upshot
BY INFLUITIVE

Javier Leon

Adjunct Professor and Marketing Manager at Saint Joseph's University and Amazon Produce

Empowering Through BI in the Classroom and at Work

QLIK

MARCH 30, 2020

I like to keep busy. By day, I work on special projects at Amazon Produce, a major importer and distributor of fruit, based in the United States. By night, I teach as an adjunct professor at schools like Drexel, Villanova, and Saint Joseph's University. To

engage students in the classroom after a full day at work requires passion, and that's what drives me: a passion for empowering people. My vehicle to do that? Business intelligence.

Companies everywhere are looking to become data driven. According to a study conducted by IBM, we'll see 2.72 million jobs requiring data skills by this year. These companies have seen the power of unlocking their business through better decision-making. As a result, the field is booming. Having a background in data science can land you that job or help you get that promotion.

But it's not enough to simply understand the theory. As educators, we must combine knowledge with the right tools to make sure our students—and our organizations—thrive with data.

Educating the Leaders of Tomorrow

My teaching began in 2017, where I started teaching introductory classes in business intelligence at Saint Joseph's University. After these introductory classes, I was given the chance to teach Critical Performance Management—a class largely devoted to data visualization. This class dives into business intelligence tools that students will see in the real world, like Qlik.

With hands-on experience, students learn how to create different applications. When students leave school, they can show employers that they have experience with one of the most coveted tools in BI.

The class dives deep into the platform. We have two goals here. The first is to show the students the ins and outs of Qlik. The second goal is to have students build up a portfolio of data visualizations.

Some of our students participate in #MakeoverMonday, where they analyze a visualization they find in a magazine or online, and then try to make it better. They collaborate with each other to get feedback on the changes they made. This helps foster the collaborative environment they'll find in the real world.

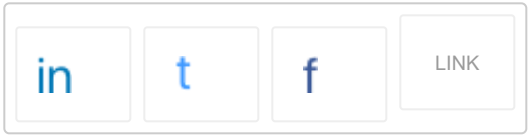
Through #MakeoverMonday and the regular cadence of classwork, students may come out of the class having built up a portfolio of 30 different visualizations. Some employers that are reviewing their resumes might not have even built a graph in the past year. So to see a student with such rich experience can make the difference when it comes to hiring.

Even though all of this is valuable, I don't just want my students to learn only the technical side. These students will be the leaders of the future, so we need to look at data holistically. We help students understand how to get buy-in for a project, and how to fail fast and cheap to decrease risk to their future organizations.

A Helping Hand for Academics

We use Qlik in the classroom thanks to Qlik's Academic Program. The program provides free data analytics software and resources to educators and students around the world. With education budgets being tight, the financial side shouldn't be what holds us back from teaching the BI leaders of tomorrow.

The good news is that students love using Qlik. Something I hear all the time is about its ease of use. The interface essentially takes complete beginners through the process and tells users the number of metrics, values, and dimensions they need to add.



Another powerful feature that students love is Qlik's data modeling. It gives you a visual representation of your data model, where you can link different tables, and by linking those tables you see the relationships between them. Sometimes, you might think that two data sets are very far removed from one another, but when you look at them with a data model, you can see that they are in fact connected and you can build a visualization of that relationship.

While business intelligence is my passion when it comes to education, it doesn't stop there. BI is also an integral part of my 9–5.

BI Inside the Office

The company I work for, Amazon Produce, is the largest importer of mangoes to the United States. Working with mango growers in Brazil is where this company got its start, but we've moved on to other produce as well. Our mission is to be the most efficient distribution channel in the United States for customers and growers alike.

It's about sending the right fruit to the right customers at all times, which might sound simple, but we're juggling over 50 growers across countries and cultures in Latin America. And then our customers, which are some of the major US retailers, each have their own standards and expectations for produce. There are a lot of complexities to our supply chain.

> Amazon Produce wanted to be more proactive, but there were so many variables to consider. Working with Excel spreadsheets, these dimensions didn't just jump out.

One day, we realized we needed to be more proactive in telling a story about everything that happened along that supply chain. We're ultimately accountable to our customers and growers, so we wanted to be better at telling the growers, for instance, why we had a certain result with their produce. If the produce arrived to the customer in less-than-great condition and didn't sell as well as it usually did, we wanted to help the grower understand what happened, when it happened, and where it happened. If we can tell that story, the grower can fix potential problems, and will see better returns as a result.

But there was a catch: When you're dealing with a product that isn't manufactured —but instead is grown and harvested hundreds of miles away from the point of sale —there are so many variables and potential linked data points to keep track of. Working with Excel spreadsheets, these dimensions didn't jump out at us.

A New Project, with a Focus on Performance

It was my boss who came to me with a solution. Someone recommended Qlik to him. "Have you heard of it?" he asked. In fact, I had. When I told my boss what a powerful solution Qlik is, we started on a project right away. The idea was that everyone at Amazon Produce who is in sales and grower relations would have full access to data visualizations in Qlik.

The purpose of the project was to track the performance of all kinds throughout the supply chain: performance of the product, the customer, the employee's own performance within the Amazon Produce organization. In particular, we wanted a better understanding of the regions where our growers make their product.

I started by conducting interviews with the heads of sales and grower relations. From there, I had a rough idea of the parameters of the project. That's when I held brainstorming sessions with the teams involved, to get a sense of what our end users would need immediately, versus v visualizations they

needed, as well as the visualizations they hadn't mentioned, but that I anticipated they would look for once they realized Qlik's potential. The process until rollout was about nine months.

Empowering My Colleagues to Own the Supply Chain

We've just launched this initial project, and I'm excited to see how much more productive we will be because people are feeling empowered through these visualizations.

My long-term goal for this project is to integrate Qlik with other major databases within Amazon Produce as well as from government agencies in the U.S. and Latin America. Just imagine what we could do if we linked census data, with weather data, with data from the Mexican mango exporter association, for example. I want to find those relationships that may exist between the different variables we look at every day.

I have to give a shout-out to my boss at Amazon Produce, because he's always understood my need to share this passion with others. He understands that I'm busy, but whether it's through teaching or my projects at Amazon Produce, it's all in the service of empowering others to get the most out of their data.

Our progress with analytics reconfirms my belief in teaching. If our staff already had experience in business intelligence, we could skip the education part and get right into innovating with data. It's exciting to know that my students will be able to join companies and dive right into making an impact.

Whether it's in the classroom or at the office, I get joy from seeing people transform into proactive, data-centric thinkers. These are the people who will change their organizations. Knowing I had even a small part of that shift is what keeps me going as an instructor and during the in

Javier Leon
Adjunct Professor and Marketing Manager at Saint Joseph's University and Amazon Produce

More Stories from Qlik see all

QLIK

Finding the Recipe for a Data-Driven Company

Stephanie Robinson

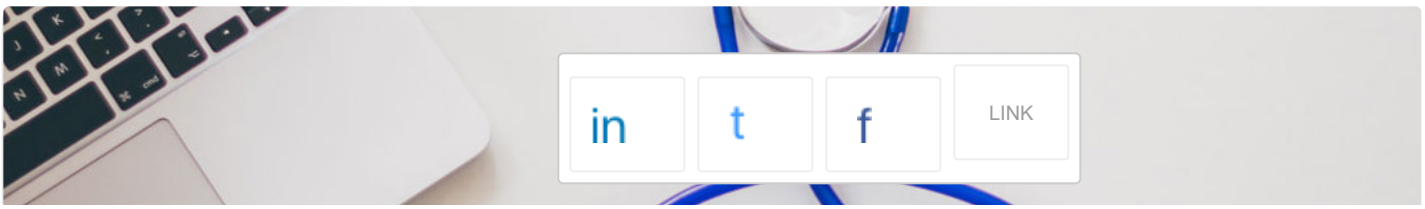
Qlik Manager IT BI Team at JBS USA

QLIK

Our Journey to Building a Data-Driven Culture at Radiall

Henri Rufin

Data & Analytics Manager at Radiall



QLIK

Transforming an Information Focused Company into a Healthcare Analytics Powerhouse

Derek J. Evans

SVP and Practice Head, Health Technology Solutions at Symphony Health