

STAFFING **SUCCESS**



American Staffing Association

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From Numbers to Profit:

How ASA Data Can Supercharge Business Growth

ASA is the staffing industry's leading source for economic data, survey reports, research, and analysis, giving firms valuable market and competitive insight, and clients and industry watchers an informed perspective on the industry. Here's a glimpse into how all this is unleashing data-driven growth and success stories for members. >>>

By Adam Stone



Early this spring, Atwork Group president and chief operating officer Jason Leverant, TSC, CSP, CSC, CHP, needed to make a decision about an upcoming marketing spend. He turned to industry data to help guide his thinking.

“We quite literally tie some of our operational expenditures and budget expenditures to those trade winds in the industry,” he says. Hard data “helps us make those early-stage decisions, because we’re not immune to the economy and everything else that’s going on.”

The data he consulted came from the ASA Staffing Index—one of several research and analysis products the association makes available to its members. These tools have proven pivotal in driving growth and success of staffing firms large and small.

“Without understanding what the rest of the industry is doing, you don’t have any context for your decisions,” Hulley says. ASA data creates that context, “and we’re thrilled to be able to bring these types of resources to our members, to support them in their planning and decision-making.”

REAL-TIME INSIGHTS, FUTURE FORECASTS

ASA data, analysis, and research covers a wide range of business interests, from multiple perspectives. (See the sidebar for a complete rundown of ASA research and data offerings.)

Published weekly, the ASA Staffing Index gives executives real-time insights into the state of the industry. It shows them where they stand in relation to their peers, which in turn can help to guide key decisions.



HARD NUMBERS, STRATEGIC DECISIONS

Across the economic landscape, there’s growing recognition of the importance of hard numbers. “Data plays a vital role in every industry. By making good use of the data they possess, organizations across all industries can gain an edge,” according to the International Institute of Business Analysis, which notes that metrics “should be the starting point for any company that wants to create better business outcomes.”

This focus on business improvement is a driving force behind ASA research offerings, says the association’s assistant director of research, Tim Hulley.

“Especially the last few years, our members have faced a different kind of business environment—a more challenging environment,” he says. “Our goal is to give them the resources they need to be able to make good decisions.”

ASA data covers a wide range of business concerns—from compensation to operations to big-picture economic trends. That kind of knowledge is critical for those looking to position their staffing firms for future success.

“The Staffing Index covers employment for a given week,” Hulley says. “The value there is that it is real time, or pretty close to real time. It’s a way of getting a pulse check on the industry—a temperature check on the trends.”

Staffing firms can use that data to do near-term planning, “and it’s an opportunity for some benchmarking, a chance to say ‘My company is observing this.’ Is that consistent with what the industry is seeing, or is there something else going on? What kind of opportunity is out there, and do I need to shore things up and really optimize?” Hulley says.

For a longer-term view, ASA also produces a quarterly Staffing Employment and Sales Survey. This research includes benchmarks on temporary and contract staffing employment levels, as well as things like sales, payroll, and gross margin.

The data also is broken down by company size and by industry sector, enabling members to easily incorporate the quarterly findings into their own forecasting and modeling.

“This is another data point to have at the ready when you’re looking at how you did in the last

quarter,” Hulley says. Senior executives contribute to the findings, along with back-office leaders in areas like operations and financial analysis—“the people who are really going to find this data fascinating and helpful for their business.”

The ASA Data Dashboard offers a roundup of key indicators—an at-a-glance look at metrics that define the state of staffing at the moment.

“For someone who just wants a quick look at how the industry’s doing, it draws from our other research, as well as from the Bureau of Labor Statistics,” Hulley says. “It also looks at gross domestic product (GDP), because that’s something that is closely related to our industry. Looking at the overall health of the economy is meaningful for our members.”

There’s also the ASA Workforce Monitor®—an ongoing series that looks at trending topics in the industry, conducted by The Harris Poll. It offers members another view of key metrics, including deeper dives into specific topic areas. In addition, ASA provides infographics, summary reports, and webinars to help bring its research findings to life.

DATA MODELS, REAL RESULTS

For staffing firms, ASA research products generate tangible business benefits. Here’s a look at how three staffing executives are leveraging the data in support of improved outcomes.

1. Graph Out Company Growth. At LaSalle Network, president and chief executive officer Tom Gimbel relies heavily on the ASA Staffing Index.

“It shows me what the market’s doing, it shows me the trends, and I have found it to be really accurate,” he says. “I use it to map my company’s revenue to others year-over-year and week-by-week, and it allows me to communicate with my staff and leadership on how we’re pacing against the industry.”

To make the data even more actionable, Gimbel’s finance team has created a dashboard charting the firm’s weekly revenue and growth trajectory against the index.

“Were we better than the index by one time or two times, or were we below it? With a dashboard that shows how we compare historically, we can graph out our growth and success,” he says. “It’s been really helpful. Sometimes you think you’re doing better than you are, but if in fact you’re not where the industry is, you may need to make changes.”

When the numbers don’t line up, “you have to look back at what your business has done, and then you set up a budget and a model for what you



Which Data-Driven Resources Can Bolster Your Business Growth?

ASA offers members access to a wide range of data-driven resources, including the following association mainstays that feature timely research and analytics.

STAFFING INDEX tracks weekly changes in temporary and contract employment.

STAFFING EMPLOYMENT AND SALES SURVEY

is conducted on a quarterly basis and collects information on temporary and contract staffing sales, payroll, employment, and gross margin, as well as select search and placement benchmarks.

DATA DASHBOARD lets you see the staffing industry’s past, present, and future all in one place.

WORKFORCE MONITOR is an online survey conducted on behalf of ASA by The Harris Poll among U.S. adults, focusing on current workforce trends and issues.

STAFFING COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

benchmarks provide the only comprehensive view of corporate employee salaries and benefits in the staffing and recruiting industry.

CANDIDATE SENTIMENT STUDY provides insights on potential staffing employee perceptions and experiences.

STAFFING OPERATIONS benchmarks provide essential insights for providers of temporary and contract staffing, as well as direct hire search and placement services.

STAFFING INDUSTRY PLAYBOOK is an award-winning annual economic analysis of the staffing and recruiting industry that provides data-driven information and insights critical to strategic planning and business development.

RESEARCH WEBINARS offer practical insights into new data and other topics of vital interest to staffing leaders.

project the business to be. Both are important,” Gimbel says. “You have to know where you’ve come from, and you have to know where you’re going.”

ASA data enables him to get that big-picture view. And getting that data weekly aligns perfectly with the prevailing business model.

“In the staffing industry, the majority of companies bill out on a weekly basis. Because of that, you can see trends a lot faster than you can if your company billed out on a monthly basis,” he says. Weekly updates allow him to look at fill rates, order volume, revenues, and other telling factors, and to know whether he’s on track.

Gimbel also closely follows the ASA Workforce Monitor in order to take employee sentiment into account as he makes significant business decisions.

“I was looking at the recent survey and it showed that 33% of Black Americans reported feeling the need to shave facial hair, and 19% of Hispanic Americans felt they needed to cover their tattoos,” he says. “The survey finds out about different sectors of the population that you might not normally think about or understand, and it can help you raise your emotional intelligence both on the candidate side and the client side.”

That can be especially helpful for staffing firms that lack the resources to surface such data on their own. “Not every company has either the tools or the bandwidth or the labor force to be able to do the surveys themselves,” Gimbel says. “So it’s crucial to rely on your association for this.”

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—Tom Gimbel, president and chief executive officer,
LaSalle Network

At LaSalle, data is a team effort. Gimbel looks at the numbers, and so does the head of marketing, the head of HR, and the chief operating officer. Beyond that close circle, “my employees also all have access to the website,” he says. “Everybody

can access it and use it. ASA has been around forever, and they do this work for us. Why would we not utilize it?”

2. Get everyone on board with data. Beyond being just a staffing firm, Atwork Group also is a franchisor. In that role, “data is absolutely critical for us to help educate the uneducated—those who are not familiar with our space,” Leverant says.

In that context, he’s a big fan of the ASA Staffing Industry Playbook, an annual economic analysis of the staffing and recruiting industry that provides data-driven information and insights critical to strategic planning and business development. “The Staffing Industry Playbook is a phenomenal way to do that at a base level,” he says. “It’s mainly the size of the industry that blows people away; that type of data really helps us move the needle.”

Looking beyond the franchisees, Leverant relies on data to guide the decision-making process in his staffing operations. He contributes regularly to the Staffing Index and leans heavily on that resource to help drive success.

The Staffing Index “is a key metric that we look at to compare ourselves as a business. How do we compare against those we consider the winners in the industry?” he says.

ASA’s hard data gives him a factual basis for making tactical choices. “We try to cut through the noise and not listen to the media headlines; they get a little too slanted, a little too biased,” he says. “Using the index, it’s real raw data...not hype, not what some reporter thinks we should be doing.”

He points to a recent instance in which the Staffing Index helped him to determine the pace of certain strategic investments. “We had some software-development activities going on, and we pulled back on that based on the Staffing Index alone—that was our primary metric,” he says.

To get the most value out of the data, Leverant also shares it widely across his organization.

“Our operations lead distributes the results every week, with some commentary around how we performed versus the rest of the industry,” he says. “It doesn’t have to reside exclusively at the ‘c’ level or at top-line leadership. You need to make sure this data is accessible to your team. Down to the branch manager level, they should have access and understand what the data is showing them. It helps to mitigate fear; it takes away some of the uncertainty.”

3. Stay ahead of talent trends. As a consultant to the engineering and sciences industries,

Actalent provides not just advice but also labor, including contract talent as well as managed talent. Market research analyst Eliza Hetrick looks to ASA resources to help guide the talent-solutions side of the enterprise.

“They give me information that I haven’t been able to find anywhere else, that is specific to the staffing world,” she says.

In addition to reading the daily ASA newsletter *Staffing Today*, Hetrick follows the Staffing Index, reads the analyses, and attends webinars that delve into the data. “It helps me to stay in the loop with what other professionals in the talent-solutions staffing world are seeing and experiencing,” she says. “It’s good to keep an eye on any trends [around] temporary workers in the overall economy.”

By understanding that intersection of temporary labor and general economic trends, she’s able to help shape strategy for Actalent, by answering key questions for company leadership.

“We’ve had a couple projects internally where we’re asking things like ‘What are the top reasons workers choose contract employment?’ That is a question that ASA fact sheets answer, and that’s been a huge help,” she says.


It especially helps with recruiting. “If a candidate hasn’t worked on a contract basis or worked with a staffing firm before—if they are unfamiliar with the industry, unfamiliar with what it means to work on a contract—it may not sound as secure to them as full-time employment does,” Hetrick says. Data helps paint the picture.

“Here’s the percentage of people in the temporary workforce, specific to engineering and sciences. Here’s the average duration that we tend to see, and here are some reasons why people choose contract employment,” she says. That hard data “helps put the candidate’s mind at ease and helps them understand why they could or should consider a contract opportunity.”

In terms of the bigger picture—helping to drive overall business growth—Hetrick does her own research on the state of the engineering and sciences industries, and she turns to ASA data to support that effort. She’ll look at data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, but those numbers “only tell you so much of the story,” she says. ASA data helps “to fill in those gaps, to provide the context and connect the dots.”

If she sees an uptick or a downturn in health care hiring, for example, ASA will help her to make sense of the trend. “Maybe I’ve been reading through ASA resources that show burnout and

staffing shortages are a really difficult challenge within the health care industry,” she says. “That helps me fill in those gaps and figure out why employment could be going up or down—the reasons and the current events in those specific industries. That’s a huge thing for me.”



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—Tim Hulley, assistant director of research, ASA

MORE DATA, LESS STRESS

They say that knowledge is power. Nowhere is this truer than in the fast-paced and rapidly changing staffing environment. Yet some still shy away from numbers and hard metrics.

For those leery of diving deep into quantitative data, Hulley feels your pain. He was a political-science major who came to data later in his career, and he’s here with his team to help ASA members make the most of the available resources.

“You can always give us a call,” he says. “If you’re curious about data that’s out there, we can support you in that. We also have webinars where we’ll bring on a guest who is very comfortable with the numbers, who can explain what they mean and what to look for. We hear stories from people about how they are using the data and why it is meaningful for their business.”

In other words, Hulley says, ASA doesn’t just churn out the data and leave you to fend for yourself. “Part of our role is to make these things accessible, to explain why you should be tracking these things and the bottom-line benefit to your company.” ■

Adam Stone, a freelance writer based in Annapolis, MD, is a regular contributor to *Staffing Success*. Send feedback on this article to success@americanstaffing.net. Engage with ASA on social media—go to americanstaffing.net/social.