The Rise of the Customer Data Strategist

Transforming Data from Cost Center to Strategic Asset

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Executive Summary

Your company collected 847 customer data points yesterday. Marketing used 12 of them. The other 835 just cost you money.

This is not a technology problem.
You have the tools. CDP implementations are complete. Data warehouses are operational. Analytics platforms are licensed and deployed.

This is not a talent problem.
You have smart people. Data engineers who can build anything. Marketers who understand customers. Analysts who can find patterns in numbers.

This is an ownership problem. And it may be costing you millions.
The average organization collects information from 15 or more sources. Yet most of this data never gets used. When it does, it often creates more problems than it solves. Teams talk past each other. Projects miss their goals. Systems sit partially implemented because nobody can translate technical capability into business value.

While companies have invested heavily in analytics teams, data scientists, and Chief Data Officers, a critical gap remains. Someone needs to connect the technical work of data engineering with the commercial objectives of marketing and business teams. Someone who can translate database schemas into customer lifetime value. Someone who understands both Python and profit margins.

This person is the Customer Data Strategist.
This ebook explores why this role has become essential, what makes it different from existing positions, and how organizations can build this capability. You'll see evidence from companies like Procter & Gamble and Virgin Australia, along with frameworks you can use to assess your own readiness.

The data you already have can become your most valuable asset. It just needs the right kind of ownership.

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PART ONE

The Data Paradox

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CHAPTER 1: THE $6 BILLION QUESTION

Organizations are drowning in customer data while starving for insights.

According to Gartner research, the average enterprise loses $12.9 million annually to poor data quality.[1] Multiply that across thousands of large organizations, and you reach a staggering collective cost. These numbers represent actual losses showing up on balance sheets, in wasted marketing spend, in customer service failures, in missed revenue opportunities.

Zoom in and the impact becomes personal. Marketing teams report that 36.9% identify data and analytics as their biggest skills gap.[2] Sales? They are targeting the wrong decision-makers 86% of the time because their data is incomplete or incorrect.[3] Finance departments watch one dollar in five vanish into wasted media spend and mistargeted campaigns.[4]

These are not small inefficiencies. They are strategic failures that compound over time.

Consider what happened at Unity Technologies. A single data quality incident cost the company $110 million.[5] Samsung Securities issued billions in ghost shares because of a data entry error.[6] Uber paid tens of millions in compensation adjustments when accounting data was mishandled.

But the real cost is not these spectacular failures. The real cost is the slow bleed of missed opportunities.

When customer data sits in siloed systems, marketing cannot personalize at scale. When data quality is poor, customer service cannot anticipate needs. When nobody owns the strategy behind data usage, teams build on faulty foundations. Quarter after quarter, year after year, the gap between what is possible and what is actual widens.

The numbers confirm this. Companies achieve only 60% of their goals when they lack proper data strategy, compared to 89% success rates when strategic data ownership exists.[7]

Now zoom back out. This is not just your problem. This is an industry problem. A trillion-dollar problem spreading across every sector of the economy. And it exists not because organizations lack data or technology, but because they lack something more fundamental.

They lack strategic ownership.

The question is not whether your organization has this problem. The question is how much it is costing you right now, today, while you read this sentence.

CHAPTER 2: THE TRANSLATION CRISIS

In any enterprise, you will find two groups speaking different languages.

On one side sits the data engineering team. They talk about schemas, ETL pipelines, data lakes, and API endpoints. They care about scalability, latency, and system architecture. Their concerns are technical and their solutions are built in code.

On the other side sits the marketing team. They talk about customer journeys, conversion rates, lifetime value, and personalization. They care about campaign performance, attribution, and customer experience. Their concerns are commercial and their solutions are built in strategy.

Both are competent and well-intentioned. But they rarely understand each other.

This translation crisis manifests in predictable ways. Marketing requests a unified customer view without specifying what attributes matter most or how quickly data needs to update. Data engineering builds technically sophisticated solutions that do not map to actual business workflows. Projects get scoped without clear success metrics because nobody can articulate what business value the technical work should generate.

The result is what we call the technology-first trap. Organizations buy customer data platforms, implement data warehouses, and hire data scientists without a clear strategy for how these investments will drive revenue or reduce costs. The tools are sophisticated but directionless.

You can easily picture a Fortune 500 retailer spending over a million implementing a CDP. The data engineers built an elegant solution. Fifteen sources integrated. Forty million customer profiles unified. Sub-second query response times. Technical perfection.

Six months later, a marketing manager asked a simple question: Can we see which customers browsed winter coats but bought nothing?

The engineering team said yes. It would take three weeks and a custom SQL query. The campaign window was two weeks.

The CDP could answer a thousand questions. But it could not answer the one question marketing actually needed, in the timeframe they needed it. Nine months after launch, platform utilization sat below 30%. Money invested. Minimal return.

This is not a story about incompetence, or platform failure. This is a story about a missing role.

Traditional organizational structures do not account for the need to bridge these worlds. Data teams report to IT or the Chief Data Officer and optimize for technical excellence. Marketing teams report to the CMO and optimize for campaign performance. But nobody owns the connection between them.

The commercial opportunity being left on the table is enormous. Companies that successfully leverage their customer data are 23 times more likely to acquire customers and six times more likely to retain them.[8] But realizing that opportunity requires someone who can speak both languages fluently.

Without that bridge, technical capability and business need remain strangers. With it, data transforms from cost center to strategic asset.

PART TWO

Enter the Customer Data Strategist

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CHAPTER 3: A NEW ROLE FOR A NEW REALITY

The Customer Data Strategist is not another analyst with a new title. It is a fundamentally different way of thinking about data ownership.

To understand the difference, consider the evolution of data roles over the past two decades. Data Analysts emerged first, focused on answering specific business questions through SQL queries and Excel models. Then came Data Scientists, building predictive models and statistical analyses. Data Engineers followed, creating the infrastructure to move and transform data at scale.

Each role added capability. But none solved the strategic gap.

The Customer Data Strategist operates at a different altitude. While analysts focus on specific questions and scientists build specific models, the strategist asks: What customer data do we need? How should it flow through our organization? Which use cases will generate the most value? How do we measure success?

This role combines three distinct capabilities that rarely exist in a single person.

First, technical literacy. Customer Data Strategists understand data architecture well enough to have meaningful conversations with engineering teams. They can review a data schema and spot gaps in customer identity resolution. They can evaluate whether a proposed technical solution will actually support business requirements. They do not necessarily write production code, but they understand what is possible and what is not.

Second, business acumen. They translate data capabilities into commercial outcomes. When engineering proposes a new real-time integration, the strategist immediately thinks about which marketing use cases that enables and what revenue impact it could generate. They can build business cases that connect technical investments to profit and loss impact.

CHAPTER 3: A NEW ROLE FOR A NEW REALITY (CONTINUED)

Third, organizational bridge-building. Perhaps most critically, they can facilitate conversations between groups that traditionally struggle to communicate. They sit in marketing planning meetings and identify data requirements. They sit in engineering sprints and push for business context. They are translators, facilitators, and connectors.

Without a Customer Data Strategist:
Monday morning. Marketing requests a complete view of high-value customers. Engineering asks for 47 clarifying questions. Marketing does not know how to answer them. The request sits in a backlog for three weeks. When delivered, it is technically correct but commercially useless.

With a Customer Data Strategist:
Monday morning. Marketing says they want to target high-value customers. The strategist asks: High-value how? Purchase frequency? Lifetime revenue? Margin contribution? And what action do you want to take?

Fifteen minutes later, they have defined high-value as customers with $500 or more in spend over the past 90 days and three or more purchases. Engineering starts building that afternoon. Marketing has their segment in two days.

The closest historical parallel is the rise of the Marketing Technologist a decade ago. As marketing became more technical and technology became more central to customer engagement, companies needed people who understood both marketing strategy and technical implementation. These professionals could evaluate technology vendors, manage implementation projects, and help marketers actually use the tools they had bought.

The Marketing Technologist role proved essential. But it focused primarily on systems integration and tool management. The Customer Data Strategist goes deeper, focusing on the data itself and how it flows through those systems to create value.

Three specializations are emerging within this broader role. Transformation Leaders focus on large-scale organizational change, often driving CDP implementations or data warehouse modernizations. Operations Leaders optimize ongoing data workflows, improving quality and reducing latency. Product Specialists embed within specific business units, ensuring data capabilities serve specific product or customer experience needs.

Sainsbury's, the UK grocery chain, recently created a Chief Technology, Marketing and Data Officer position that embodies this evolution.[9] The role explicitly bridges technology infrastructure, marketing activation, and data strategy. It is a recognition that these domains cannot be optimized independently.

The Customer Data Strategist is not a luxury role for mature organizations. It is becoming a survival requirement for any company that depends on customer relationships.

CHAPTER 4: THE THREE-WAY BRIDGE

Think of the Customer Data Strategist as an interpreter at a three-way negotiation. Engineering speaks in schemas and APIs. Marketing speaks in campaigns and conversions. Legal speaks in compliance and consent.

Without an interpreter, each party talks at the others. With one, they talk to each other. The difference is not subtle. It is the difference between a three-hour meeting that produces confusion and a thirty-minute conversation that produces alignment.

The Customer Data Strategist connects three organizational nodes that have historically operated independently.

The first connection point is data engineering.
Here, the strategist needs to understand technical constraints and possibilities. When engineers discuss building a new data pipeline, the strategist asks: What latency does this pipeline offer? Which customer attributes will be available in real-time versus batch? How does this integrate with our identity resolution strategy?

But they translate those technical details into business implications. A pipeline that updates customer profiles every 24 hours enables next-day personalization but not real-time offers. That matters for some use cases and not others. The strategist helps teams make informed tradeoffs rather than defaulting to technical solutions that do not align with business value.

The second connection point is marketing and business teams.
These groups need to articulate what they want to accomplish, not just what data they want to see. A request for better customer segmentation is not actionable. But we need to identify customers likely to churn in the next 30 days so we can run targeted retention campaigns gives the strategist something to work with.

The strategist helps marketing teams think through the data requirements of their strategies. If you want to personalize email content based on browsing behavior, what specific behavioral signals matter? How recent does that data need to be? What happens if some users do not have enough behavioral history?

These questions are not obvious to marketers focused on campaign creativity and message testing. But answering them determines whether technical solutions will actually support marketing objectives.

The third connection point is compliance and governance.
Customer data comes with legal and ethical obligations around privacy, consent, and security. The strategist ensures that business use cases respect these constraints. They work with legal teams to understand requirements, with security teams to implement controls, and with data teams to build compliant architectures.

This three-way bridge means the Customer Data Strategist often has no direct reports but influences multiple teams. They are advisors, facilitators, and translators rather than traditional managers. Their value comes from connection, not command.

Companies structure this role differently based on their organizational model. Some place it within marketing, reporting to the CMO with a dotted line to the CDO. This makes sense when marketing is the primary consumer of customer data. Others place it within the data organization, reporting to the CDO with strong partnership requirements with marketing.
A few create hybrid structures where the strategist has dual reporting relationships.

What matters less than reporting structure is organizational empowerment. The Customer Data Strategist needs access to senior leadership in both technical and business organizations. They need budget influence over data infrastructure investments. They need the authority to shape how teams work together.

Without that empowerment, the role devolves into project management or business analysis. With it, the strategist becomes the connective tissue that transforms data from a cost center into a strategic capability.

PART THREE

The Business Case

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CHAPTER 5: MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

The case for Customer Data Strategists is not theoretical. Multiple organizations have implemented versions of this role and measured the results.

The Transformation Story: Procter & Gamble
Start with Procter & Gamble, one of the world's largest consumer goods companies. P&G recognized that its extensive customer data was underutilized. They created strategic data ownership focused on connecting customer insights to product development and marketing activation.

The results were substantial. Smart product users grew from 5.2 million to 20.5 million. Net sales increased from $67.7 billion to $84 billion. Net earnings jumped from $3.9 billion to $14.9 billion.[10] While not all of this growth came from better data strategy, P&G's leadership explicitly credited improved data capabilities as a major driver.

The Speed Story: Intrepid Travel
Intrepid Travel, the world's largest adventure travel company, manages 25 regions and seven marketing offices across a fast-moving industry. Before strategic data ownership, new site rollouts took 16 months. After implementing Tealium's customer data platform with clear strategic leadership, that timeline dropped to one month. The company achieved a 12x return on investment by using their data with integrity to drive relevant customer interactions across all digital touchpoints.[11]

Speed became their competitive advantage. While competitors spent over a year planning and executing regional expansions, Intrepid moved in weeks.

CHAPTER 5: MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

The Precision Story: Partenamut
Partenamut, one of Belgium's largest health insurers with over a million customers, faced the classic translation crisis. Their data sat siloed across multiple platforms, preventing any unified customer view. Marketing could not determine how to engage effectively. They were guessing.

By establishing strategic data ownership and implementing deeper Tealium integration, they achieved a 16.6% average increase in email click-through rates. More importantly, they built an agile foundation that allows rapid testing and deployment of new marketing approaches.[12] They stopped guessing and started knowing.

The Scale Story: HEINEKEN
HEINEKEN built what they call a data-driven digital ecosystem with clear strategic ownership. They now manage 700,000 active customers across multiple markets, process 180 billion data points, and track €11 billion in gross merchandise value.[13] The strategic data capability enables personalized marketing at scale and real-time inventory optimization.

They turned chaos into orchestration. Billions of data points now flow with purpose rather than accumulating as noise.

These examples share common patterns. Organizations see returns within six to 18 months. Benefits show up as both cost reduction and revenue growth. Technical capabilities improve while business outcomes accelerate.

The timing of returns matters. According to industry research, 48% of organizations see ROI from strategic data investments within six months. That number rises to 79% within 12 months and 91% within 18 months.[14] These are not decade-long transformation projects. They are practical initiatives with measurable near-term value.

The impact shows up across multiple dimensions. Data availability improves dramatically, with some organizations reporting 75% faster access to customer insights.[15] Machine learning model deployment accelerates by up to 90% because data quality and availability no longer create bottlenecks.[16] Operational errors decrease by an average of 44% as data-driven processes replace manual workflows and assumptions.[17]

But the most significant impact is strategic. Organizations with effective Customer Data Strategists can shift from reactive to proactive customer engagement. They can anticipate customer needs, personalize at scale, and optimize resource allocation based on actual customer value rather than proxies and assumptions.

Compare this to organizations without strategic data ownership. They achieve only 60% of their stated goals.[18] They struggle with data silos that prevent holistic customer views. They implement sophisticated tools that sit partially used. They make decisions based on incomplete or outdated information.

The gap between these two states represents the business case for the Customer Data Strategist role. This is not about marginal improvement. This is about fundamentally different organizational capability.

CHAPTER 6: BUILDING THE CAPABILITY

The talent market cannot supply what you need. The Customer Data Strategist role is too new and the talent pool too small. Most organizations will not hire from outside, at least not initially. Instead, they will develop the capability internally by evolving existing roles or combining skills across team members.

This starts with honest assessment. What data capabilities do you have today? Where are the gaps? Who in your organization already bridges technical and business contexts, even informally?

Look for data analysts who regularly translate complex analyses into executive presentations. Identify marketing technologists who have learned to speak with engineers about data architecture. Find product managers who understand both customer needs and technical constraints. These people are your candidates.

The competencies required fall into three categories: technical foundation, business acumen, and bridge skills.

On the technical side, Customer Data Strategists need fluency in SQL and at least one programming language like Python. They should understand cloud platforms, particularly the data services these platforms offer. They need working knowledge of customer data platforms, data warehouses, and identity resolution approaches. They do not need to be engineers, but they need enough technical depth to evaluate technical proposals and spot flaws in proposed architectures.

On the business side, they need strategic planning capabilities and the ability to connect data initiatives to business outcomes. They should be able to build ROI models that account for both costs and benefits of data investments. They need stakeholder management skills to navigate organizational politics and build coalitions around data initiatives. Industry-specific knowledge helps, particularly understanding the customer journey and key business metrics for your sector.

The bridge skills are often the hardest to develop but the most critical. Translation between technical and business language requires practice. Data storytelling that makes complex analyses accessible and actionable takes skill. Change management capability helps drive adoption of new data-driven approaches. Vendor evaluation becomes important as organizations select tools and partners.

Compensation for this role reflects its strategic value. Entry-level positions typically range from $120,000 to $160,000. Mid-level roles with a few years of experience command $160,000 to $200,000. Senior strategic positions, particularly those with enterprise-wide influence, can exceed $200,000.[19]

Development takes time. A data analyst will not become a Customer Data Strategist in three months. But with the right opportunities and support, they can evolve over 12 to 18 months. Give them cross-functional project leadership. Expose them to business strategy discussions. Have them present data insights to senior leadership. Pair them with marketing leaders to understand campaign strategy.

Some organizations create rotational programs where technical team members spend time embedded in business units and vice versa. Others use major data platform implementations as development opportunities, asking emerging strategists to lead workstreams that require both technical and business thinking.

The key is intentional development with clear milestones. You are not just adding a new job title. You are building organizational capability that bridges historically separate domains.

PART FOUR

The Strategic Framework

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CHAPTER 7: ASSESSMENT AND ROADMAP

Before implementing the Customer Data Strategist role, organizations need to understand their current state.

Assessment begins with data maturity. How unified is your customer data today? Can you track a customer across channels and touchpoints? Do different systems maintain conflicting customer records? How long does it take to make customer data available for new use cases?

Then examine organizational capability. Do your data teams understand business priorities? Do your marketing teams know what is technically possible? Who makes decisions about data architecture investments? How do you prioritize competing data initiatives?

Finally, consider governance and compliance. Do you have clear policies around data privacy and security? Can you demonstrate compliance with regulations like GDPR or CCPA? Do you track consent and honor customer preferences across systems?

These questions reveal where you stand and what needs to change.

Implementation follows a phased approach. The first 90 days focus on assessment and quick wins. In your first 90 days, you should audit your data sources and identify the most critical gaps. Map existing talent and potential internal candidates for the strategist role. Define what success looks like with specific metrics. Launch a pilot project that can demonstrate value quickly.

The six-month horizon is about establishing foundations. Implement or consolidate your customer data platform. Create a data governance framework with clear ownership. Demonstrate measurable ROI from early initiatives. Build working relationships across functional boundaries.

By 18 months, transformation should be visible. Your customer data strategy should be fully implemented with clear business impact. You should have achieved measurable improvements in key performance indicators.

Personalization and automation capabilities should be significantly enhanced. And you should have built competitive advantage through superior customer data management.

This timeline is not arbitrary. It reflects the reality that organizational change takes time while creating pressure to show results relatively quickly. The quick wins in the first 90 days build credibility for longer-term transformation.

Organizational models vary. Some companies create a centralized customer data team with the strategist as a key leader. Others use a federated model where strategists embed within business units but coordinate across a center of excellence. Hybrid approaches combine central strategy with distributed execution.

What matters is clear ownership and empowerment. The Customer Data Strategist needs authority to influence technical and business decisions. They need budget control or significant influence over data infrastructure investments. They need access to senior leadership across both technical and commercial organizations.

Without that positioning, the role becomes consultative rather than strategic. The strategist can recommend and advise but not actually drive change. That is sometimes a starting point, but it is not the end state that generates business value.

PART FIVE

The Competitive Imperative

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CHAPTER 8: WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

The window for competitive advantage through customer data is narrowing.

The Customer Data Platform market is growing from $2.65 billion in 2024 to a projected $12.96 billion by 2032.[20] This growth reflects enterprise recognition that customer data management is a strategic priority. But it also means that the tools and infrastructure are becoming commoditized. Every organization will have access to similar technical capabilities.

Competitive differentiation will not come from having a CDP. It will come from having strategic ownership that extracts maximum value from that platform.

Consider the emerging role of AI in customer engagement. Large language models and predictive analytics can personalize customer interactions at unprecedented scale. But these AI capabilities are only as good as the data that feeds them. Organizations with clean, well-governed, strategically managed customer data will see their AI investments pay off. Those with fragmented, low-quality data will get marginal results from the same AI technology.

The Customer Data Strategist becomes even more critical in an AI-enabled future. Someone needs to define what customer attributes matter for AI models. Someone needs to ensure training data quality and monitor model performance. Someone needs to translate AI capabilities into specific business applications.

Job market trends reflect this shift. Data science roles are projected to grow 34% by 2032, faster than most other professions.[21] But demand is shifting from pure technical skills toward hybrid capabilities that combine technical depth with business strategy. The fastest-growing data roles are those that bridge domains.

Meanwhile, organizations face increasing data complexity. The volume of data continues to grow exponentially, reaching projected 181 zettabytes by 2025.[22] Customer touchpoints multiply as new channels and technologies emerge. Privacy regulations evolve, requiring ongoing adaptation. Identity resolution becomes more challenging as traditional cookies and device identifiers become less reliable.

Navigating this complexity without strategic ownership is increasingly untenable. Technical teams cannot make business tradeoffs without business context. Business teams cannot specify requirements without understanding technical constraints. The gap between them becomes a strategic liability.

Companies that establish Customer Data Strategist capabilities now are building advantages that compound over time. They make better technology investments because someone can evaluate options through both technical and business lenses. They execute faster because teams communicate more effectively. They innovate more successfully because data enables experimentation at scale.

Those that wait risk falling further behind. As early movers establish data-driven competitive advantages, catching up becomes progressively harder. The data flywheel accelerates. Better data enables better customer experiences. Better experiences generate more data. The gap widens.

In 2027, your competitor launches AI-powered personalization that feels uncanny in its relevance. You launch yours six months later. It is mediocre. The gap is not technology. You use the same AI models. The gap is data quality, governance, and strategic orchestration. The gap is the role you did not create in 2024.

This is not fear-mongering. This is pattern recognition based on previous technology transitions. Organizations that moved early on digital transformation, mobile-first strategies, and cloud infrastructure built advantages that persist today. Customer data strategy is following the same trajectory.

The question is not whether your organization needs a Customer Data Strategist. The question is whether you will establish this capability before your competitors do.

Conclusion: Your Next Steps

The case for Customer Data Strategists rests on three foundations: the massive cost of poor data strategy, the proven value of strategic data ownership, and the widening gap between leaders and laggards in data capability.

Your organization has already invested in customer data collection. You have systems, tools, and technical capabilities. What you may lack is the strategic bridge that connects these capabilities to business value.

Three immediate actions can move you forward.

01 **First,** assess your current state honestly. Do you have someone who owns customer data strategy end-to-end? Can your technical and business teams communicate effectively about data? Are you achieving measurable business value from your data investments? If the answers reveal gaps, you have confirmed the need.

02 **Second,** identify potential candidates within your organization. Who already bridges technical and business contexts? Who translates between teams? Who connects technical possibilities to commercial opportunities? These people are your talent pool for developing Customer Data Strategist capabilities.

03 **Third,** launch a pilot initiative that requires strategic data ownership. Pick a high-value use case, perhaps real-time personalization or predictive customer analytics. Staff it with someone who can play the strategist role, even if informally. Measure results and use that pilot to build the case for formalizing the position.

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The transformation from cost center to strategic asset does not happen through better tools or more data. It happens through better ownership. The Customer Data Strategist provides that ownership.

Your data can become your most valuable asset. It just needs someone to make that transformation happen.

APENDIX

Practical Tools

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Readiness Assessment
Organizational Readiness Questions:

✓	1. Can you track a customer across all touchpoints and channels?
✓	2. Do your data teams understand business priorities and use cases?
✓	3. Do your marketing teams know what is technically possible with your data?
✓	4. Can you measure ROI from data infrastructure investments?
✓	5. Do you have clear data governance policies and enforcement?
✓	6. Can you activate customer data in real-time for personalization?
✓	7. Are compliance requirements integrated into data workflows?
✓	8. Do teams communicate effectively about data requirements?
✓	9. Is there clear ownership of customer data strategy?
✓	10. Can you launch new data-driven initiatives in weeks, not months?

Interpretation:

- 8-10 Yes: You have strong foundations; focus on optimization
- 5-7 Yes: You have gaps; Customer Data Strategist could drive improvement
- 0-4 Yes: Significant opportunity; prioritize strategic data leadership

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About Tealium

Tealium helps companies collect, govern, and enrich their customer data in real-time to power AI initiatives and delight customers in the moments that matter. Tealium's turnkey integration ecosystem supports more than 1,300 built-in connections from the world's most prominent technology experts. Tealium's solutions include a real-time customer data platform (CDP) with intelligent AI data streaming, tag management, and an API hub. Tealium's data collection, management, and activation capabilities enable enterprises to accelerate operating performance, enhance customer experiences, drive better outcomes, and support global data compliance. More than 850 leading businesses globally trust Tealium to power their customer data strategies.

For more information, visit

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