From Data to Decisions:

Choosing Metrics That Actually Help

Service area: Data, Dashboards & Decision Support

We help you focus on the numbers that guide smarter choices.



The owner of a growing retail business had plenty of data: sales reports from the point-of-sale system, a bookkeeping dashboard, social media analytics, and a spreadsheet of customer complaints. Yet every Monday she still asked the same question: 'How are we actually doing?'

Having data is not the same as having information you can act on. The goal of metrics is not more reports it is better decisions.

Illustrative example: the scenario described is fictional.

Key takeaway: Useful metrics turn data into better decisions, not simply more reports.

Start with the decisions, not the data

Before choosing a single metric, list the decisions you make regularly.

- When do you hire?
- When do you reorder inventory?
- When do you follow up with a client?
- When should you change a process?



Good measures are the ones that help you make those calls with more confidence.

Key takeaway: Choose measures because they improve recurring decisions.

Choose a small set of KPIs

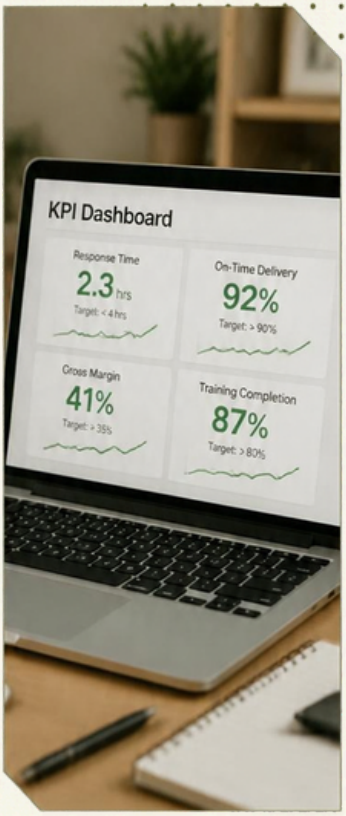
Most small businesses are well served by five to eight key performance indicators across a few areas, such as:

Customers: response time, satisfaction, repeat business

Operations: turnaround time, error or rework rate, on-time delivery

Financial: revenue per client, gross margin, collection time

Team: workload balance, training completion, turnover



Key takeaway: A focused set of five to eight KPIs is more useful than a crowded dashboard.

Give every KPI the information it needs

Each KPI needs four things to be useful: a baseline (where you are today), a target, a current value, and a unit of measure.

	Baseline
	Target
	Current value
	Unit of measure



Without a baseline, you cannot tell whether a number is good news.

Key takeaway: A KPI needs conteer before it can guide a decision.

Organize the data you already have

Messy data is the most common barrier to reporting. Before building dashboards, agree on where each number comes from, who updates it, and how often.

- Where does each number come from?
- Who updates it?
- How often?

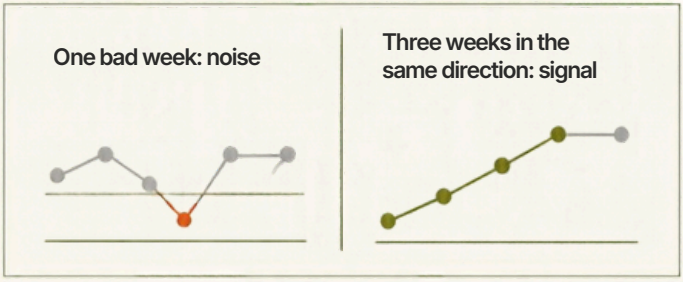


A single tracking sheet with clear definitions often does more than a sophisticated tool fed with inconsistent inputs.

Key takeaway: Clear definitions and ownership make existing data more useful.

Look for trends, not single points

One bad week is noise. Three weeks heading the same direction is a signal.



Review with rhythm

Review measures on a consistent rhythm—weekly for operational numbers, monthly for financial and team measures—and compare them to the prior period and to the target.



Key takeaway: Consistent review reveals direction that a single data point can hide.

Turn insights into actions

Every review should end with a question: so what?

If turnaround time is rising, what will you change, who owns it, and when will you check again?

Action pathway

What changed? → What will we change? → Who owns it? → When will we check again?



Metrics that never lead to action quietly become busywork.

Key takeaway:
Every metric review should end with an action, an owner, and a follow-up date.

Quick exercise

Write down the three decisions you make most often.

For each, identify one number that would help you make it better.

Note whether you can find that number today, and how long it takes. That list is the start of a useful dashboard.

Decision	Helpful number	Can you find it today?	Time required
1			
2			
3			



Key takeaway: Start your dashboard with the decisions and numbers you use most often.

Next step

Choose three KPIs, record a baseline and target for each, and review them at the same time every week for a month.

KPI 1	Baseline Target Weekly review
KPI 2	Baseline Target Weekly review
KPI 3	Baseline Target Weekly review



If you would like a second set of eyes on this work, contact AuofOnyx to talk through where your business is today and what would help most.

Key takeaway: A small, consistent KPI habit can turn scattered data into better decisions.

Source:ASQ. "DMAIC Process: Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control."
Read ASQ's DMAIC guidance: https://asq.org/quality-resources/dmaic