



Enhancing Performance and the Customer Experience

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS)

A. Introduction

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) is a very good example of a charity which is seeking to make better use of data to enhance its understanding of key stakeholders and to facilitate performance improvements.

B. Questions

1. How can data enhance performance?
2. How can data enhance the customer experience?
3. What can be done to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to work effectively with data?
4. How does data bring transparency to strategic and operational decision-making?

C. Organisational profile

As its name implies, the NTS operates throughout Scotland. It is diverse in scope and scale, its curation and conservation portfolio including 76,000 acres of land, 400 islands and islets, 10,000 archaeological sites, gardens, plant collections, art collections, properties, and artefacts. Its annual income in 2015/2016 was in excess of £52.5 million, of which circa £11.7 million was commercially generated through activities and services such as retailing and catering, £3.5m through admissions incomes and £13.4m through the Trust's Membership Scheme. During the height of the visitor season the number of FTE staff employed in 2015/2016 was almost 1,400, of which 677 were seasonal employees. Visitors to



its properties numbered 2,654,000 in the same period, while its membership grew to more than 351,000, and its volunteers donated more than 217,500 hours of time.

D. What is driving the charity's engagement with data?

The charity's engagement with data derives from a number of inter-related factors. Firstly, the NTS is operating in a highly competitive environment in which every organisation providing heritage, cultural, and recreational services is a potential competitor. Secondly, the charity derives the major part of its income from its own income-generating activities, receiving only a small proportion of its income from public funding. Thirdly, and following from these first two points, it is critically important that the charity knows what its members, supporters, and customers want, how well it is performing, and where there is scope to operate more efficiently and effectively. Fourthly, in addition to executive and senior management teams who understand what data can bring to strategic and operational decision-making, the charity's recently appointed Chief Executive is actively co-opting trustees who want Board level discussions and decision-making to be data-informed.

E. How important is digital technology for the charity's data utilisation?

Digital technology is crucially important to the NTS, enabling the capture, processing, analysis and reporting of key data streams and performance indicators such as membership, visitors to properties, sales from catering, and product sales through the charity's 'bricks and mortar' and online shops.

The website and social media have become particularly important and rich data sources for the Marketing team of the Customer and Cause Department. This is expected to grow, as future generations of NTS members and visitors increasingly choose digital rather than more traditional channels for communicating with the charity, garnering information, and the purchase of its goods and services.

The Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS) system is also critically important for the Retail team. The current system was implemented over a four year period, completing in 2015. Prior to

that, Retail was reliant on a manual stock check which took place annually. In addition to Retail, the EPOS system also serves Catering, Admissions, and Travel Trade.

Additional software systems, including CRM and HR systems, are used by other departments and teams within the NTS. Currently, the various systems, including the EPOS system, are not integrated with one another and operate as stand-alone systems. The Weekly Reporting Database (WRD), which feeds into the corporate dashboard, and brings together admissions, retail, catering and membership data from the properties and head office systems. This involves a number of manual processes at present which are run on a daily and weekly basis.

F. What types of data is the charity capturing and using?

The NTS is capturing a wide range of data of use in strategic planning and performance management. As well as data captured in-house through the website, the Customer Relationship Marketing (CRM) database, and an annual visitor survey for example, the Marketing team also accesses analytics from Google and social media companies such as Facebook and Twitter on whose sites it has a presence. Benchmarking data is provided monthly through independent organisations such as the Moffat Centre at Glasgow Caledonian University and the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions. TripAdvisor is a further valuable source of information, providing additional insights into visitor experiences and perceptions of the NTS, its properties, services, and other facilities. Experian's Mosaic profiling provides the charity, annually, with a more sophisticated segmentation analysis of its membership profile than is currently possible using in-house systems, This data is recognised throughout the UK and helps to inform sales messages and media buying choices. The charity also derives critically important data through the EPOS system which is facilitating new insights into the performance of the charity's shops and cafes, enabling stock sales and performances to be monitored (see Section E), supplier mix to be monitored and evaluated, and performance comparisons across different outlets to be reviewed, for example.

G. What is data enabling the charity to do differently or better?

Improving the customer experience

Data is enabling better understanding of the customer experience. This enables the charity to review and investigate the extent to which different areas of the business are meeting customer expectations, to invest its resources in areas of the business which are performing strongly, and to remain in touch with and responsiveness to shifting expectations. This has led to substantial investment programmes to improve the visitor experience at Culzean and Brodie Castles, for example, with a view to encouraging new audiences – younger people and families - into the attractions. By making the experience more relevant to these audiences the charity is better positioned now to secure its long-term sustainability.

Growing the membership

Digital channels and television are reaching more of the charity's existing and potential stakeholders than traditional channels such as Direct Mailing were able to do. They are also generating significant volumes and types of data that were previously unavailable to the charity, and at considerably lower cost. This is enabling the Customer and Cause Department to understand more about visitor perceptions and expectations of the charity's facilities and attractions, as well as what generates donations or applications for membership, for example. By following the discussions in which its stakeholder communities are engaging the charity's Customer and Cause team are able to identify and respond to the issues which are being raised in online discussion forums.

Significantly and crucially, by embracing digital media and television in this way, within a very short time frame Customer and Cause has moved the NTS from a position where its incremental growth in membership was circa 4000 new members per annum to growth of 17,000 in 2015/16.

Longer term, the aim is to use all of the data held about members to enable the Trust to provide more personalised and relevant communications to its members. This will improve the Trust's customer service and is expected to have a positive impact on member retention and loyalty.

Efficiently managing retail stock

The EPOS system is enabling Retail to better understand and manage its stock. One illustrative example of these concerns was, for years, perceived to be a best-selling shortbread. Before the EPOS system was implemented product decisions were based on an annual, manual stock-take. The manual stock-take showed the number of units ordered and the number left at the year end. Based on a comparison of these two figures the shortbread appeared to be a highly successful product and would be re-ordered each year. Within the first year of installing the EPOS system it was found that the product was not a best-selling line. In fact, most of the line was being written-off because it was staying on the shelves and becoming out-of-date. Under the manual system this data was not recorded at the local outlets and, therefore, was not communicated to the central office. The result was that the central office was increasing its order year on year for a product that was not selling. With Retail generating circa £4m of the charity's income each year the EPOS system is a significant improvement on the manual system, enabling wastage to be quickly identified and reduced on the one hand, while stocks of popular products can be more quickly replenished on the other.

The EPOS system also allows patterns and trends to be identified, so that stock can be tailored to each outlet and seasonal differences identified and outlets stocked accordingly. The data generated by the EPOS system also enhances internal 'benchmarking' and facilitates conversations about the relative performances of the charity's retail outlets.

Competitor benchmarking

As well as comparing customer satisfaction levels against its key competitors (see Section D for data sources) the NTS also benchmarks competitor spend on both traditional and new media. It also looks at what types of media competitors are purchasing and at how that correlates with performance in relation to membership attrition and growth, and visitor numbers, for example.

H. What are the challenges associated with being a data-informed charity and how are these being managed?

Stand-alone and ad hoc digital systems

The charity's digital systems have developed on an ad hoc basis, leading to a high degree of incompatibility and fragmentation. This means that processes which could otherwise be fully automated remain reliant on manual interventions. Thus, currently, (and as previously indicated in section C) data held on Retail's EPOS system has to be downloaded as hard copy and manually keyed-in to the WRD, for example. This makes analysis and reporting challenging and inefficient. It also means that datasets which might usefully be integrated, so as to generate a more holistic or fine-grained analysis for strategic and operational purposes, cannot be used to full effectiveness.

Transparency and vulnerability

Data is bringing significant new transparency to the charity's decision-making process and to performance management and reporting. For staff who are comfortable with this, data is assisting in identifying opportunities to deliver improved services, practices, and performance. For others, the transition to being a data-intensive organisation is a challenging one. This is being addressed in a number of ways. Firstly, training is being provided to staff, so that they can better understand how data can support their decision-making and lead to improvements in performance. Secondly, as new staff are recruited, willingness to engage with data and the skill set to do this effectively are being looked for in potential recruits. Thirdly, the charity is seeking 'to routinize' data utilisation, embedding it in the culture of the organisation. Thus, for example, managers at all levels of the charity are regularly monitoring and analysing their data, Board members expect staff to provide them with data to inform their decision-making and governance, and staff are being made aware of how data is informing changes within the organisation.

I. What are the charity's next steps with data?

The charity's aim, going forward, is to develop and maintain a fully integrated and highly functional digital infrastructure, so that there is no need for data to be manually transferred from one database to another. Delivering this objective will be a significant challenge, not least because it requires substantial investment to achieve a digital infrastructure that will remain sustainable and fit for purpose in the longer term.

The charity is also seeking to develop a more sophisticated understanding of its members, supporters, and visitors than is available currently. The current software systems are unable to generate the detailed profiles that would enable information and communications to be effectively personalised and targeted to take account of the circumstances and preferences of individual members, supporters, and visitors. The systems that will deliver this level of information need to be identified and will be an important element in the programme of digital investment and modernisation which is now underway.

J. Learning points

- Data underpins organisational growth and sustainability
- Data enriches and supports strategic and operational decision-making
- Data makes decisions, practices, and performances more transparent
- Having professional staff with commercial acumen and who are comfortable with data is extremely important
- Upskilling staff so that they are comfortable with data is important
- On-going and significant investment in digital technologies and ICT professionals is crucial
- Digital systems and datasets need to be integrated if data is to be used to best effect
- Having a governing board that understands the value of digital technology and data is crucial
- The organisational culture has to embrace and support data utilisation.

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