TOP TAKEAWAYS FROM SSB'S COLLEGIATE SUMMIT:
DATA CULTURE CONTINUES TO GROW

SSB'S FIRST EVER COLLEGIATE SUMMIT IN MAY BROUGHT TOGETHER COLLEGIATE LEADERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, WHERE MANY AMAZING CONVERSATIONS TOOK PLACE.

After listening to some of the sharpest people in collegiate athletics discuss the strategic use of data, we wanted to share some of the most interesting takeaways.

1. A GROWING NUMBER OF TOP UNIVERSITIES ARE USING DATA TO DRIVE TICKET SALES, DONATIONS AND FAN ENGAGEMENT.

Across the nation, collegiate athletics departments face constant pressure to increase attendance and revenue. Competition for sports and entertainment dollars is tougher than ever. Results are more important than ever, even though resources are often constrained. People who have to do more with less are realizing that data can help them utilize and allocate their resources more efficiently — and demonstrate their success. Attendees said data that is easily accessible and accurate helps them target the right people, at the right time, with the right message.

2. A DATA-DRIVEN CULTURE TAKES TIME TO BUILD. QUICK WINS CAN HELP INFLUENCE INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS.

Many of the summit attendees have been pioneers in embracing data and pushing for change. They've gone from trying one data-driven project to trying ten of them in a single season. Once they got the first one behind them, doors began to open for more.

But change comes slowly to some college campuses, where the old guard are used to doing things the way they always have. Many of them rely on older technology and still believe that they can just throw open the stadium gates and wait for fans to arrive. Fortunately, new technology comes with tracking, which helps show the results of data-driven programs in real time. For leaders who can say: "We launched this campaign during our annual fund drive and raised 30 percent more money this year", buy-in can come quickly. And with that stakeholder support, they can begin refining their model, building best practices, and driving data more deeply into the university's decision-making process in a programmatic way.

3. STORIES THAT ARE BASED ON DATA PROVIDE CREDIBILITY

Most people like to base their decisions on facts, so when they can show results of a data-driven campaign and explain why it worked, that lends credibility to their argument. Constant measurement and tracking produces such facts, and the only way to track the data is to have it all in one place. It needs to be accessible in order to segment it and use it in creative ways.

For example, data from the ticketing system, when combined with tracking data from the university's marketing automation system can show which combinations actually resulted in a ticket sale. Evidence like that tells a story that can build support for cultural change. To conduct that analysis requires an easy to use platform that delivers the information quickly and in a format that is ready to consume.

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4. ANALYTICS DRIVES EFFICIENCIES AND INCREASES CONVERSIONS FOR THE FUTURE

With limited resources, collegiate athletic departments might have to support as many as two dozen different sports teams. They need to operate as efficiently as possible. Analytics programs can help them better connect their messages with the correct people – those most likely to make a purchase.

For example, they don't want to call recent graduates and offer them a luxury suite, or offer tickets in the end zone to a 50-year alum who might buy club seats at midfield. By analyzing data from multiple sources – demographics, purchase behavior, income levels, etc. – they can identify people who won't sit in the rain to watch a game, but would happily watch from a restaurant or bar inside the stadium. Even fans who prefer to stay home and watch a game on their 80-inch HDTV might still buy a sweatshirt.

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Analytics helps maximize yields by increasing conversions while conserving valuable marketing resources.

Incidentally, this approach also works for donor solicitation efforts. Development officers can only communicate with a small percentage of the potential donor base. Analytics can help segment and prioritize potential donors to contact directly, versus those targeted with direct mail or a digital advertising campaign.

STAYING COOL AT OLE MISS

Some of the most helpful data comes in during the game, when fans provide instant input on things that can make them happier, often uncovering simple solutions to seemingly complex problems. For example, the University of Mississippi football team found that many seats were empty at kickoff during games in hot weather. That's a bad outcome in any sport. Were Mississippians afraid of a little heat?

Of course not. But they do know that it's smart to keep hydrated in high temperatures. Hourly concession data showed that fans were waiting in long lines to buy water before taking their seats. The simple solution was setting up coolers where fans could quickly grab a bottle without waiting in long concession lines. Without great data, others might consider a far more expensive solution.
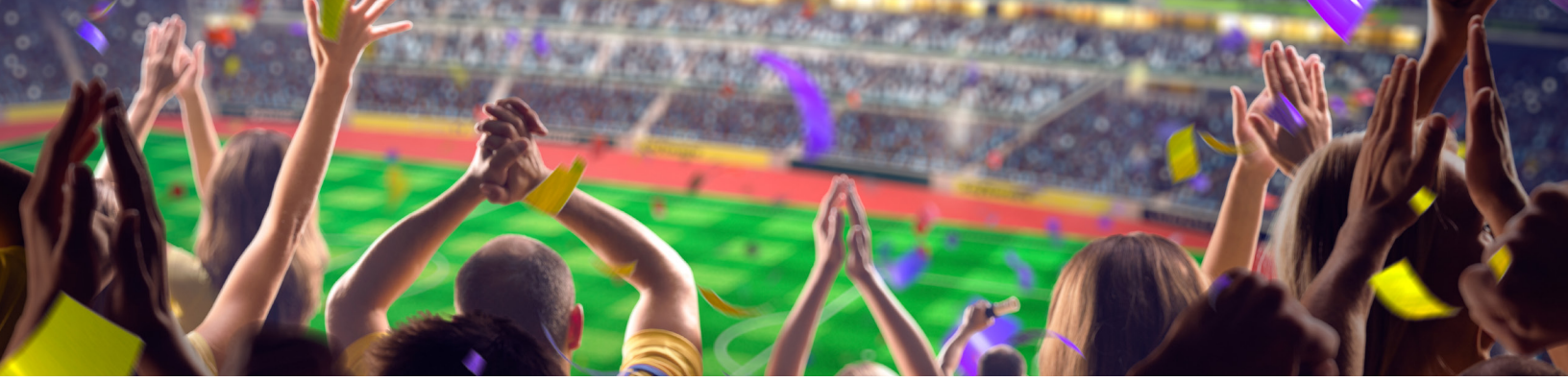
5. REAL-TIME REPORTING GIVES INSIGHTS TO ACT ON FACTS, NOT INTUITION

The product in collegiate athletics is perishable. A ticket that doesn't sell before a game on Saturday can't be sold on Sunday – it's expired and the opportunity is lost. Quick, simplified access to information which enables better decisions helps drive the most ticket sales, which of course leads to downstream revenues. Some fans spend far more on food and beverages, and team apparel, than they spend on the ticket.

Having heard from so many talented and forward-thinking collegiate leaders during the summit, we're more confident than ever that the trend toward embracing and deploying data will continue to gain momentum and grow. We're seeing more innovators with an experimentation mindset and a willingness to test new ideas. Those innovators are seeing positive results.

We know that it can be time consuming and expensive to embrace new digital models, and that university personnel come with varying degrees of technical sophistication. If we want them to rely on data and not just their gut, we need to do everything we can to help them get started.

SSB's customer promise is to aggregate and centralize critical data in one location, then make it as easy as possible for universities to begin using it to make important decisions. We provide a comprehensive platform with up-to-the-minute information and actionable insights. We also provide solutions that are built on proven industry best practices that help drive results. Our platform has built-in expertise that leverages our knowledge of specific customer workflows.

We want our clients and their staff to use their time doing smart, strategic things, and our platform lifts away much of the routine and mundane tasks that prevent them from having a strategic impact. Ultimately, we hope to see every athletic department and development office using their own data to build better relationships with their alumni, donors and sports fans.

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