Google Cloud

YMCA of San Francisco: Using data to build stronger communities

The YMCA of San Francisco built a centralized data warehouse with BigQuery to better understand the needs of the community, grow membership, and optimize its fundraising efforts.

Google Cloud Results

- Synthesizes data reports to create more effective and focused community services and programs
- Helps meet 5% annual membership growth goal with analytics insights
- Leads innovation at YMCA by being the first branch to make a nationwide impact with its data

Saving $2 million per year on total cost of ownership

About YMCA of San Francisco

Founded in 1853, the YMCA of San Francisco builds strong kids, families, and communities. With more than 35 locations across the Bay Area, it offers 54 school and community-center-based after-school and summer programs.

Industries: Non-profit
Location: United States

About Analytics Pros

Analytics Pros is a Google Premier Partner delivering business intelligence solutions, focusing on big data for the YMCA of San Francisco and other well-known brands.

When it comes to building healthy and vibrant communities, the YMCA is committed to giving children and their entire families a place where they can learn and prosper. And given the many challenges facing families today, that's not always easy.

According to the YMCA, just a few obstacles facing families today include the fact that one in five children is obese before their fifth birthday, marking the first generation in the United States whose life spans are predicted to be shorter than that of their parents. Another challenge to address, and one which disproportionately affects low-income families: by the eighth grade, children who have not engaged in summer learning experiences are on average three years behind their peers academically.

The YMCA of San Francisco works to expand opportunities for everyone, strengthening the foundations of area communities through youth development, social responsibility, and promoting healthy living through initiatives such as the YMCA Diabetes Prevention Programs and Y Bike. For more than 160 years, the YMCA of San Francisco has addressed the most pressing social issues of the day — whether helping immigrants adjust to life in America, providing safe spaces for kids from all backgrounds to learn and grow, or helping soldiers returning from duty to find civilian jobs back home.

Through 15 branches and hundreds of program sites, the YMCA of San Francisco serves nearly 50,000 members and nearly as many community participants with community-focused activities and programs. It has a [strategic plan and 2020 vision](#) that the healthiest children in America will live in the Bay Area, strong in spirit, mind, and body. Increasing membership is important to achieving this goal, and the organization seeks to grow it by 5% annually.

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Creating a more tailored member experience

YMCA members join because they want more than a great gym — they want a welcoming community. The YMCA of San Francisco is part of a coalition of YMCAs that allow members to use nearly every YMCA branch in the United States, instead of being limited to their local branch. This presented a golden opportunity to look at patterns of which branches members visit, along with other metrics — gym they such as event attendance, donations, and program registrations — to create a more tailored experience. This could result in adjustment to schedules, program offerings, or targeted communications that provide members with the opportunities and information they want.

Each YMCA is its own nonprofit entity, responsible for its own IT systems and fundraising efforts. To support its vision for a healthier future, the YMCA of San Francisco decided to use data to better understand what people want and need to improve their health — and how the YMCA could serve their members better. It also hoped that a more complete picture of its stakeholders and prospects would lead to a better understanding of who is most likely to join. After evaluating several cloud providers, the organization decided to build a centralized data warehouse on [Google Cloud Platform](#) (GCP), bringing together data from fitness centers, daycare and after-school programs, seasonal and weekend camps, swim lessons, and other activities for more informed decision-making.

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—Ravi Epuri, Director of Applications, YMCA of San Francisco

Meeting growing analytics needs

Previously, senior management and branch leaders compiled data from various business systems that were not well integrated, resulting in tedious, cumbersome, and error-prone processes. Even simple reports took a long time to build, and leadership could not fully trust the data when making important business decisions.

To make sure the new cloud data warehouse could help with overcoming these issues, the YMCA of San Francisco engaged Analytics Pros, a Google Premier Partner, for design and deployment assistance.

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The YMCA of San Francisco used BigQuery, a fully managed big data analytics service, for the core data warehouse. It also used App Engine to create and deploy a mail server application to receive source files as email attachments and upload them into BigQuery in an automated, compliant, and highly secure manner. To allow end users to visualize metrics such as membership retention, facility usage, fundraising statistics, program quality ratings, and other demographics, it uses Tableau, which connects directly to BigQuery for fast slicing and dicing of data. The data warehouse is expected to reach 20 TB once all source data is added.

"With BigQuery, we can scale up or down as needed while avoiding maintenance and infrastructure costs," says Ravi. "We did a proof of concept with several cloud data warehouses, and BigQuery is our tool of choice. It provides the scalability and performance we're looking for at approximately 60% less cost than other solutions."

Growing membership and impact

Having a single trusted source of truth to make decisions about membership, retention, planning, budgeting, sales, and marketing will help the YMCA of San Francisco continue to drive social impact. Using BigQuery, it can produce a holistic view of members and their activities and preferences to enable more effective and focused community services and programs. With data already in the warehouse, building Tableau reports takes 50% less time, getting information in the hands of decision-makers twice as fast. The YMCA can now better track donors, funding partners, foundations, and other grant organizations, and target them with appropriate fund-raising efforts.

"The data warehouse we've built on BigQuery is helping us meet our 5% annual membership growth goal and increase our fundraising capacity by giving us more accurate reporting," says Ravi. "Ultimately, that means we can reach more members of the community with more programs."

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Leading a nationwide effort

YMCAs across the country are transforming their organizations, driven by the realization that they can do even more for their communities. The YMCA of San Francisco is leading the way from a technology standpoint, providing a data-driven model for others to follow.

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Data Solutions for Change

The YMCA of San Francisco participated in Data Solutions for Change, a Google data analytics program for nonprofits to achieve their missions at scale. As a participant, the YMCA of San Francisco received Google Cloud credits, self-training resources, and enablement support.