



Sticker Mule is Building a Metrics-Driven Company

| INDUSTRY | LOCATION | CONNECTORS | RJMETRICS USER SINCE |
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| Custom sticker printing | New York, New York | Ecommerce backend, web analytics, customer support | 2012 |

Sticker Mule prints “custom stickers that kick ass” for people, startups, bloggers, artists, and companies like Github, Reddit, Amazon, Google, and Netflix. Their success is powered by continuous improvement. “It’s definitely not a fast process,” says Anthony Thomas, CEO. “Our improvement is often incremental and stems from a metrics-driven culture that we’ve had from the start.” But the results – a high-quality product, happy employees, and halved turnaround times – speak for themselves.

Anthony’s background is in manufacturing, and his approach to running a business is reminiscent of a finely tuned machine. Here are his four core principles:

1. Build a metrics-driven culture from day one
2. Focus on a small, core group of metrics
3. Share performance data with everyone
4. Fix what’s broken

Build a metrics-driven culture from day one

Sticker Mule launched in March 2010. In 2012 they began using RJMetrics; about the same time the company started to gain traction. A lot of new businesses view data as a luxury, but Anthony thinks this is a mistake, “The sooner you establish a focus on metrics, the better. People get used to them. If the process is there early on, it becomes part of who you are and how you grow.”

In other words, if you want to build a metrics-driven company, don’t wait to reach a certain level of sophistication or success. Start building norms around data today.



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Focus on a small, core group of metrics

Like any new business, Sticker Mule’s day-one priority was sales. They chose three sales metrics - revenue, year-over-year growth, and customer acquisition cost - that would align everyone in the company, and that was it. “We weren’t tracking things like Twitter engagement,” Anthony says, “we only cared about the metrics that were core to our company’s business goals.”

Only once the business began gaining traction did Anthony and his team expand beyond that small, core group of sales metrics. First, they added manufacturing metrics to the mix, but only the two most important ones: quality and turnaround time. In 2014, as they began adding marketing and customer success team members, they added metrics to these functions as well. Anthony explained, “When you bring more people on, you introduce new metrics that are relevant to their roles.” Every person needs an individual metric they can move, but it’s important for the whole team to also keep an eye on the top 2-3 core metrics that never change.”

Share performance data with everyone

Sticker Mule’s performance data is available to any team member who wants to look at it. At anytime, anyone from any level or department in the company can check sales numbers, see how many customer support tickets have been closed, or check out how many new customers were acquired over the past month. The reason is simple: “Everyone can see how their efforts are making a difference, and it inspires us to keep working on it. It’s human nature to want to see those numbers improve.”

This transparency resulted in the reduction of their turnaround time from 5-6 days down to an average of 72 hours. “There was no big fix,” Anthony says about this incredible achievement. “It was just constant hard work from our entire team, correcting tons of small problems.”

It’s this shared alignment around goals that Anthony says is the most exciting thing about building a metrics-driven company, “being able to see the outcome gets everyone excited about trying new strategies.”

Fix the things that are broken

This approach of making incremental improvements by identifying things that are broken and fixing them is a staple of how Sticker Mule works. “We don’t need to run experiments to figure out what to do,” Anthony says, “we know what’s not working.” So, they just fix it. They’re constantly finding new ways to improve print quality, get artwork to download faster, and create tighter processes with partners. Little by little, it all adds up.

Anthony believes that leaders shouldn’t look at the results of a single action, but instead the net impact on metrics over time. “If you’re a small company with a small team, pick the things that make the most sense, and be patient.”

Attracting metrics-driven people

Anthony admits that this working style isn’t for everyone, but it’s so core for Sticker Mule that it’s become part of the recruiting process, “we’ve had a few higher-level hires that were sold on working for us once we showed them our RJMetrics reports. It makes the path to success really clear because our focus is on well-defined challenges and metrics. The right kind of person values that ability to see how their work is making an impact on the business.”