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Bridging the gap!

Data and departmental silos are impacting member experience – cross-functional collaboration will help

A data-driven world

It's no secret that data reigns supreme, with McKinsey reporting a 2200% increase in new customer acquisitions for companies that are data driven. This perhaps explains why 63% of organisations are looking to expand their use of data in 2024.

It's all about using the details members have shared with you to craft personalised, value-added member experiences that keep people coming back for more. Nevertheless, the process isn't always that simple. Whilst data could, in theory, be used to drive the decisions behind sustainable membership growth, there's often one major obstacle standing in the way: data and departmental silos.

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What are data silos?

Data silos refer to the separate collections of data stored throughout an organisation in standalone systems. This could be anything from paper-based notes and spreadsheets all the way through to departmental platforms. Whatever the format, data is isolated from the rest of the company, unable to be accessed by other teams, or departments. The systems used by each individual department may furthermore prove incompatible with other data sets or systems.

The dangers of a siloed approach

Working only in departments is often seen as a way of controlling outside influence and allows the department to get the job done. However, isolating processes, systems and data, can have significant negative impact on the experience for the membership, not only in terms of limiting data use and access but also in terms of not targeting and attracting new members, operating efficiently and achieving member satisfaction.

Unhappy members

Departmental silos prevent membership organisations from making efficient use of their data, limiting the ability to provide a seamless, personalised experience. This proves incredibly detrimental, given that, according to McKinsey, 76% of customers feel frustrated when the service delivered isn't tailored to them.

What's more, when data is trapped in different departments without the communication channels in place to let it travel, experience suffers, as members are often passed around multiple times before reaching the right person or finding their required solution. This ultimately leads to significant frustration and potential membership loss, leaving subscribers or supporters feeling undervalued and underappreciated and, ultimately, causing them to seek value elsewhere.

Siloed data can also lead to inconsistencies and discrepancies, as member insights are incomplete at best, with blind spots potentially leading to incorrect assumptions. This can do more damage than good, with 47% of marketers admitting that data silos are their biggest challenge when it comes to making appropriate use of insights, according to Treasure Data's State of the Customer Journey report.

Misaligned priorities

Things are made even worse by the fact that departments operating independently create misaligned priorities, making it challenging to achieve overarching organisational goals. Messaging becomes patchy as each siloed unit follows its agenda, hampering both communication and coordination. Indeed, Nielsen found that 70% of marketers will make major decisions alone, without consulting other departments. This means that the messaging reaching both existing and potential members is disjointed, potentially causing confusion and reducing overall satisfaction.

Furthermore, if marketing decisions are made alone, promotional efforts may not align with the actual needs and expectations of members, ultimately leading to a disconnect and/or attrition. Indeed, Congrex Switzerland has reported that trade associations around the world are losing members as a result of their inability to meet member needs and expectations, with financial pressures leading to an additional drop in membership numbers in commercial and charitable spheres.

Engagement and retention

Building and maintain relationships with members is another core struggle for membership-based organisations and associations. When members are scattered across different digital platforms, it can become difficult for organisations and trade bodies to keep track of all the data available to them. This, in turn, makes it difficult to keep members engaged and active, as those in charge aren't doing as much as they can when it comes to delivering personalised content, be it via online resources, on social media or via regular newsletters.

When members can't see value in the services they're getting, it can make it difficult to monetise any content offered, too – particularly when efficient delivery of these services is hindered by a lack of interdepartmental coordination.

Inefficiencies

Siloed ways of working prevent people from communicating with one another, meaning that membership data can easily be missed. In fact, in a study commissioned by app-building platform, Airtable, Forrester Consulting calculated that large organisations use an average of 376 different software programs and apps to manage their workflows, meaning that critical data gets confused with multiple sources of truth. This can lead to all kinds of major problems, including members not being able to access the information they need when they need it, and an increased risk of data security breaches, due to an organisation-wide lack of shared data governance and security practices.

Operations furthermore become inefficient, given that different teams will spend an inordinate amount of time chasing information. In fact, as many as 12 hours a week can be wasted just following things up with other departments, causing 68% of people to report reduced performance with their official work-based tasks as a result. The more time people spend trying to access the information they need, the less time they have to spend fostering positive membership relationships, taking on feedback and coming up with creative solutions to drive satisfaction. This places membership organisations yet another step behind the competition.

Vulnerabilities

To make matters worse, a recent survey of more than 1000 IT risk, compliance and security professionals has found significant correlation between data silos and data breaches. According to the survey, 51% of respondents struggled to identify where critical risks are located in order to determine how to protect organisational data in the first place, whilst 39% admitted they found it difficult to locate risk-related information when they need it.

The vicious cycle

The above challenges ultimately mean that organisations spend more time repairing issues through small-scale complaint management, engagement and marketing efforts than they do on addressing the root causes of problems. This causes both members and staff to feel frustrated, reducing productivity whilst stunting membership growth.

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There is a solution: collaboration is key to success

There's a clear need to move towards a more centralised approach, where data can be easily shared, to overcome these challenges. Those in charge of data transformation could then leverage all the membership data available to the organisation to its advantage, guiding decisions in an efficent member–oriented way. However, this, in itself, is not without its challenges.

Resistance to change

Many membership organisations continue to cling to outdated legacy systems, whether it's because the executive board doesn't want to invest in centralised data management when the systems they already have in place are 'just fine' or because the people using said systems don't want to invest more time and effort into learning new working processes when they already know how to 'get things done'. Perhaps they prefer to use personal spreadsheets that they don't share with other people to manage their work, rendering any data they hold useless from an organisational perspective. They might even have an existing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, but don't know how to leverage it effectively or deem it too complex to navigate.

People don't want to add to an already busy workload or get distracted from their core mission: engaging with members. They feel they don't have time to learn new technologies and don't want their performance at work to be affected by any skill gaps that would come to the fore if systems were to change.

A worthwhile investment

Despite these challenges, transformation is still the key to success – with any costs invested in new technologies paying for themselves multiple times over when compared to the multiple systems and apps companies must purchase, subscribe to and maintain in their current, non-centralised model.

Overcoming legacy constraints

Bridging the gap with change management

The key to overcoming any resistance standing in the way of change is to invest in change management strategies..

According to Gartner, 73% of change-affected employees report experiencing moderate to high levels of stress as a result of change. What's more, those suffering from change-related stress performed 5% more poorly than the average employee.

Most of this stress comes from factors such as fear of being displaced, not being sure how to operate new technologies, and feeling concerned that the shift will add to an already busy workload. This just goes to show that centralised data management requires more than just technology. It also demands a cultural shift.

Employee confidence in the solution is essential. Staff need to see that the changes proposed are making their day-to-day tasks easier, rather than regarding them as an additional hindrance that needs to be dealt with. As such, if there are any inefficiencies, it's important to include these as focus areas for the change, ensuring that the plans in place correspond to what team members actually need or are asking for.

Aligning priorities

Take the British Dietetic Association's collaboration with Equantiis, for example.

With over 11,000 members and 45 paid members of staff, the BDA wanted to increase both its visibility and its voice, in order to increase membership numbers and deliver higher quality services to the communities it serves. After implementing a new CRM in 2020, the BDA team still found itself struggling with user adoption. The organisation was spending money on fixing and operating a system that was not fit for purpose and the membership experience was suffering as a result.

Staff were losing confidence in the data system – especially after a lack of the appropriate skills and understanding led to over 1000 members being deleted from the BDA database by mistake. Equantiis therefore stepped in to work out where improvements needed to be made to make the system more appropriate to the organisation's processes and aims. A replacement CRM system was implemented, alongside a cloud version of their CMS and an upgraded member portal – all of which were fully integrated with one another and with the digital marketing platform for seamless workflows.

As a result of the changes, adoption of the BDA's new centralised approach increased significantly, with the fit-for-purpose solution allowing all core membership processes to be managed consistently. A 360° view of the customer journey and the high-quality data accessible throughout allowed for further added value and innovation, with staff gaining increased internal capacity to support continuous improvement. Not only did the customer and employee experience improve, but compliance was assured, too, making it much easier to achieve organisational aims at low risk.

Transforming together

If the benefits of a well-planned system can be communicated to executive boards in advance, it becomes clear that a centralised solution is a worthwhile investment, particularly if training, digital strategy and implementation are included in the transformation plan. This will show that the investment to be made can be implemented seamlessly, without additional workloads or disruptions, simply serving to improve data access and strategy.

Some of the tangible benefits to communicate with key decision makers include:

Numbers on the rise

Membership organisations that implement centralised ways of working will witness a significant uptick in both membership numbers and engagement, all thanks to the faster and more complete responses that departments are able to deliver. Rather than waiting for the appropriate team to get back to them with the relevant information, the person contacted can find this data themselves in little time, passing the member in question onto the relevant person of contact without delay.

In turn, this leads to improved membership satisfaction, contributing to sustained membership growth whilst preventing existing valued members from fleeing to the competition.

Personalised experiences

Centralised access to organisational data furthermore facilitates a comprehensive overview of what members need and want, allowing membership organisations to offer personalised experiences. This personalisation is the added value that distinguishes you from the competition. When every touchpoint in the member journey becomes visible, it allows data-driven innovations and tailored membership services to come to the fore, demonstrating the value in maintaining subscriptions.

A happier, more productive team

Another advantage of easy access to data and information across the organisation is that staff will spend less time on manual processes like inputting or chasing information. What's more, organisations can reduce the risk of different departments duplicating tasks, unaware that another team has already carried something out. This leads to more efficient operations and a less stressful working environment, where staff members can shift their focus from handling member complaints and feeling unsure to working on creative strategy and innovation for further membership engagement. It's all about creating a culture of continuous improvement.

A new era of data transformation

Once a successful transformation has taken place, the possibilities for continued improvement are endless. For instance, organisations might also consider adopting AI or other automated technologies to allow them to make use of big data. Put simply, this means they will be able to handler much larger, more complex member data sets, rather than limiting themselves to simple membership data. In turn, this means they will be able to take insights and improvements one step further for more valuable membership service. PwC has reported that this move alone can increase profitability by 6% and productivity by 5%, with future figures likely to rise as technologies and related skills develop.

Breaking free from data silos once and for all

The journey from the challenge of data silos to winning centralised data management and effective member data use is not only possible, but highly rewarding. Once frustrated and concerned, those in charge of membership data transformation can feel confident in their ability to successfully guide organisations through a cultural shift, particularly when their efforts are aligned with professional support from a leading Consulting and Delivery Services Company like Equantiis.

In a competitive climate where membership data is the key to survival and growth, the adoption of these solutions is not only an investment but a strategic imperative. By addressing the root cause of problems – data silos – membership organisations can position themselves for success, ensuring a future where data is a valuable asset rather than a hindrance.

Think data silos are holding your membership organisation back? Click the button below to book an initial consultation today.

BOOK A MEETING

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