

CASE STUDY

Dark Data Unearthed to Shape Direction and ROI of Efforts

SQA Group helps national arts organization unlock actionable insights to shape data-driven strategy

CHALLENGE

In response to company growth imperatives — strengthening employee engagement, driving speed to customer acquisition, and future-proofing its differentiated elements — SXSW, a globally recognized brand that drives experiential events, was on a journey to ignite a more data-centered approach to setting strategy. What's more, they wanted to pre-bake ROI into future initiatives, particularly in the areas of employee experience and diversity, equity and inclusion.

SXSW had stood up employee survey and feedback methodologies that generated initial sets of data. But leadership wanted to go beyond out-of-the-box reporting to derive true data analysis that could answer questions such as: What is current employee sentiment? Where is immediate opportunity for growth? Where are risks? How do we gain predictive capabilities? How do we measure impact/ROI on cultural changes and investments?

The leadership team believed that a greater investment in data maturity and predictive analytics would be essential in shaping future decisions, but lacked the internal expertise and capacity to drive forward on its own. What's more, they needed to work with data experts who not only possessed data mastery, but could analyze raw data through the lens of shaping business strategy around culture, employee experience, and diversity, equity and inclusion.

SOLUTION

SQA Group deployed its Data and Innovation team — hyperspecialized in data science, advanced analytics, and innovative business strategy — to power SXSW's commitment to becoming more data driven. The engagement centered around SQA Group unearthing “dark data” insights from the company's existing data, identifying new actions and behaviors to move the needle, and correlating the impact of those actions to financial, efficiency, and morale gains.

In just a few weeks, and providing weekly sprint-like actionable intel for stakeholders to build momentum, SQA Group partnered to:

- Analyze both structured (data living in existing systems) and unstructured data (social media posts, sentiment analysis, anecdotal stories, etc.) that could not previously be correlated

The SXSW logo is displayed in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters 'S', 'X', and 'S' are connected, and the 'W' is also connected to the second 'S'. A stylized arrowhead points downwards and to the right from the top of the 'W'.

“We are so close to the work that we didn't know where our blind spots were. We needed the lens and the expertise of SQA Group who could show us what we weren't seeing and illuminate what was previously in the dark. We're now leveraging our data for better outcomes for staff, increased revenue, organizational culture, and for the progression of the organization over the next decade.”

-Dr. Jason Ottley, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Unearth insights and data stories that explain why certain things are happening today, and predict what might happen next, along with its potential for impact
- Create a custom roadmap of new data-driven actions and behaviors cross-functional teams should take to drive swift impact against target goals and business objectives
- Conduct a risk analysis to understand the cost to the business of not moving forward with data-backed recommendations, as well as the ROI impact of driving execution swiftly
- Plot roadmap items against a prioritized timeline that accounts for maximum ROI realization



“Our performance evaluations were too long, and we didn’t know which areas to condense. SQA group helped us analyze our previous survey results to show us what our staff was most interested in, as well as most despondent about. Now we have a better performance evaluation framework that focuses on the pieces that are most aligned with our staff needs, wants, and desires.”

IMPACT

SQA Group delivered a custom-built Data-Backed Framework, with 7-figure ROI value, that leveraged newly elevated insights to identify risk, set direction, and prioritize new actions against their ability to drive financial health and growth. Chief findings included:

- **Modernize existing data collection process** for collecting employee and customer sentiment to increase opportunities to capture dynamic, multi-dimensional feedback
- Introduce an **always-on approach to data** collection through employee pulse surveys, listening sessions, Ask Me Anything workshops, and org-wide data maturity efforts
- Spark a culture of **innovation acceleration**, with analysis revealing an opportunity to expedite the time from conception to execution to drive faster achievement of financial gains
- Amplify the firm’s Culture & Values internally and through public channels (e.g. website, social media) to increase **speed to talent, customer and partner acquisition**
- Augment the **performance review process** by introducing bi-directional review cycles that give employees the chance to share what they need from their manager

In examining ROI potential of all recommendations, SQA Group connected each prioritized action to its ability to **make or save the business money**.

For example, prioritizing speed to act on even one employee idea via innovation acceleration could lead to revenue potential being boosted 15%. By unlocking hidden insights about employee interests and desires, SXSW could safeguard against attrition costs that result in 2X each employee’s salary, in addition to vacancy costs. In leading with values messaging, the firm could drive a 60% revenue increase, with 85% of customers considering authenticity when choosing a brand.

Roadmap items and risk mitigation strategies uncovered multi-million dollar ROI potential that could be realized by executing data-backed prioritized actions. Enabling SXSW to not only unlock the impact of advanced data analysis, but to align teams to actions and behaviors that most create wins, momentum, and buy-in for the power of data-powered strategies.