

How Marks & Spencer Built a Vibrant Data Culture with DataCamp

Marks & Spencer partnered with DataCamp for Business to support their digital transformation and grow internal data talent. Discover how Marks & Spencer blended online learning and a community-driven approach to build a vibrant data culture and achieved 800% upskilling program growth in one year.

Inside Marks and Spencers' Ambitions to Become a Digital-First Retailer

In 2018, Marks and Spencer (M&S), a major British multinational retailer, launched an initiative to become a 'digital first' retailer enabled by data. The strategy for the data team comprises three focuses: core data technology, extracting value from data, and enabling the workforce with modern data and AI skills.

To implement its data and AI upskilling agenda, M&S introduced the BEAM Academy, an internal data academy created to help upskill M&S employees across digital, data, and technology. The goal of the BEAM Academy is to raise home-grown data practitioners, retain existing data talent, and allow anyone to feel confident when working with data.



There is a massive focus on growing internal data & AI talent.

HOLLIE MCINTOSH, BEAM ACADEMY PROJECT MANAGER AT M&S

Looking to make learning data science more accessible and engaging, M&S sought an online platform to provide self-paced, hands-on, and bite-sized learning. The solution should ensure aspiring data scientists possess business-critical Python, SQL, Power BI, and data literacy skills and that working data practitioners feel supported through professional development opportunities.

In 2022, M&S partnered with DataCamp for Business to provide a tailored data upskilling program and build a vibrant data culture where everyone feels empowered to use data.



At BEAM Academy, we try to make professional development fun and exciting. We wanted to enable our colleagues with bite-sized learning opportunities to become more confident when handling data. We wanted to provide self-led training but, at the same time, had to ensure the quality of learning outcomes. This was when DataCamp came in.

HOLLIE MCINTOSH, BEAM ACADEMY PROJECT MANAGER AT M&S

Building Key Data & AI Skills with DataCamp


To cater to learners with different needs and increase adoption of existing data tooling, BEAM Academy rolled five tailored learning paths using DataCamp for Business. Those included:

1. **M&S: Analytics Foundation track**, designed to build foundational data literacy and fluency and featuring courses on Excel, Spreadsheets, data-driven decision making, and basic SQL skills.
2. **M&S: Analyst (Core) track**, focused on building foundational statistics and SQL Server skills by completing courses such as Cleaning Data in SQL Server Databases, Introduction to Statistics, Time Series Analysis in SQL Server, and more.
3. **M&S Analyst (Advanced) track**, designed for those who want to leverage Python for more complex analytics tasks.
4. **M&S: BI Analyst (Core) track**, focusing on teaching the fundamentals of Power BI and comprising courses and practical case studies in Power BI.
5. **M&S: BI Analyst (Advanced) track**, designed to upskill on advanced Power BI and SQL Server skills.



I have developed my skills and understanding of AI, large language models and machine learning. I will be looking to understand where these new technologies may pose challenges, operational inefficiencies or expose M&S to new and previously unmitigated risk.

MITCH STEPHENSON, INTERNAL AUDITOR, M&S



To provide learning at scale, M&S enabled LMS integration alongside SSO login. This helped seamlessly onboard 450+ learners to the platform and made it easy for them to start learning.



I can see how we could lay out the store better to improve purchases and product association, which DataCamp explained to me through correlation and association techniques.

ALICE DAVIS, CUSTOMER ASSISTANT, M&S

Spotlight: Building a data culture with competitions & events

M&S didn't stop there—to raise awareness and drive engagement around data upskilling, the BEAM Academy introduced a series of initiatives to drive a learning culture. This included internal data competitions & expert-led events on the growing significance of data & AI.

M&S partnered with DataCamp's Customer Success team to design friendly upskilling competitions. By leveraging the leaderboard functionality, they introduced a series of themed competitions with the objective for participants to accumulate the highest number of experience points (XPs) by engaging in any learning modules on DataCamp within specific time frames. Below is an overview of the key competitions:

- **The M&S World Cup Competition:** M&S formed 20 teams into DataCamp teams, creating a team-based format. Throughout the competition, these teams were evaluated based on their performance against each other. Winners, both teams and individuals, were awarded M&S vouchers, and celebrations were themed around iconic football players.



“The competition helped me build a regular routine in my learning and allowed me to challenge myself to try new things that I didn't think I had the time to really commit to. It's been a fun way to stretch myself and give me confidence that it is possible!”

CARA HOOFE, BUSINESS ADOPTION SPECIALIST AT MARKS & SPENCER



- **The M&S Wimbledon Competition:** Designed as an individual-based challenge, learners aimed to surpass a significant XP benchmark to qualify for the “Center court.” Center court participants could donate from a pool of £1000 to any chosen Sparks charity. Additionally, top achievers were presented with a custom Nike tennis kit, courtesy of DataCamp's collaboration with Nike. Those who couldn't secure a spot in the “Center court” received enticing DataCamp merchandise.



“I’ve already been learning on Datacamp before the competition, and it has helped me improve my SQL code execution time—the competition motivated me to learn even more!”

OLASOJI AMUJO, COMMERCIAL ANALYST AT MARKS & SPENCER

On top of competitions, the M&S BEAM Academy regularly holds events & meetups aimed at promoting data & AI upskilling. M&S also hosted its AI Week expo, an internal conference accessible to various M&S teams, featuring both internal and external expert-led sessions from data & AI thought leaders.



We run digital meet-ups where we bring in external speakers from other companies working within the data space and address hot topics. A lot is happening around AI, and we were happy to have the DataCamp team joining AI Week in September

HOLLIE MCINTOSH, BEAM ACADEMY PROJECT MANAGER AT M&S



It was exciting to see more people across the business anticipating competitions and wanting to get involved. One month before the Wimbledon competition, we got 100 more people requesting a license

HOLLIE MCINTOSH, BEAM ACADEMY PROJECT MANAGER AT M&S



Key Results

M&S sees a lot of value in growing in-house data & AI talent as existing employees combine their new-found data & AI skills with their existing domain knowledge. During the first year of partnership with DataCamp, more than **450+ learners have completed learning tracks on DataCamp.**

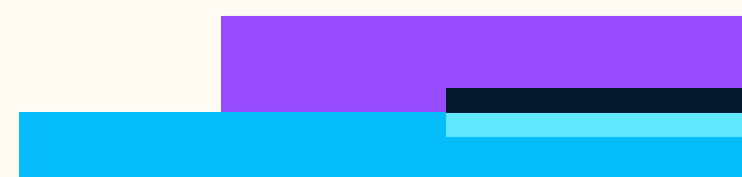


DataCamp is now a massive part of what the BEAM Academy offers for data practitioners and those who aspire to be data literate

HOLLIE MCINTOSH, BEAM ACADEMY PROJECT MANAGER AT M&S

By running competitions, live events, and supporting their learner communities, M&S achieved a massive **800% program growth in one year.**

BEAM Academy never stops; together with the DataCamp's Customer Success team, they are planning new initiatives and learning tracks to further drive a data and learning culture within Marks & Spencer.





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