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Data governance: How to get started

With great data comes great responsibility. Your ability to confidently transform data into insights, and more importantly, into action will give your organization the competitive edge to win over customers—and it must be handled with care.

This starts with quality data—meaning data that is complete, accurate, unique, and clean—but governing that data and determining how it's used, stored, accessed, and kept secure is what keeps many companies up at night. In fact, 95 percent of businesses say that they struggle to implement a data governance program.

If you're looking to advocate for data governance at your organization, you can follow our five-step blueprint to get your team on board.

Find your champion

You'll want at least one influential business leader who supports your data governance efforts early on and who can help build credibility and interest among the C-suite.

This could be your CIO, CTO, CMO, CFO or another data influencer, but be on the lookout for these qualities: Are they vested in the value of data within the organization? Is this person a visionary, an influencer, and an effective storyteller? Are they well-respected and action-oriented? Will he or she vet your pitch, give you critical feedback, and sponsor both you and your idea with senior leaders?

Once you've identified your cheerleader, you'll want to make sure your business proposal is ready in hand. We'll get to that next.

Connect your pitch to strategic business drivers

The easiest way to earn the attention of senior executives is to build a case for data governance that: 1. delivers a quantifiable impact and 2. connects back to your strategic business priorities. For example, if your organization has a goal to increase the efficiency of marketing campaigns,

show your executives how changing the way you govern customer data enables more targeted campaigns, which can yield increased customer engagement and business revenue.

Additional proven business benefits from high-quality data governance include, but are not limited to:

- Informed and trusted decision-making
- Faster time to market
- Reduced operational costs
- Improved customer satisfaction

Framing your pitch in this way will successfully highlight the ROI of data governance and help secure C-level buy-in.

Assemble your data governance A-team

Now that you've gotten buy-in, your governance program will need dedicated full-time staff to lay the foundation for a scalable and sustainable program. The most successful organizations often set up a cross-departmental data governance council to identify, prioritize, and execute data-based projects.

Make sure to include data owners from various departments, including marketing, finance, business stakeholders, compliance, and data quality analysts. This diverse expertise will be critical to defining your mission, vision, goals, success metrics, and processes, and the data quality analyst can ensure that these initiatives are operationalized to drive impact downstream.

Establish processes for managing your data

Now that you've found the right people, together you can partner to set up processes that address data security, monitoring, observation, and reporting. Consider your plan for accountability, requirements, issue resolution and analysis to support data acquisition, compliance, financial priorities, and how to drive improvement initiatives.

Most importantly, don't forget your communications plan for how you'll amplify learnings, success, and recommendations to the rest of the organization. Hello, marketing team!

Invest in the right technology

Remember, your data governance program is only as successful as the reliability of your data. The proper tools will transform your data into actionable insights and empower you to profile, cleanse, monitor, and enrich your data. Specifically, look for capabilities such as removing duplicates, standardizing inconsistent formats, and appending missing information. These methods can help you take control of your data and make sure it's clean and ready for use.

Congratulations! You're one step closer to transforming your data, your business, and better leveraging this information to create happier customers.

Want to know more about the do's and don'ts of data governance?

Learn more