, phone number, and so on, it becomes unmanageable, because different stakeholders have their own versions of what they believe these elements should be.

For example, accounts payable may consider the “bill to” address as the golden record, while operations may prioritize the “shipped to” address. Each group believes their version is the ultimate truth, and the truth is, they’re probably correct! The reality is that all these versions are valid. More important than being true, they all have value, so they all have to be represented somehow.

Therefore, we propose embracing the concept of “[the multifaceted golden record](#).” Essentially, this means allowing the golden record to include fields that can accommodate these seemingly duplicated values or establishing a linkage to tables that capture the diverse versions of the truth. By adopting this approach, we can capture the full richness of the data and ensure that all valuable versions — and use cases — are appropriately represented.

LESSON NO. 4:

Embrace the multifaceted nature of the golden record, recognizing that multiple versions of the truth exist for different stakeholders and have their own significance.



HURDLE 5:

Trying To Boil the Ocean

When organizations undertake an MDM initiative, there's a tendency to try to tackle everything at once. This is commonly referred to as "trying to boil the ocean."

This mindset isn't exclusive to master data management. The belief that something must be an all-or-nothing endeavor can hinder progress and impede the benefits any initiative can bring to your organization.





If we consider marathons, 5Ks, or a simple walk down the street, it becomes evident that accomplishing everything at once can be unrealistic. Progress is made one step at a time.

Runners establish milestones — the next mile, the next block, even the next telephone pole — as targets to move toward. By setting these smaller milestones, they maintain their sense of movement and motivation. They keep moving and eventually reach the finish line.

In contrast, attempting to run a full 26.2-mile marathon without intermediate milestones to gauge progress can make the journey feel unbearable and the finish line unreachable.

We encourage the same approach for master data management as well as other technology and data initiatives. Master data management doesn't need to be an all-or-

nothing proposition; it shouldn't be an all-encompassing task completed all at once. It can be achieved iteratively, incrementally, and by establishing meaningful milestones.

For instance, you can prioritize addressing and normalizing subject areas, considering tranches of customers based on their value to the business. This way, you can integrate the highest-value customers first, follow them with the mid-level customers, and eventually include customers or prospects that may not drive the bulk of your business but are still important to your systems.

Similarly, if you have multiple systems resulting from acquisitions or the evolution of legacy systems, you can select which ones to bring together and address them one by one to achieve your master data management goals.



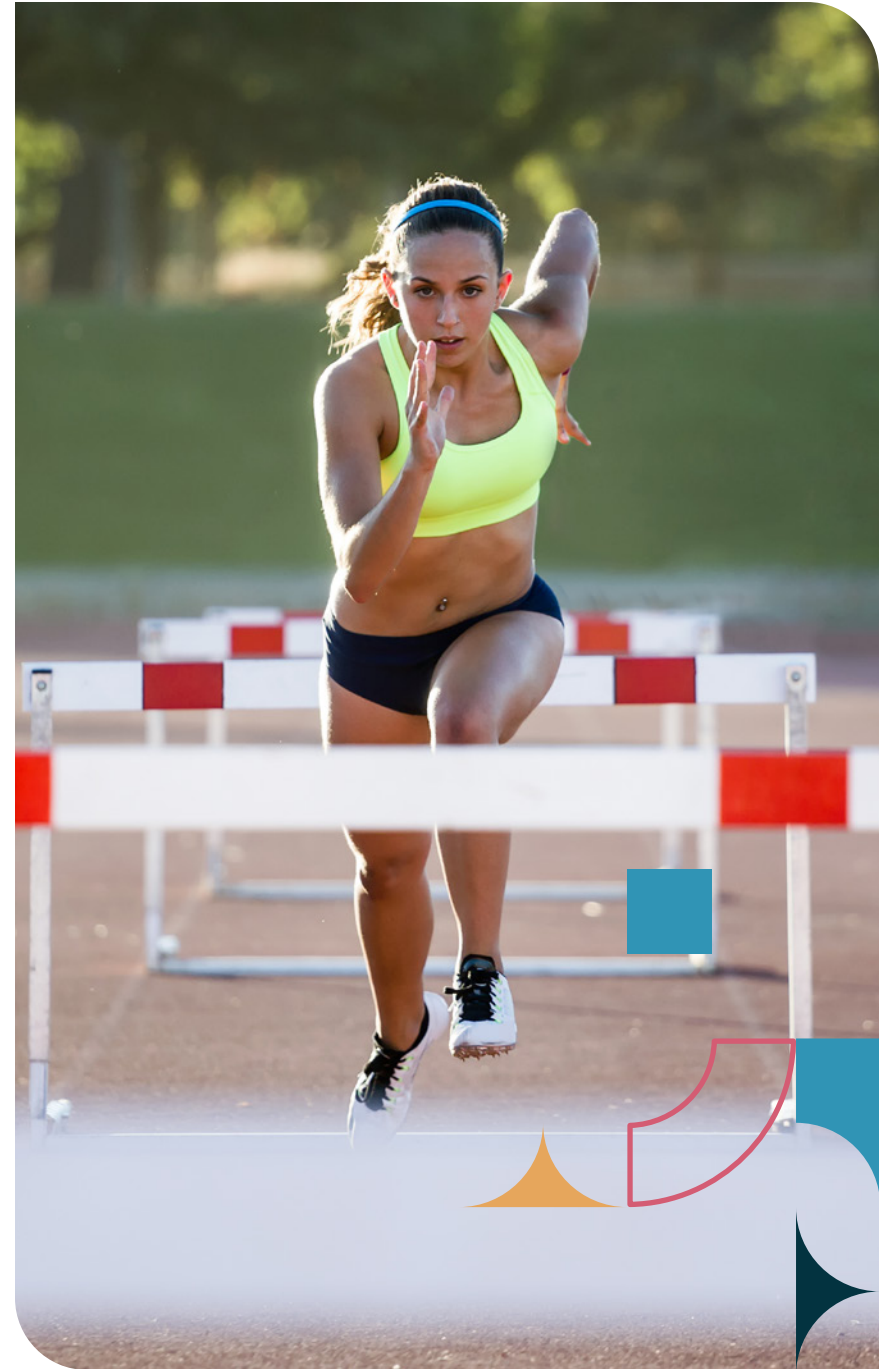
Taking an incremental approach instead of a monolithic block approach offers several advantages. First, it is much easier for a team to focus when they can see the endpoint within reach. Presenting a team with a four-year undertaking can be overwhelming, whereas outlining a six-to-eight-week plan allows them to comprehend and rally around the task.

Additionally, building these smaller blocks one at a time enables you to progressively demonstrate value to stakeholders. By showcasing ongoing progress and illustrating how it positively impacts the business, you can maintain their attention and support.

Finally, this approach facilitates a feedback loop, allowing for measurement, reassessment, and reprioritization as the world around you evolves. It ensures that your next steps align with the changing landscape. Rather than attempting to run the full 26.2 miles in one go, focus on the next telephone pole and strive to reach it.

LESSON NO. 5:

By embracing an incremental mindset and setting achievable milestones, you can make significant progress in your master data initiative, demonstrate value, and adapt to the evolving needs of your organization.



The 'Runners-Up'!

These hurdles didn't make our top five, but any one them could keep you from reaching the MDM finish line.



BONUS HURDLE 1:

Allowing Your Data To Get Old and Stale

Data is constantly changing. Every company experiences this. Businesses change locations, phone numbers, addresses, and even names. People come and go. Have a plan in place to periodically refresh your data.

BONUS HURDLE 2:

Forgetting the Basics

The basic blocking and tackling of any data management project involves data models and definitions. Unfortunately, these are often things that can feel tedious, sometimes to the point that nobody ends up addressing them. Don't fall into that trap! It's really much easier to take the time early on to take care of field mapping and building data dictionaries that everybody can access than to backtrack later and try and find that information. After all, preparation is everything!

BONUS HURDLE 3:

Attempting To Build Insight Without a View of the Outside World

Don't go it alone and rely only on your first-party data. The truth is you don't know what you don't know. You're blind to the data that you don't have. It's best to at least test the benefits of external source data. By incorporating additional data with your own first-party data, you can build a much richer view of your subjects and make more informed, nuanced decisions.

BONUS HURDLE 4:

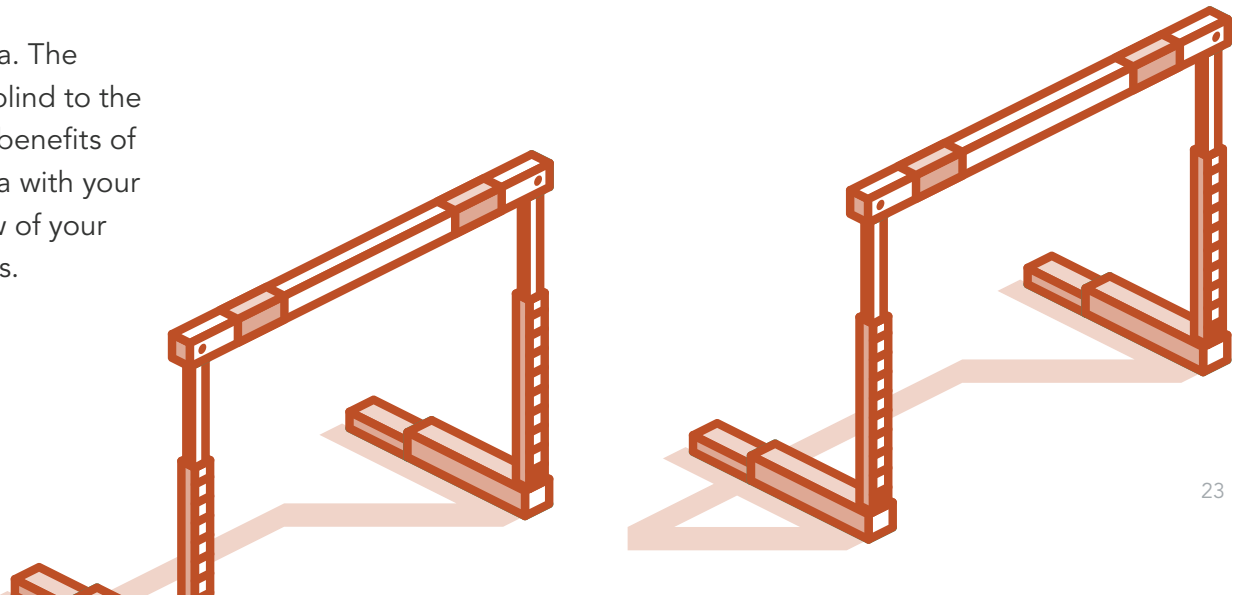
Treating Data as a Cost Center Rather Than an Asset

Working closely with the business to make sure that everything is geared toward helping it succeed will certainly go a long way when it comes to addressing this hurdle. If done properly, you'll have results that you can report in a dashboard and broadcast to the company ([see Hurdle 2: Losing Focus on Your Ultimate Business Goals](#)). This shows value instead of looking like a cost.

BONUS HURDLE 5:

Trying To Do It All Yourself




Don't try to take on everything yourself when good referential data sources exist. Simply put, this is the process of mastering data by matching to a unique key — such as the Dun & Bradstreet D-U-N-S® Number — and then using that key to connect your records to the referential data source — such as the Dun & Bradstreet Data Cloud. You'll be able to lean on their subject matter experts for guidance and support. After all, a marathon can feel shorter and more enjoyable when you have a running buddy! Even though there are no shortcuts, just like in running, it might just feel a little bit like one if you get that help.



Crossing the Finish Line

Congratulations! You've cleared the hurdles and have crossed the finish line. But there's still time for one more lesson.



-  Practice patience.
-  Progress isn't linear.
-  Trust in your process.

Sometimes in our minds, it feels like success happens overnight, but in reality, it is often two steps forward, a step backwards, a plateau, and a leap forward.

Remember that progress is not linear. There are moments when we plateau and sometimes even feel like we have regressed. Progress will happen if you keep at it.

Reward the team's efforts

Recognize what's happened and reinforce it. Reward your team's efforts. Make sure to call out the benefits the company is seeing as a result of the work that went into your initiative. This bit of recognition will reinforce morale as your team gets ready to fuel up for the next race.

Assess what you did

How well did we do it? Where did you stumble? Where could you do better? Also consider where you excelled and which practices you want to see repeated.

Maintain good data habits

In the meantime, before that next race, make sure you continue to eat well, you continue to drink enough water, you continue to get enough sleep; those are things that every runner needs to do. The equivalent for our organizations is to maintain those good data habits, to keep your data clean, to keep it up to date, and to make sure that you're getting it from reliable sources. Those types of good data habits are going to be what help sustain you until you begin your next initiative inside that master data management approach.

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Dun & Bradstreet can help your enterprise strengthen your master data strategy

Modern, data-driven organizations rely on their customer and prospect data every day to make decisions that drive growth, streamline efficiency, and mitigate risks for the business, but the outcome of those decisions is only as successful as the quality of data informing them.

Dun & Bradstreet's master data solutions empower teams across the enterprise with a trusted data foundation to help you get started, and continue, on your data journey, transforming your data into a single source of truth. Our team of experts will help guide you through a process to determine the best solution for your current needs and future vision.

[Learn More →](#)

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