

From Dashboards to Decisions: Building an Analytics Practice People Actually Use

Most companies have more dashboards than decisions. Here's a framework for building analytics that changes what people do, not just what they look at.

The dashboard graveyard

Walk into most companies and you'll find a graveyard of dashboards: built for a launch, opened a handful of times, then quietly abandoned once the person who requested it moved on. The problem usually isn't the tooling. It's that the dashboard was built to answer a question no one actually asks day to day.

Analytics work earns its keep when it changes a decision someone was already going to make — what to price, who to follow up with, what to fix first — not when it adds a new screen to check. This paper covers the principles we use to keep analytics work tied to real decisions, and a simple pattern for scoping new requests.

Four principles for analytics that gets used

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| 01 | Start from the decision, not the data
Before building anything, name the specific decision the output should change and who makes it. If no one can name a decision, it's a report, not analytics — and it will be ignored. |
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| 02 | One number people trust beats ten they don't
A single well-defined metric that everyone agrees on outperforms a dashboard with twenty charts using inconsistent definitions of the same underlying thing. |
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| 03 | Put the answer where the decision happens
A dashboard nobody opens loses to a Slack alert, an email digest, or a number embedded directly in the tool someone already uses every day. |
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| 04 | Revisit cadence, not just content
A weekly number reviewed monthly is as useless as a stale one. Match the refresh rate and review cadence to how often the decision actually gets made. |

A pattern for scoping new analytics requests

Most analytics requests arrive as a solution already in mind: “can we get a dashboard for X.” Before building, we run every request through the same four questions. It takes fifteen minutes and prevents most of the graveyard dashboards described above.

- **What decision does this inform?** Get specific — not “visibility into churn,” but “which accounts the retention team calls this week.”
- **Who acts on it, and how often?** A daily-operating decision needs a live number. A quarterly planning decision doesn't.

- **What does “normal” look like?** A number without a baseline or threshold doesn't trigger action — it just gets glanced at.
- **What happens after someone sees it?** If there's no clear next action, the output is context, not analytics — useful, but shouldn't be built as if it drives a decision.

Case pattern: from churn dashboard to churn workflow

A recurring pattern across clients: a churn dashboard exists, is checked occasionally, and churn keeps happening anyway. The fix is rarely a better chart. It's converting the dashboard into a ranked, actionable list — the specific accounts at elevated risk this week, with the contributing signal named — delivered directly into the tool the retention team already works from. The underlying model doesn't need to be more sophisticated; the output needs to be closer to the point of action.

Signs an analytics practice is working

A healthy analytics function looks different from a productive one on paper. A few signals we look for with clients:

- People argue about what to do about a number, not about whether the number is right.
- Dashboards get retired on purpose, not just abandoned, once the decision they supported changes.
- New requests get scoped against a decision before any building starts.
- The same metric means the same thing in every tool it appears in.

A closing note

Good analytics work is closer to product work than to reporting: it is scoped around a user, a decision, and a moment of action, and it is retired when it stops earning its place. Teams that hold every dashboard to that bar end up with fewer of them — and the ones that remain actually get used.

About Itzynergy

Itzynergy is a data analytics and generative AI consulting practice. We help businesses connect their data, build models they can trust, and put generative AI to work on real internal problems — from first pipeline to production. Engagements are scoped small, shipped early, and supported end-to-end by the same team.

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