

Data & The Church

How data and analytics empower churches to reach more people, increase engagement, boost generosity, activate leaders, and make key decisions with confidence.



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Introduction

Data has been around for millenia. From ancient mathematicians who discovered gravity and the position of planets—to astronomers using the night sky to develop the first calendar, data-informed decision-making has been a valued practice throughout history. Though we've come a long way from recording data with tally marks and bone etchings, the concept of analyzing data remains just as important now.

Why do we see data used throughout history? Because it helps us make decisions. Today, data is changing the game across industries. We see this as an opportunity to serve people who make it their mission to change lives.

In this guide you'll learn how consumer-driven companies use data to build stronger relationships with customers. You'll walk away with an understanding of key terms and insights, as well as a list of questions to guide you through the purchase process of buying data for your strategy.

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How Data is Changing the Game

Top innovators are using data to understand their people better.

These insights inform the way they attract, engage, and retain customers.

Data is all around us—and there's more than ever before.

Google defines data as “facts and statistics collected together for reference or analysis.”

You may have also heard big data thrown around as a term...

Google defines big data as “extremely large data sets that may be analyzed to reveal patterns, trends, and associations, especially relating to human behavior and interactions.”

So what's the difference? It simply comes down to the quantity. “Extremely large” is a broad term with no set definition, but it's generally data sets so large, disparate, or complex that

they cannot be analyzed by a human alone—or with basic software like Excel.

These days, nearly every one of our actions produces data. This so called “data exhaust” can be analyzed to predict human behavior.

Few have responded to these changing dynamics better than today's most recognizable brands—including Google, Amazon, and Netflix. Rather than think of business as one-time transactions, these top innovators analyze data so they can align their strategy around building deeper relationships. To make sense of the data, they build consumer models, profiles, and personas. This results in personalized consumption experiences that drive first and repeat purchases.

Let's take a look at a few examples:

- Amazon engages new customers by providing relevant value. By using consumer data and powerful analytics, Amazon is able to predict habits, and future purchases. This offers aligned value to customers, and builds trustworthy relationships.

Fun Fact: 35% of Amazon's revenue is generated by its recommendation engine.

[\(Rejoinder\)](#)

- Netflix creates highly personalized experiences by analyzing consumption behavior. Based on the content consumed by a viewer—or similar viewers—Netflix recommends TV shows, movies, and Netflix originals to match their taste.
- Google develops healthy relationships with its users by customizing their web searches. Search history, SEO, and cookies all inform Google's approach to creating a smooth experience.

These strategies work because they resonate with the customer. Not to mention—people love it.

51%

of consumers expect companies to anticipate their needs and make relevant suggestions by 2020.

[\(Salesforce\)](#)

73%

of consumers prefer to do business with brands that use personal information to make their shopping experiences relevant.

[\(Digital Trends\)](#)

86%

of people say that personalization influences their purchase decisions.

[\(Infosys\)](#)

Customers who perceived supplier content to be tailored to their specific needs were 40% more willing to buy.

[\(Harvard Business Review\)](#)

Advances in technology now put the power of data and analytics into the hands of organizations on a mission to change lives. As you read on, you'll see how this technology has the power to do so much more than lead customers to a shopping cart.

Let's talk church.

► **Note about Personas:**

Personas are the lifeblood of any marketing, sales, and engagement strategy. Yet, many organizations never complete this essential exercise. Personas force you to answer some basic questions about your ideal customer so you can be more effective in your marketing and treatment strategies.

Before big data, leading organizations spent considerable amounts of time completing their customer personas. For example, Lego famously conducted an exhaustive four-year study that analyzed the behavior of 3,500 girls to grow its female consumer base.

Big data brings these traits and propensities to the forefront so you can complete an accurate patient persona in a fraction of the time.

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What this Has to do With Church

Data turbocharges what churches already care about being great at—building genuine relationships that last.

Using data to serve people revolves around the importance of relationships—a concept every church values. But now, more than ever before, churches face challenges that bring difficulty into the picture.

51% of U.S. adults believe church isn't at all important.

59% of millennials feel church is irrelevant.

Authors Anthony B. Pinn and Tom Krattenmaker explain,

“One reason so many are opting out of religion, or never opting in to begin with, is that churches are addressing the wrong questions.”

[\(Christian America is in Decline\)](#)

In short, members leave because they feel their church doesn't provide enough

spiritual engagement. Some want more opportunities to serve, while others look for ways to solve frustrations or doubts. Many even feel church is irrelevant, and list the struggle to connect as the primary reason they leave—or never get involved at all.

It's relevant value that builds trust. With data, you gain insights on your people, allowing you to align your strategy with their unique needs and motivations.

Churches Need to Be Relevant

Most unchurched people are not walking down the streets of your community thinking about the eternal destiny of their soul. But they are thinking about something ... If the Gospel of Christ is really relevant to all aspects of life, we need to show unreached people how it is relevant to their lives, as well.

[\(Beliefnet\)](#)

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What you Need to Know about Data & Analytics

Knowledge is power. Knowing your way around data vocabulary is helpful to understanding its value. In this section you'll learn more about collecting data and the importance of putting it to use.

Before you read on, feel free to familiarize yourself with this [this list of essential data terms](#).

Governance

Because data can reveal sensitive information or even the identity of an individual, it's important to have rules in place. Doing so ensures value, usability, integrity, and security—while protecting against risks, unethical use, and other pitfalls that can cause harm.

These principles answer questions like:

- What uses for data will the platform support
- How will insights be delivered without compromising privacy
- What data sources are considered ethical
- How will platform users be allowed to speak or communicate

So where does data come from? Like information in general, there are multiple ways to collect it.

Here are the two most common:

First-Party Data.

Data you collect from your own congregation and community.

First-party data is data you own—and it's usually the most accurate information.

This could include information that someone has volunteered to you from:

- Assessments or Surveys
- Intake Forms
- Child Check-Ins
- Membership Events or Classes

Third-Party Data.

Data generated from outside organizations, platforms, or websites.

Third-party data is either shared or purchased anonymously. This information is important as it can fill in the missing pieces sometimes found with first-party data. Make sure you work with a trusted provider who is transparent in how they collect and share information.

Collecting the data is only half the battle. Without solid analytics, you

can have all the data in the world and still not get the insights you need to generate value and impact. This is where most churches we speak with find themselves.

Data reveals information like how many people give, the number of baptisms, and new members, but it doesn't show people's motivations. This is why analytics are needed.

Analytics.

Powered by algorithms, analytics detect and process meaningful patterns found in data. Often visualized in a report or dashboard, analytics are what put useful and actionable information into the hands of Champions.

▶ **A Note About Privacy**

Information can be a powerful tool, and it's critical that your partner handles your data with integrity and trust. Trust includes privacy, security, confidentiality, and accountability.

When selecting a data solutions provider, ensure they follow industry standard self-regulatory principles around consumer privacy, established by organizations like the IAB and DMA. Be selective when choosing your partner - it will pay off!



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Key Considerations for Churches

Churches benefit from data that shows them information they can act on. In this section you'll learn some tips on how to comb through the data you use to find actionable next steps.

- ▶ **Some Assembly Required: 77% of marketers say real-time personalization is crucial; however 60% report it's a challenge to execute.**

(Adobe)

We understand that churches want to use data to maximize ministry. Many of them collect data already. However, when we talk to churches, they tell us they're missing key insights. Perhaps the data needs to be acted on, isn't revealing the whole picture, or a combination of both. Either way, here are some helpful ideas to consider.

In addition to audits, check-ins, and record-keeping, churches should consider the following when looking for a data solution:

Larger sets of data.

Churches often rely on data sets that are too small to reveal any sort of helpful information. This is a great use case for using third-party data solutions.

Analytics strategies.

You can have half the data in the world and still not find value in it if you don't apply analytics. Having a strategy in place to interpret your data will help you discover deeper information like patterns and trends.

Relational information.

The data churches surface might provide scoreboard information about attendance and giving, but it's not the same as relational information. When using data, be sure it reveals relational insights. This could be anything from values and motivations, to needs and desires.

The ability for data to support co-service.

Co-serving is the idea that people will have a number of different Champions. Let's examine the following example to explain this clearly.

Analyzing data may reveal that a person is spiritual and has a high propensity for depression. With these insights, they may decide to take part in a small group at church, work with a therapist, and interact weekly with a personal trainer. Each of these Champions play an important role in the growth and development of that individual.

- ▶ Note: It's important that these Champions have access to information in a private and secure way that doesn't infringe on the rights of the individual.

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Popular Applications for Data & Analytics Across Your Strategy

Analyzing and applying data allows for limitless impact on your people and local communities.

A quick recap . . .

using data is all about aligning your strategy to the people and communities you serve.

Here are just a few examples of the possibly infinite number of ways to align data to your people strategy:

Reach more people.

The trick to reaching more people isn't always about quantity. Consider the quality and relevance of what you're offering. Bringing the right message to the right people at the right time always yields stronger results.

► *Note: Don't jump to this as a goal if you haven't already identified your audience!*

Appoint more leadership.

Models exist that can help identify leaders in your local community and church body. Propensities, motivations, and affiliations are just a few indicators of potential leadership. Analyze the data you collect to see who can join the effort to move your ministry forward.

Cultivate more generosity.

Consider thinking of your church budget as a tangible representation of your people's generosity. Aligning spending to the needs and values of your people is a powerful way to cultivate an ongoing cycle of giving. Insights can reveal the financial needs of those you serve—making it easier to support this culture.

Encourage spiritual formation.

People who receive aligned value are more likely to engage and continue coming back. Use data to provide what's relevant and encourage the engagement that helps with spiritual growth.

Long-term tracking.

Data analysis allows you to track progress without interviewing everyone in your community. This means churches can now measure the impact of their ministry.

For example, consider how powerful that is in the realm of church planting. As a church plant progresses, tracking the following years of results can be done with ease.

Small group formation and curriculum selection.

Choose small group curriculum that aligns to your people and their styles.

- Should be online or in person
- Be tailored to married people, singles, or millennials
- Provide community service
- Is in a reasonable proximity and location
- Align with the interests of the group members

Hiring and staff development.

Ask [behavioral interview questions](#).

The best questions determine how someone would behave in your specific environment—with your specific people.

For example:

- Tell me about how you worked with a high-novelty, aspiring congregation
- Explain how you handle a challenges with different denominations—and give an example
- Give an example of how you approach others with your faith

If necessary, you can consider driving staff toward development programs—helping them to better serve people's needs.

Opening new locations.

Choose locations that are a good fit for your church and strategy. Consider that different locations may present unique challenges.

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How to Get Started

In this section, we'll cover some helpful ways you can craft personas and profiles to get you started today—without even buying data.

Clarity of who you're serving is always valuable. Here are a few next steps you can take to develop and personalize your approach.

Do some research.

Not sure where to start with research? Begin with the basics. This often takes the form of:

- Auditing your public demographic database
- Auditing your church management system
- Sending out a survey
- Taking an assessment
- Conducting an audience analysis

Synthesize and analyze.

Put plain and simple, synthesis and analysis is making sense of the data so you can craft it into a persona. It helps to

organize these insights into buckets that are then turned into specific audiences.

Make a persona.

With the results of your research, synthesis, and analysis, you can form specific personas. Be sure to apply unique findings. The goal of a persona is to inform the way you serve your specific audience.

Assessments

Assessments are special for two reasons:

1. They are first-party data. That means information straight from the horse's mouth—accurate and enriching to the data you already have.
2. They draw conclusions from answers that go beyond just tallying up a score. In other words, assessments give you information you can act on.

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How to Identify a Trusted Data Solutions Provider

With the hype of data, lots of organizations are stepping up to the plate to offer solutions. Not all solutions are built equally. In this section, you'll learn how to choose the right provider for your organization—with confidence.

Your options for getting the right data solution.

Let's take a look at three ways you can obtain this technology.

Disparate Systems

This can include any number of systems to manage your data and models. Some of these solutions may solve a portion of your needs, but leave gaps in critical processes. This can limit your ability to target your ideal audience and build tailored journeys.

PROS

- Low cost
- Low subscription

CONS

- Missing advanced features
- May not integrate
- Difficult to share data
- Lack of access to third-party data

Build Your Own

Organizations that need highly custom solutions can build their own software products and models. To do this, Champions need to hire in-house engineers, data scientists, and product designers, or outsource the work to an agency.

PROS

- Custom
- Build only what you want

CONS

- Technical deficit
- Integrations may not exist
- Expensive to maintain
- Lacks data

Buy from a Vendor

Companies are beginning to offer solutions to suit the unique needs of many industries. The best vendors will offer solutions that address all the requirements listed adjacent.

PROS

- Works out of the box
- Has the data you need

CONS

- May not be exact for your industry
- Trust is a consideration

- ▶ No matter which option you choose, make sure your data vendor or service provider can answer specific questions. For many questions, the right answer will be unique to your organization and needs. However, these 14 questions are important for all Champion organizations:

1. Where does data come from (e.g, first-party, third-party, both)?
2. How is privacy ensured?
3. How will it integrate with current investments?
4. What's the overall cost, and are there additional fees?
5. How long will it take until the platform is live?
6. How will you help me input data?
7. What resources will you need from me?
8. How will value or ROI be measured?
9. How can data and insights be activated?
10. How is data visualized and/or reported?
11. What will my main workspace look like?
12. Does the product surface relational information?
13. Are models available out of the box?
14. Can I build customized models?



Conclusion

Data continues to prove its importance as time unfolds and industries grow. Despite the most complex and impressive components of the technology, its foundation remains firm on a single principle—relationships.

Changing lives for the better is effort wasted without genuine relationships—those built on trust and value. Data helps you align your strategy to the needs of your people, provide them with relevant value, and ultimately, gain trust. This is where we see the greatest yieldings of customized personal growth.

Throughout this guide, you learned how Champion organizations are changing the game with data. You got a thorough rundown of key terms and insights, and essential elements. You saw how this new technology is turbocharging churches, and got next-step takeaways for applying data to your strategy.



Data is a powerful resource in the hands of Champions who care about changing lives for the better.

If you're considering boosting the strategy of your ministry to get more people on a journey to personal growth, engage them, build relationships, and change lives, we'd love to help—and we'd be happy to walk you through the process.

[Learn more](#)



Appendix & Additional Resources

[A Brief History of Big Data Everyone Should Read](#)

[Americans Divided on the Importance of Church](#)

[Big Data, Bigger God](#)

[Christian America is in Decline](#)

[Church Evaluation Questionnaire](#)

[Data Tells a Story ... Why Churches Should Track Everything](#)

[How Data Can Predict Your Divorce](#)

[Making the Consensus Sale](#)

[Mathematical Treasure: The Ishango Bone](#)

[Must Know Data Terms for Champions](#)

[Quality Church Assessments](#)

[Rethinking Retail](#)

[The 5 Most Important Church Growth Principles](#)

[The Amazon Recommendations Secret to Selling More Online](#)

[The Church Outreach Toolkit](#)

[The Rise of Data and How to Use It to Pastor Your Church](#)

[The State of The Church](#)

[The Ultimate Guide to Buying data Solutions](#)

[Top 10 Behavioral Interview Questions](#)

[What Consumers Expect in 2020](#)

[Why Consumers are Increasingly Willing to Trade Data for Personalization](#)

[20 Sample Questions for Church Member Polls](#)