One year ago, we shared with you our plans for Campus Store Insights (CSI), a game-changing tool developed through the NACS Foundation Standards Project in partnership with NACS. We are pleased to announce that those plans have come to fruition and the CSI business intelligence and data visualization platform is now live and available.

The goal of CSI is to equip stores with the data and tools needed to benchmark key performance indicators and report financial results. The initial launch of CSI takes the data from the 2020 and 2021 NACS Financial Survey and information shared through the Independent College Store Report (ICSR) survey and displays it in a user-friendly interface. Rather than providing static PDF data tables in a report, CSI transforms the data into dynamic reports, graphs, and charts that can be filtered, making benchmarking more accessible and easier to understand.

Providing visual elements like charts and graphs makes the data manageable and makes it easier to identify trends and outliers. Joey Tappel, NACS special projects manager, who served as one of the integral members of the CSI team, explains, “Visual representation of data makes the information digestible and facilitates the ability to make data-driven decisions. The application of filters exponentially increases the ability to understand the data on multiple levels.”

The CSI platform is available to NACS member stores that participate in the NACS Financial Survey or share their ICSR data with NACS. Stores currently using the platform are already reaping the benefits by making informed decisions based on data and sharing key insights with their administrators.

Understanding the data and trends is essential for stores to effectively craft their operation’s story and to share related messaging with their campus stakeholders. After comparing her store’s information and benchmarking against other stores’ responses, Cassie Wherry from Grinnell College Pioneer Bookshop notes that having data delivered in a professional, visually pleasing format makes it easier and more effective to present the store’s story to administrators, especially those who are new to working with campus stores.

Currently, aggregate data from more than 100 stores is included in the CSI platform for comparison and benchmarking. Stores can drill down into the data in categories including institution type (two-year vs. four-year), region (U.S. or Canada), FTE, sales volume, and store services. “One of the biggest benefits of the CSI platform is the ability to see your specific store data side-by-side with the aggregate data of your peers,” states Tappel.

Identifying comparable stores can be the first step of a successful benchmarking strategy. As TJ Cochran, director of the Brown University Bookstore, notes, “If you know of other campus stores that are comparable, as they might have a similar student enrollment, location, and other types of comparisons, then you can find peers for the purpose of benchmarking.”

In summary, Cochran emphasizes the overall value of the CSI tools by stating, “We can look...”
NACS plans to continue the development of additional CSI features and resources that will expand its value to the nation’s campus stores.

at data from similar stores that are having success as a frame of reference in a specific way for benchmarking. It is another way of determining what's possible as we continue to grow our business as the industry changes to strive for similar success.”

In its first few months of live production, CSI is proving to be the innovative, game-changing tool that had been envisioned. But that's not the end of the story. NACS plans to continue the development of additional CSI features and resources that will expand its value to the nation’s campus stores.

Remember that if you are a NACS member who participated in the 2020 or 2021 Financial Survey, you are eligible to experience the benefits of the CSI platform now. You can also ensure your access to this indispensable tool in the coming year by renewing your NACS membership and participating in the 2022 NACS Financial Survey which launches in October. CS

Stephen Hochheiser is a past president of the NACS Foundation and is retired after a 40-year career in publishing and bookstore management.