



University of South Carolina Athletics Department Becomes a Data Champion with SSB

The University of South Carolina is known for its academics, community engagement, and the high caliber of its student-athletes, known as the Gamecocks. With its primary campus located in the city of Columbia, the school's enrollment encompasses more than 25,000 undergraduates and more than 8,000 graduate students—that provide a legion of loyal Gamecock fans.

In 2017, the Gamecocks won the NCAA Women's Basketball Championship, and the men's basketball team advanced to the Final Four for the first time. South Carolina leads the SEC with the most student-athletes on the conference's Academic Honor Rolls. With a regular home-game attendance of over 1.3M fans, it's obvious that the university takes great pride in developing well-rounded students who become lifelong supporters of the Gamecock community.



PROBLEM

Disconnected systems and data prevented South Carolina Athletics from maximizing ticket sales.



SOLUTION

SSB's Central Intelligence platform provides access to comprehensive data across all of the departments' information systems, enabling real-time strategic insights.



RESULTS

- Combination of disparate data sources enabled email automation for engaging sales leads and donation campaigns - that were not previously possible
- Increased group sales 100% from one season to the next
- 20% increase in sales rep efficiency, which enabled greater focus on strategic segments



Disconnected Data Stalled Sales and Renewals

South Carolina Athletics is always looking for ways to increase annual fund donations and ticket sales. But in recent years, the department noticed a growing churn in season ticket renewals—despite multiple major wins in its popular, revenue-driving sports.

Eric Nichols, Sr. Associate AD/Marketing and Branding, had a hunch that the department needed to be working *smarter*—not *harder*—if it wanted to achieve its goals. “We recognized that we were adding new season ticket buyers at a good clip every year, but we were often losing them quicker than we added them,” he says.

Nichols knew the department had a lot of information coming in from diverse systems across ticketing, merchandise, and donations. The problem? The systems could not communicate with each other, which meant information was getting locked into siloes that could not be accessed easily.

“I knew the value was there,” says Nichols, “but we couldn’t connect the dots and unlock it.”

If South Carolina Athletics could get access to its data, Nichols knew his team would be able to understand constituents’ behaviors, needs, and preferences.

“We need that understanding to boost engagement with our fans and students and donors,” he explains. “If we can get them to engage and we can better meet their needs, then we’re positioned to stop that churn and elevate sales.”

Nichols and his team had some systems that enabled a partial view of customers’ information and interactions, and they were heavy into email marketing. But it wasn’t enough.

“We had the right pieces to work with, but without the ability to connect to our ticketing database and such, we had reached the limit of what we could do,” Nichols recalls. Bottom line: The department needed a new approach to make it all click.

SSB Emerges as the Clear Choice

Nichols was familiar with collegiate-focused data warehousing and data integration projects that yield strategic insights. But, he was leery of making an investment without doing due diligence. “That’s an important element,” he states. “When you invest in a data project, you can’t just decide on a Monday and start on Wednesday—you need the buy-in, and you need a plan lined up.”

Fortunately, through his role at South Carolina, Nichols had several trusted industry colleagues that were seeing tremendous successes in data integration and strategic results from working with SSB’s Central Intelligence Platform.



“Being able to point to their successes helped me sell the plan internally,” Nichols says. “We started evaluating how to proceed, wanting to look into other vendors, but what we discovered is that SSB doesn’t really have a direct competitor—not one that could do everything they could do as well as they did it. That sealed the deal for us with SSB.”



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Access to Data Leads to Eye-Opening Business Intelligence

One of the first results that Nichols and his team noticed was a vast improvement in the real-time visibility of its constituents—who they are, what they’re doing, and where they’re coming from.

“We’re really pleased with how much we can get out of our data now,” Nichols says. For example, after a recent renewal deadline, his team was able to see the specific behaviors of certain constituent segments—and then use that insight to make real-time business decisions.

“We can look at this renewal data in real time by different ticket types—like faculty versus young

alumni—or by higher versus lower donation levels,” he says. “We can now identify segments where we might be missing sales opportunities, and immediately take steps to rectify that.” Case in point: When the data revealed that a certain segment of the school’s faculty/staff wasn’t renewing season tickets at the expected rate, Nichols and his team immediately activated a new campaign around that using outbound phone calls, direct mail, and email. “Because of our newfound visibility into our constituents, we could act on our intelligence in real time, and got the levels back up to normal very quickly,” he says.

Increased visibility is also helping the athletic department track its lead sources. “We’re very focused on lead generation in our marketing strategies,” Nichols states. “Now we can identify if our leads are coming through Facebook or email, for example, and we can see how each specific source is performing—so we can adjust our strategies accordingly. Before SSB, that kind of insight was impossible to obtain.”

Connected Systems Help Cut Churn and Boost Engagement

“Having our data integrated, cleaned and accessible is huge for us,” explains Nichols, “It helps eliminate a lot of the manual work we previously had to do. Now we can speed up the flow using automated triggers to keep engagement consistent, and that’s the way to stop churn.”



For example, if the marketing team executes an email campaign and someone clicks on a ticketing-related link, they're now sent an automated email that is personalized and introducing a General Manager that offers assistance with questions or concerns. Similarly, if a sales rep makes a call, leaves a voicemail, and then marks that status in their CRM system, that action triggers an email from the system that Nichols says is, "more inspirational—including videos and that kind of hype about why you need to be in the stadium this season." Even better, when someone finalizes a season ticket purchase, they automatically receive a congratulatory video via email from the Head Football Coach Will Muschamp thanking them for their support.

"All of these things are possible because our systems can now connect and share data," says Nichols. "We're seeing some really good results, too."

Strategic Insights Truly Pay Off

One of the most valuable results of the implementation of Central Intelligence thus far is how newfound strategic insights helped make the department drive efficiencies and overall productivity.



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According to Nichols, having access to more real-time information about the people they're engaging with allows sales reps to create personalized incentives that better meet constituents' needs. As a result, sales rep efficiency has increased by 20% and they're using the time they've regained to attack additional targets and revenue-generating avenues, such as group sales. Group sales increased 100%, which we can directly attribute to that time savings.

"We'd hoped for and expected an increase in efficiency," Nichols says, "but we're still really surprised with just how much SSB is helping us."

Next Steps

South Carolina Athletics is excited to continue the progress it's begun with SSB. "We're continually working to make SSB a core part of our overall department, in revenue-producing areas and non-revenue areas, so we can all be more data-centric," says Nichols. For more information on how your school can use SSB's Central Intelligence platform to better leverage your valuable data, contact us at www.ssbinfo.com or email salesedu@ssbinfo.com to schedule a free demo today.



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