Data Informs Decisions: ASAE and Association Analytics Aim to Predict Engagement

ASAE’s goal was to bring all member engagement data together for cross analysis to build a rich picture of overall engagement and participation.

ASAE uses multiple systems—AMS, email marketing, and online community, among others—to collect member data, but it couldn’t compare or analyze valuable member activity across systems. There was no clear way to track retention, understand satisfaction, or analyze member engagement.

ASAE partnered with Association Analytics to integrate all data into a consolidated architecture for analysis. Connecting the Higher Logic community platform, branded as “Collaborate,” is the latest addition to this long-term project.

Both organizations got to work consolidating ASAE’s data from all the different systems. There was preexisting data available using visualizations with Tableau and Power BI. Association Analytics developed an integration with Higher Logic’s Activity Sync to bring community activity data into its data platform, Acumen, in near real time, where it’s linked to member data from ASAE’s multiple systems. Additional data includes community membership and discussion content for text analysis. This will enable future plans to automatically categorize discussions and derive other valuable information.
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- Reggie Henry, Chief Information Officer, ASAE

“We built an analytics platform and ASAE helped us build a baseline,” said Julie Sciullo, President and CEO of Association Analytics. “Since HigherLogic is a standard integration, we were able to quickly and easily integrate community data into the rest of this new ecosystem, bringing to light different trends, ways to look at preexisting data, and a plan to prompt further actions. And that’s a big part of it – collecting data is cool, but what are you going to do about it?”

In other words: ASAE wants to understand the “aboutness” in its member conversations. At a basic level, Acumen helps the organization visualize search terms and subject lines. On a broader scale, it helps to see what members, volunteer groups, and people in the community talk about.

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Community Data Results

ASAE knew Collaborate was a strong member benefit, but insights gleaned from Association Analytics’ Acumen tool proved the community extends beyond just a place for members to interact:

- **Revenue:** community users with at least one activity per month generate 5 times more revenue than users with one activity or fewer per month
- **Event Registration:** users who attended the annual event had over 6 times more community activities than users who did not attend the annual event
- **Member Retention:** members who renewed had over 50% more community activities than members who did not renew

The access to this data has been a big improvement for ASAE. Staff liaisons have accessible information at their fingertips. It’s easy to perform timely analysis, since data is updated at least daily and involves all activities (including community membership group composition, discussions, and any details).

Association Analytics added a way to automate community conversation details over time. Staff can view and track individual conversations to see how each got started and how it has grown over time. The next step is alerting staff and different departments to take action.

“Someone can now alert me when conversation X reaches a certain threshold, so myself or others can get in front of it, whether it’s answering a question or assessing a certain product or service based on member feedback,” said Reggie.

“Everyone talks a lot about ‘engagement,’ but we’re really close to actualizing that at ASAE, and the community is one of the key components,” said Julie.
Improving the [Specific] Member Experience

Currently, ASAE staff is exporting data on its own communities, including trends on popular discussion topics and content. These staff groups take that information back to ASAE to compare notes and plan engagement outreach accordingly.

“How can we make sure these are rich communities?” asked Megan Kuhman, Senior Manager of Online Communities at ASAE. “If we’re talking about new members, it’s invaluable to get them engaged the second they walk in the virtual Collaborate door. This new data analysis helps me get a general idea of conversations occurring across the larger member community, so I can better navigate those members to their cohorts. There is still so much potential in my day-to-day community work.”

And beyond Collaborate, the industry at large is also reaping the benefits. ASAE’s Tech Council can now view the data from staff in real time, in order to review and analyze trends and patterns. The same goes for upcoming shifts in technology and even legislation.

“When we started aggregating data, GDPR was strongly searched and frequently discussed in the community. So, we created a group and started pushing more GDPR content and resources based on the data we had collected. This was well before the regulation went into effect – we knew we had to be proactive. We put together a GDPR program much faster because we saw it growing early,” said Reggie.
The Future of Association Data is a Culture Shift

ASAE sees this data analysis as a constant evolution, with unlimited ways to slice and dice the data to best understand how their members use their systems. In the next six to 12 months, the team hopes to dive deeper into understanding group participation and how to weight different community activities. Ultimately, it aims to use data to guide members to the right place in Collaborate.

ASAE has around 40,000 members, while only 16,000 have joined at least one group in the community – systemic of its new organizational membership. With a lot of room for growth, it hopes to get more members assigned to specific groups.

“We hear people say they are part of an association and don’t recognize the benefits,” said Megan. “This is a great selling point for a members-only site or community, because this data helps us with the member view component. We can use this demographic data from the AMS and community to steer a member to the right place, where they find valuable, relevant conversations.”

Using Acumen is meant to be a two-pronged approach to engagement: a strategic tool and a day-to-day metrics tracker. ASAE wants to predict future actions, but it’s primarily focused on analyzing current conversations, terms, and actions to see how that affects the community at large.

ASAE sees this project as a reflection of a culture change in the broader association space. Where before its members would ask about static reports, now they are asking ASAE for exploration and insights into member activity. Both ASAE and Association Analytics hope this movement inspires other associations to consider change management to create a real cultural shift, based on the success ASAE has seen.

“I’ve gleaned this from the last few years: the future of data is insight. We don’t want to measure how well we did against old strategy, because it’s now constantly changing. We have these stereotypes in our minds about how to use data analytics – it’s still based on reporting and meetings. But has your data affected the day-to-day fabric of your organization?” asked Reggie.