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Why data democratisation defines the workplace of the future

Changing working patterns and the increasing importance of data makes data democratisation an essential part of modern marketing.

Data democratisation – a technical revolution

Technology has always influenced the way we live and work, or even transformed it completely. Take the internet, which has almost completely replaced libraries for research – now we just Google the answers to our questions. Or email, which allows us to send a message within seconds, ending the days-long process of mailing a letter and waiting for a response.

Because technology makes life easier, we can spend more time on the fun parts of work, and less on admin and general hassle. But even as it drives change, technology is also a response to how the world itself is changing.

Consider this in the context of the pandemic and lockdown. Amazon reported an 82% spike in sales in 2021 compared with pre-pandemic figures as customers were forced to transition to online shopping, virtually overnight.

Amazon's processes were already perfectly suited to this new, enforced "normal", allowing them to capitalise where their less-prepared competitors fell short. This is an extreme example, but it shows that businesses who fail to embrace change, or confidently predict what the future will look like, will suffer as a result.

Data democratisation is a logical progression in how we live and work. It will be instrumental in allowing post-pandemic remote workers to deliver their best, every day, from any location. It will also enable more people to do the data-based work that was once reserved for a privileged few.

In this way, data democratisation will drive greater speed, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and accuracy. These changes were already underway but have since been accelerated by the global pandemic response.

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Empowering everyone with data democratisation

Let's take a step back for a moment and define what we mean by data democratisation.

Scott Brinker, VP at Hubspot and author of the Chief Marketing Technologist blog, once described it as:

"The democratization of technology. It's a progression of taking the power to create and discover out of the hands of an elite few and putting it in the hands of the everyday many."

To put it more simply, it means giving everyone in your business the tools they need to understand data and gain insights – without specialist training.

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Why does this matter? Until recently, data was "owned" by IT departments. If you wanted access to information or insights that were not available "out of the box", you needed additional help from an IT specialist. This wasn't because of office politics or protectionism – the tools required for advanced data analysis were simply not user-friendly and required specialist skills to operate properly.

In reality, the IT department didn't even want this responsibility – they had their own IT tasks to be getting on with instead of compiling reports for the marketing department. And the business shares the same sentiment. They want more people to work with data directly so they can get more done.

This is where data democratisation comes into play.

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So what does data democratisation look like?

Before PCs were commonplace, all data crunching was done on a central mainframe computer. Operators had to write computer programs to query the data – it was a slow and laborious task requiring specialist skills. Now everyone has a laptop or PC that can do the same technical work for them. Excel formulas, data segmentation and filtering can all be performed quickly and easily without needing to know exactly how it's being done. The computer does the hard work and the user needs to know little more than which buttons to press to get the job done.

Emerging technologies are making data shareable and interpretable for everyone – not just trained data scientists and analysts. And these advances in technology are enabling people to do more, faster, and with greater accuracy.

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Why do we need data democratisation?

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Here's 9 great reasons

1. Boost productivity

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Empowering everyone to access and use data allows you to complete more work in a fixed amount of time, driving up productivity. Because no one is waiting for a data specialist to compile reports, you can generate and use insights to grow the business more quickly.

2. Faster working

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With more insights being created, you can improve decision making so the business becomes more agile, bringing products and services to market ahead of the competition. Your agile teams are a significant competitive advantage over slower businesses that rely on traditional (poor) data access techniques.

3. Happier people

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Marketers can conceive, plan, activate and analyse campaigns themselves without requiring additional input from the IT team. And the IT team isn't bombarded with non-IT requests from marketers. Everyone can automate manual processes and do more exciting and fulfilling work – improving interdepartmental relations in the process.

4. Increased business value

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Data democratisation empowers everyone at all levels of the organisation to identify and act on critical business insights. In this way, teams can be directed towards working on the highest value activities rather than low-value menial tasks and admin – or waiting for someone else to do them.

5. Improved data accuracy

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Democratisation means removing departmental information silos to create a single source of truth that everyone uses. This produces better collaboration and cohesion, as well as improving the quality of your insights. With everyone having full visibility of information, any discrepancies or inconsistencies are more likely to be spotted and rectified.

6. Increased competitiveness

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As a leaner, more efficient and streamlined business you can 'punch above your weight' and compete with leaders in your field. Smarter operations can – and do – beat big money to claim a greater market share.

7. Wider talent pool

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With the right data democratisation tools you're no longer limited to the talent in your local area. Giving remote workers access to your data can add value to your business no matter where they're located, with no friction or compromise to how they work.

8. Data-driven business

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By allowing democratising technology to take the strain, many data tasks are no longer limited to those with specialist skills. Your users can rely on technology to make the right decisions and find the right answer no matter who is pressing the buttons, making the whole business truly data-driven.

9. Less training, faster onboarding

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The application of these technologies and the reduced requirements for specialist skills also helps to make training and onboarding faster and more efficient. This means the business can reduce the time it takes to get staff fully trained and working at their best, which also delivers a better experience for the workforce too.

How Apteco is democratising data

Apteco's core strength has always been targeting and data analysis – and our business goal has always been to provide fingertip access to data to those that need it.

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We started out developing systems that could speedily explore large customer, prospect, and transactional datasets that previously took hours to process and a skilled technician to write the queries. This later evolved and expanded to campaign automation that made data insights immediately actionable within campaigns.

Making actionable insights available and more shareable provided even more opportunities for clients. Organisations can now engage with prospects and customers in near real time and use integrated AI to continually test, monitor, and optimise messaging and offers – techniques that would previously have needed the help of a specialist.

With Apteco, a single person can multi-task, focussing on the important aspects of their job while our software processes, completes, and reports on the necessary (but sometimes mundane) repetitive tasks.

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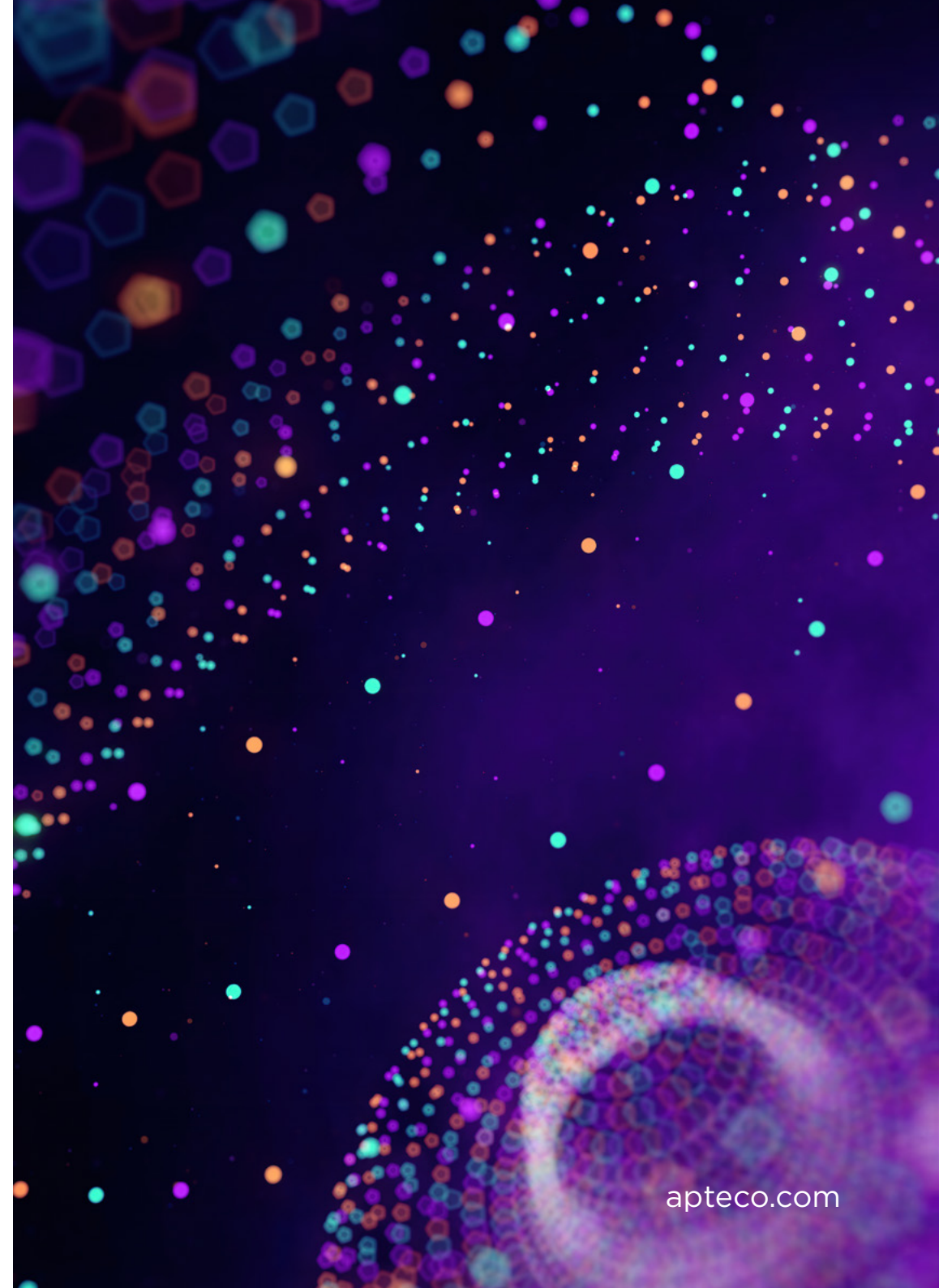
Who benefits from data democratisation?

Ultimately, everyone benefits from data democratisation, especially in today's post-pandemic workplace.

Over the last few years, more and more people have quit their jobs in what's been deemed 'The Great Resignation'. As the workforce reassessed what is important to them and how to strike the right work-life balance, they've had more confidence to leave their jobs and find new positions.

In particular, employees are escaping underperforming businesses and finding new homes in more digitally-savvy organisations. 76% of UK workers consider having the latest digital tools crucial, while 33% admitted they would be embarrassed to work in an organisation that lacked the newest tools.

The upshot of this is that employers that don't offer the best digital tools are five times more likely to see staff leave within a year, and a record number of companies are finding it difficult to recruit staff.

76%
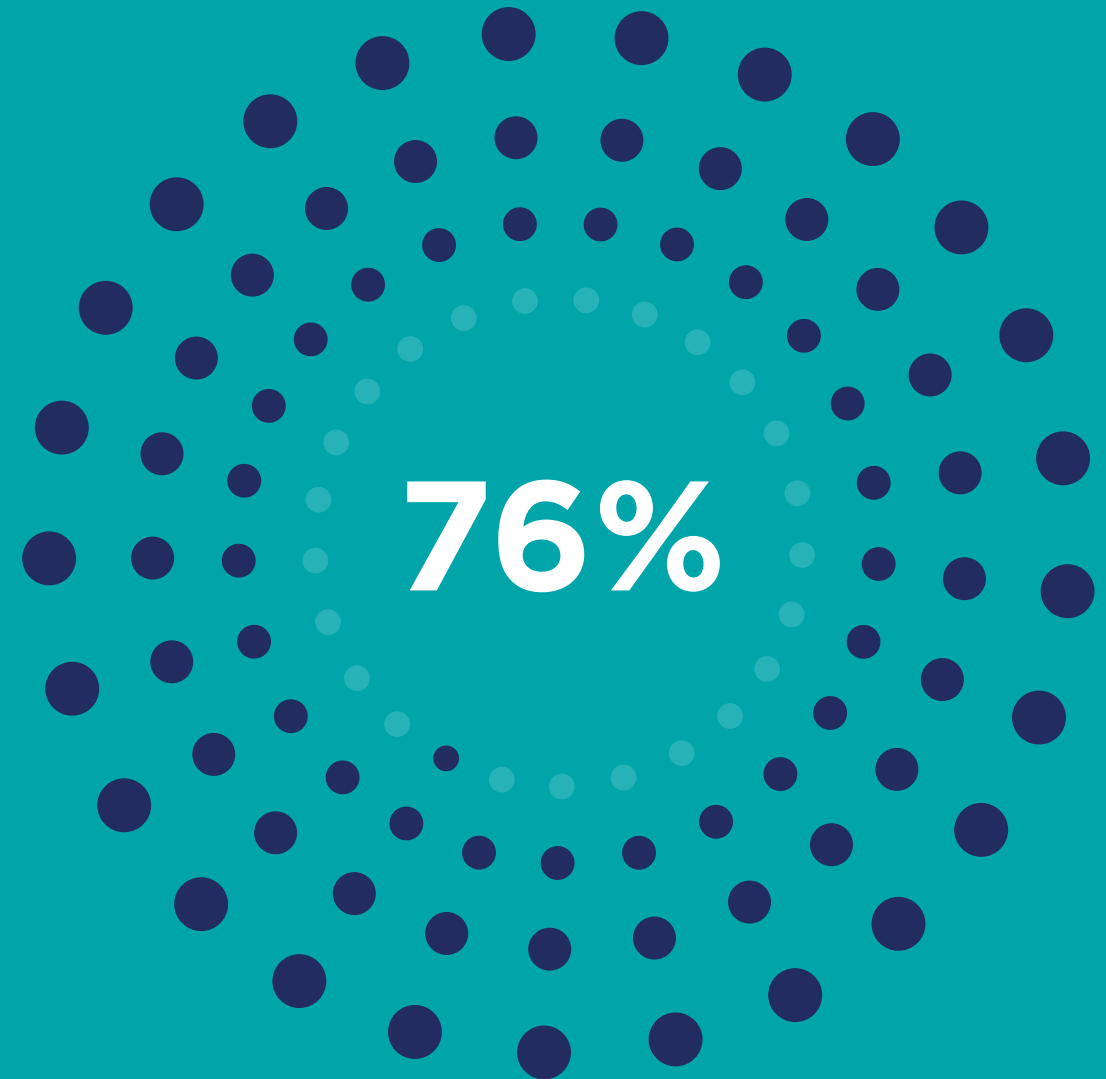
of UK workers consider having the latest digital tools crucial.

Data democratisation helps overcome these problems. It enables remote working so people can work from a location that provides the best environment for their families. It reduces the repetitive and mundane tasks, providing more opportunity for exciting or rewarding work that's under their control. What's more, it can allow people to work at their very best, demonstrating their value to the business and increasing their career prospects.

This also benefits employers, who increase the value of each worker, find it easier to attract and retain the best talent, and create a stable business that enables growth.

Let's take a closer look at exactly who benefits from data democratisation within a typical business. We've outlined five key personas below.

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Connector / Designer

Responsible for building the connectors that enable data flows across your business, the connector/ designer is faced with challenges when getting systems to talk to each other properly. Making data accessible and usable may be their goal, but this can be a laborious task due to a lack of documentation, poor quality data, and slow processes involving writing scripts, testing, and analysis of results.

Democratising data greatly simplifies their job. Easier access to information and the use of intuitive and smart importing tools dramatically accelerates the delivery of data to the people who need it, and can allow less complex tasks to be delegated. This gives the connector/designer more time to focus on tasks that are more aligned with their skills.

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Analyst

The analyst turns raw data into actionable insights. But for every targeted dataset, pivot table or predictive model they deliver, they must also deal with multiple data sources, derived variable programming and data quality issues (among others). The current fragmented landscape creates significant hurdles for them.

By democratising data, analysts spend less time joining data sets or waiting for data loads and transfers, allowing them to focus on the most important details for their stakeholders. Improved access to data allows the analyst to delegate low-level requests to colleagues – or even back to the requestor now that everyone can see and use the same data.

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Orchestrator

When planning campaigns (and all the supporting activities), the orchestrator is often drowning in information and has a huge number of tasks to tick off. However, the diversity of available channels and data sources makes it hard to achieve a complete view of the moving pieces. This has a knock-on effect on their ability to manage and monitor their campaigns, and make the necessary adjustments to respond to interactions and drive better outcomes.

With democratised data, artificial intelligence and machine learning can easily be used to analyse responses – or even lack of responses – and decide which steps should be taken to improve engagement. For example, integrated AI tools can offer automated content alternatives that deliver ongoing, incremental improvements to campaigns by ensuring the best response rates are achieved. In addition, event triggers can be established to create a chain reaction of events that nurtures the customer through a planned journey. All of which means smart decisions can be made at speed to improve campaign performance.

Marketer

Marketing executives are expected to execute campaigns across multiple channels – then to track and report on results to ensure objectives are being met. However, most are dependent on other departments to give them data they need to complete these tasks. They are under constant pressure to deliver effective campaigns quickly and to personalise the customer experience for greater effect.

Democratised data empowers marketers by giving them direct access to the information needed; they are no longer reliant on other departments for assistance with creating highly targeted segments. They are finally masters of their own domain, encouraging them to make smarter marketing decisions for the benefit of the company and its customers – and to meet their KPIs.

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Manager

The head of marketing is expected to deliver on corporate goals, and to ensure necessary resources are made available to their team. However, the manager is also struggling with limited resources and a wide variety of data that needs to be accessed, aggregated and interrogated to allow them to make smart strategic decisions and formulate a workable marketing strategy.

Democratised data takes away the hassle of monitoring multiple systems simultaneously, providing the manager with greater clarity and cutting through the noise created by too much information. With intuitive tools that anyone on the team can use, employees are empowered – and training costs are reduced. The manager is able to make smarter, data-driven decisions that increase speed to market and help the business become more competitive because they are less resource-dependent.

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What does this actually look like in operation?

Apteco delivers data democratisation by making an end-to-end campaign process possible, from conception and design, through to execution and reporting.

We also help reduce complexity by enabling all this through a single platform. A user only needs training on a single tool, rapidly increasing both the quality and speed with which they can work.

Chances are, your organisation will include specialists who focus on specific areas, such as data analysis or targeting. The advantage of using Apteco is that it's possible for one person to cover all these tasks single-handedly if necessary.

If you are part of a larger team, then you can all work together and collaborate in the same tool, making your work more effective and efficient.

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We describe this end-to-end methodology with four simple words.

1	2	3	4
Connect	**Analyse**	**Target**	**Campaign**

Connect

Bring together data and people so everyone can make smarter, data-driven decisions.

Campaign

Execute your campaign, reviewing engagements and reacting to deliver more positive outcomes.

Leg 4

Start

Leg 1

Leg 3

Leg 2
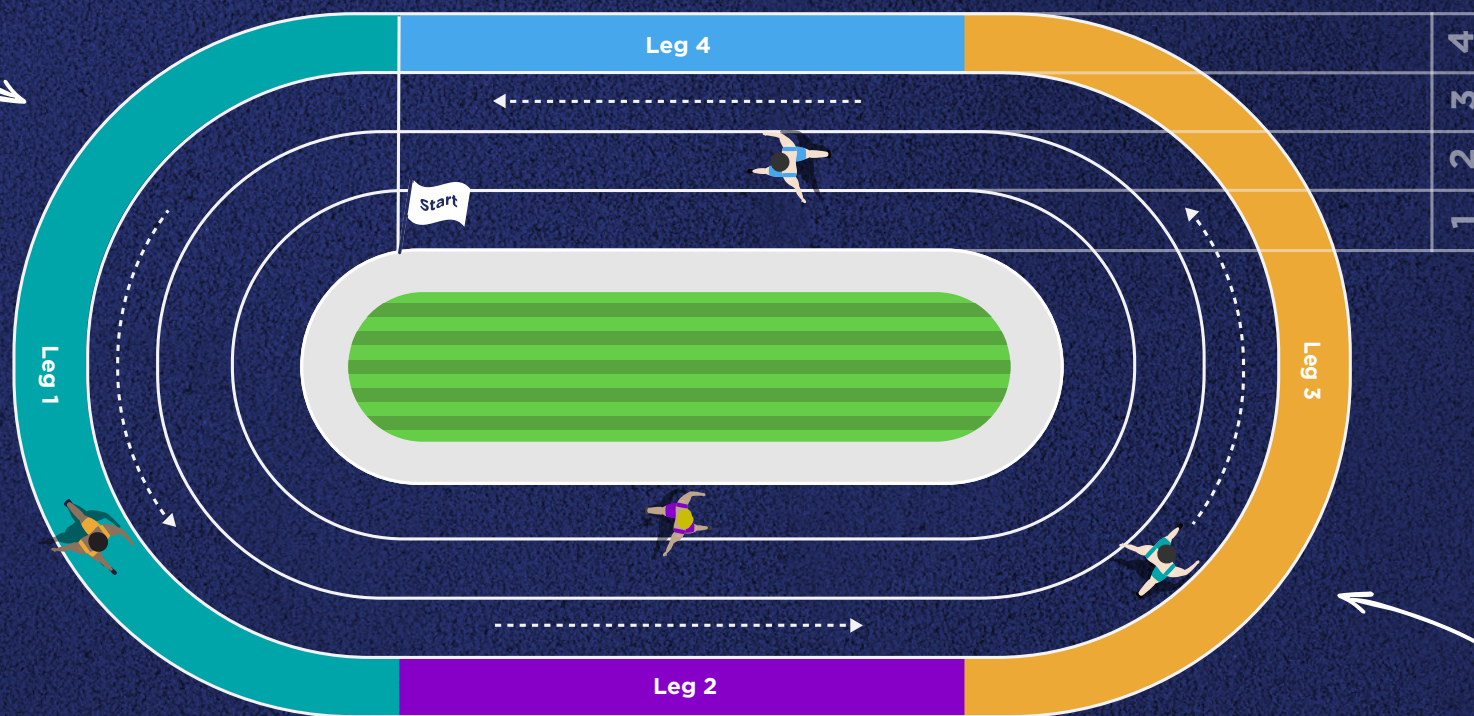
Analyse

Turn data into actionable insights with the ability to interrogate and explore data.

Target

Decide how to use your insights by choosing when, where, and how to communicate with a specific audience.

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Connect

- Easily share data from previous campaigns with stakeholders across the business.

- Drag and drop functionality allows you to pull in data and create links between different data sets, including other connected Apteco tools, and to automatically define data types.

- Integrate and connect data with your organisation's preferred ESPs and fulfilment channels.

Connector / Designer

Start

Leg 1

Manager

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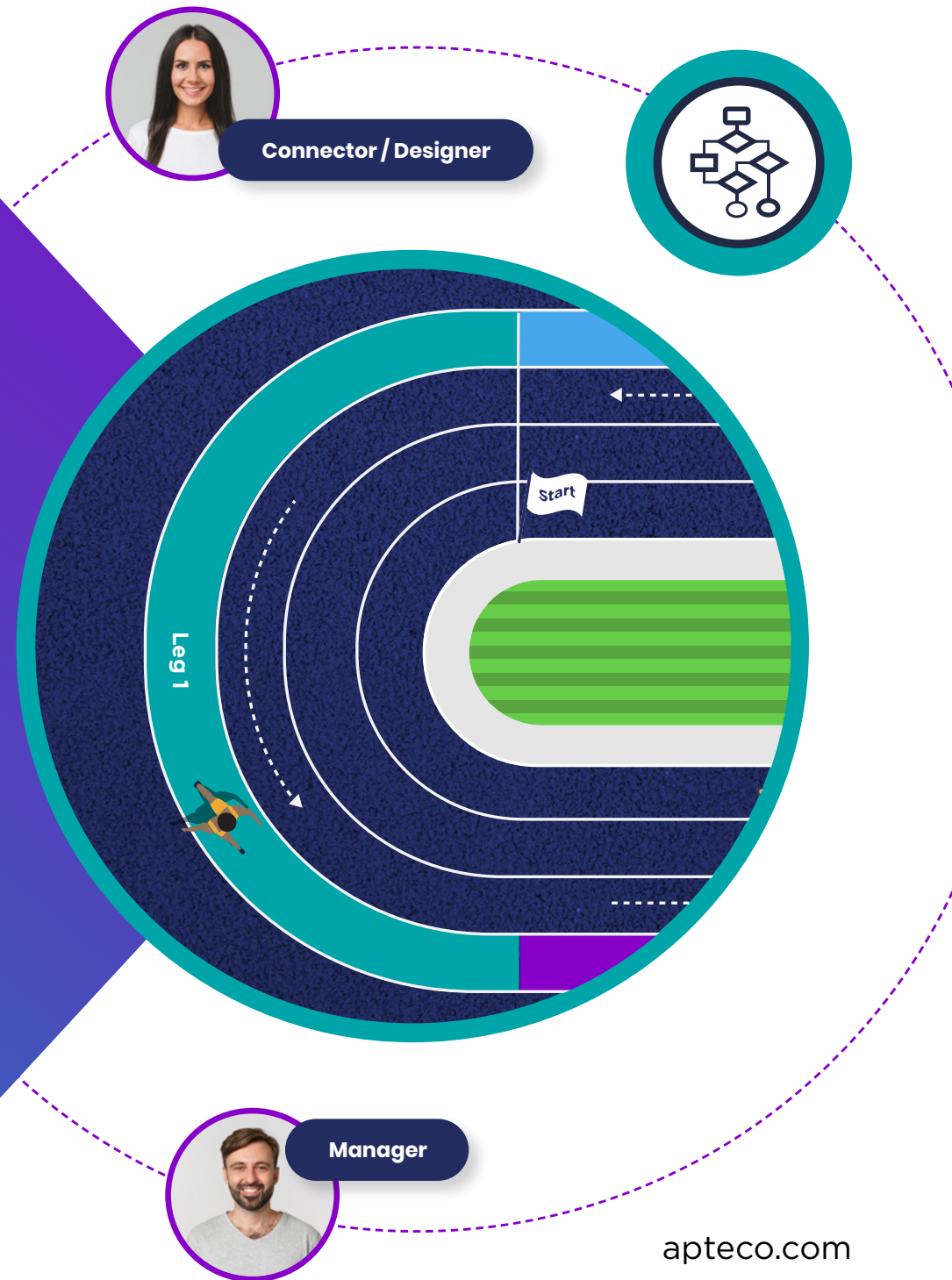
Analyse

- Perform analysis using various visualisations and methods, such as predictive analytics and behavioural modelling.

- Data analysis will give you insights to define your campaign strategy, including messaging and content.

- Create derived variables from the source data, known as "virtual variables" in Apteco software, that make it easier to generate insights.

Analyst

Orchestrator

Leg 2

Manager

Marketer

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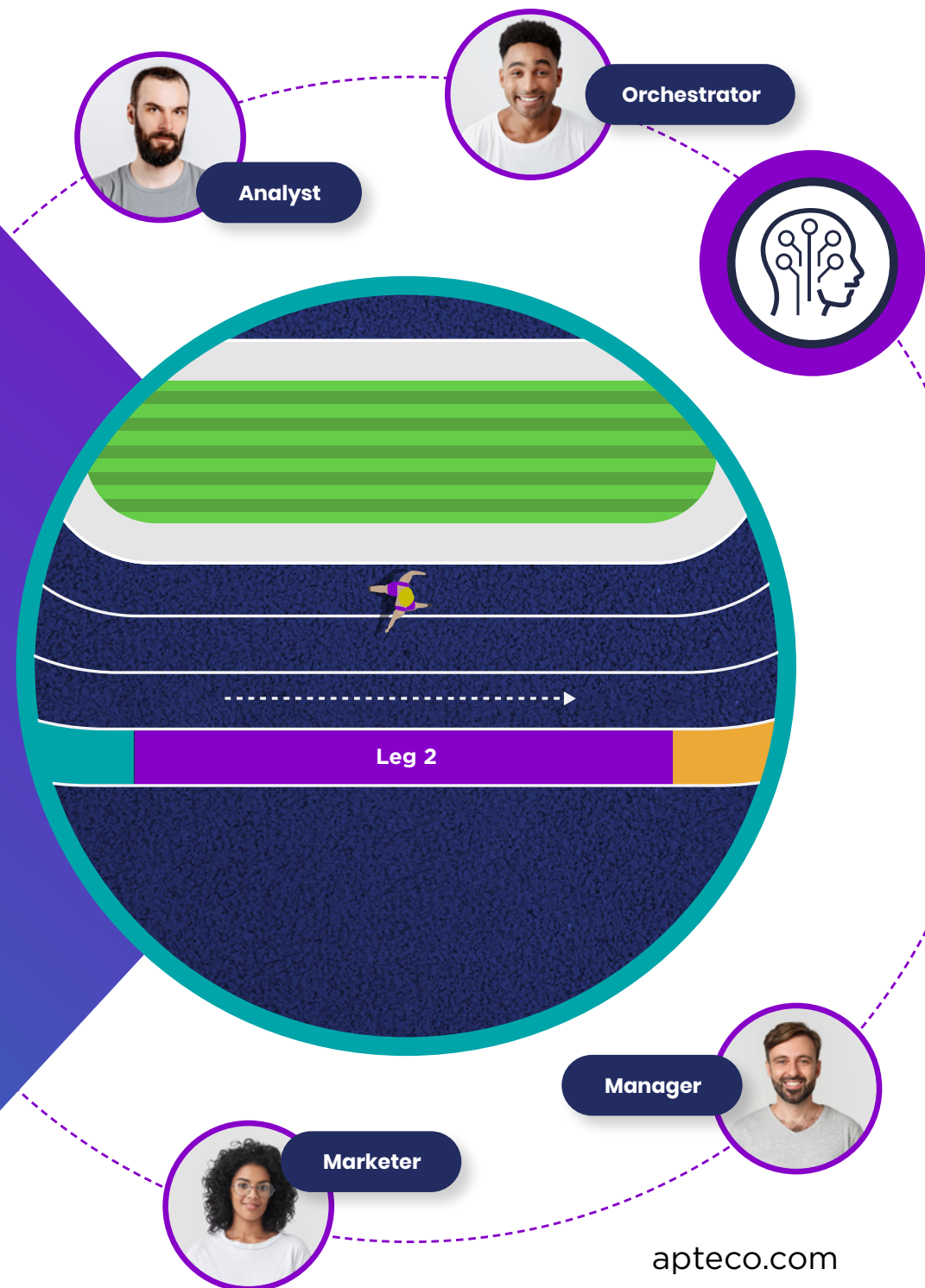
Target

- Create audience definitions, based on criteria such as demographics, transactional behaviour, send rules or compliance.

- Determine when to target them to maximise performance.

- Identify which channels to use for which audience segments to increase the likelihood of engagement.

Orchestrator

Leg 3

Manager

Marketer

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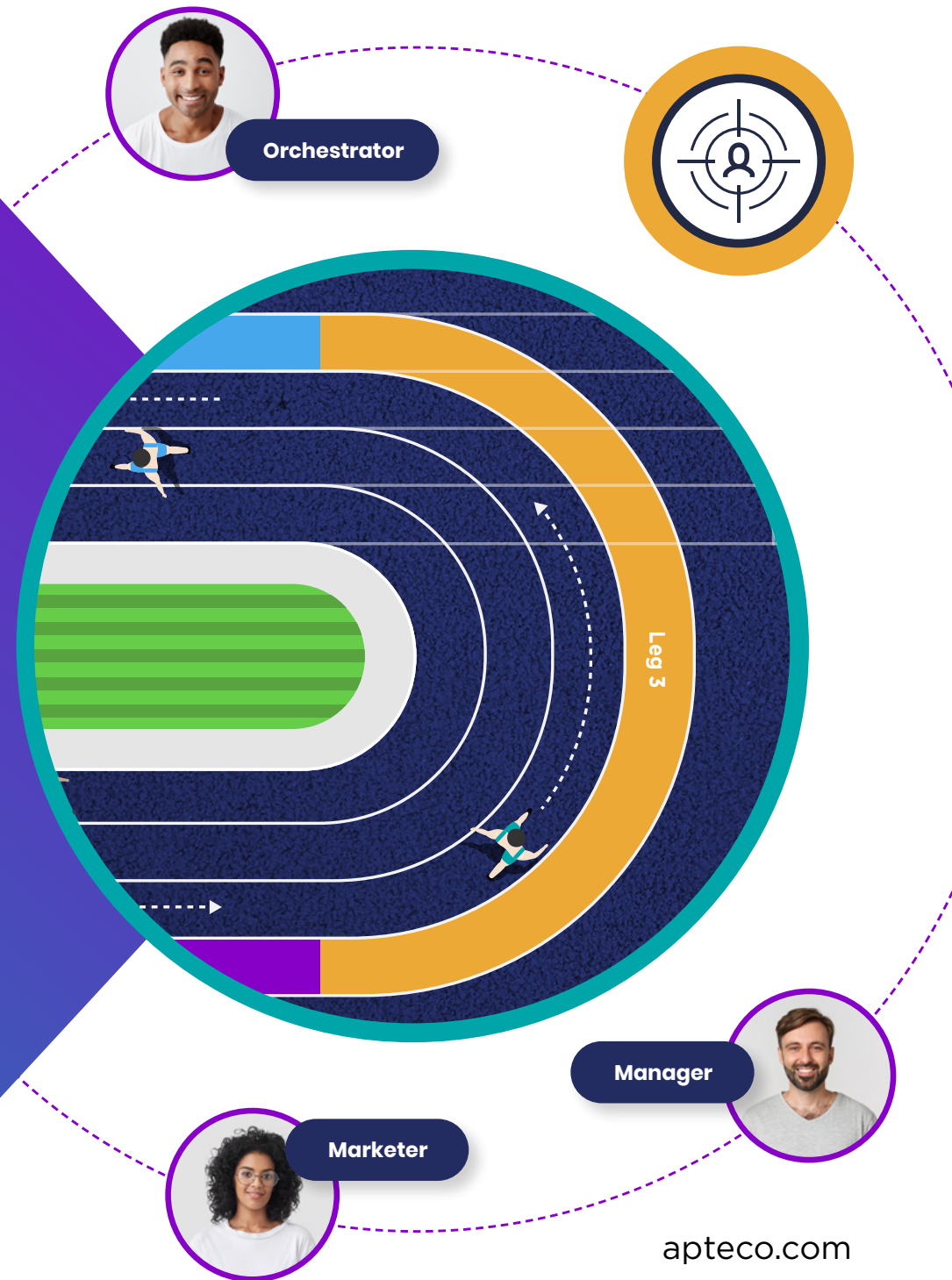
Campaign

- Run a single or multi-stage automated campaign by pre-defining a workflow based on how people respond, such as scheduling follow-ups or retargeting ads. Apteco analysis can even tell you which campaign is likely to produce the best result before you even begin. You can also define trigger-based events that allow the system to decide what to do next, without human interaction (although monitoring of these activities is always possible).

- Report on campaign success by reviewing responses and interactions. Apteco allows you to segment audiences to determine effectiveness using your preferred metrics (CTR, conversions etc).

Orchestrator

Leg 4

Start

Manager

Marketer

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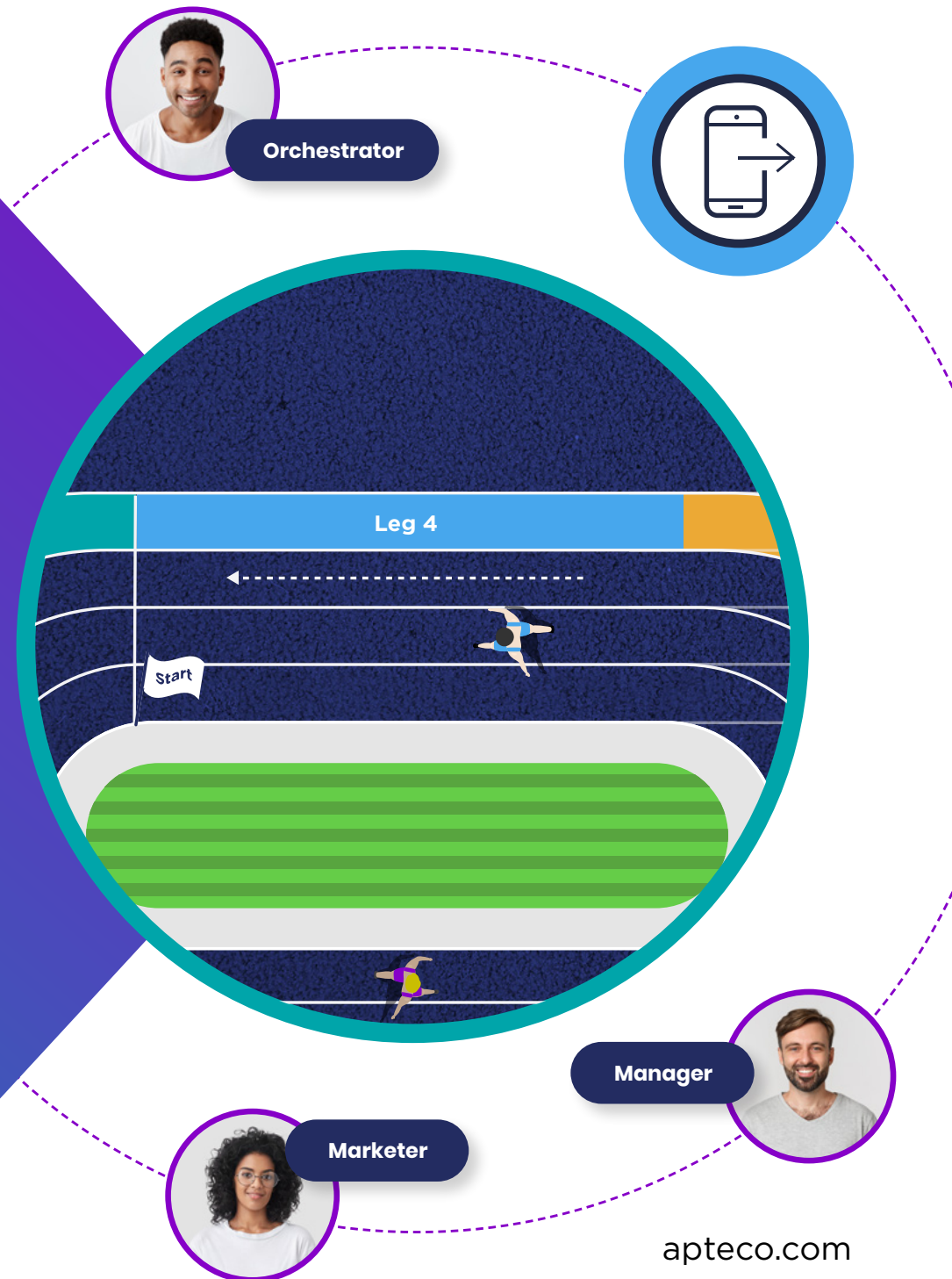
Results

- Disseminate results automatically to your stakeholders and decision makers using interactive dashboards, replacing your manual reporting processes. With fresh data and outcomes shared, the process begins all over again, using new insights to continuously improve future campaigns.

RESULTS

| CAMPAIGN NAME	RANK
CAMPAIGN 2	01 ST
CAMPAIGN 1	02 ND
CAMPAIGN 3	03 RD

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The future is democratised data

The workplace is going through another major transformation.

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Remote working and permanently connected customers (and employees) are changing the way we do business – but it is digital transformation and data-driven operations where the most significant innovation is taking place.

Because of the increased importance of data, your business needs to be smarter about how it collects and uses information, not least because of the sheer volumes you will be dealing with. Technology that applies machine learning and artificial intelligence will help your business embrace this change.

Technology that democratises data will negate the need for detailed and time-consuming training. Instead, everyone will be able to access and use data to perform their roles to a higher level. Increased productivity, faster output, happier people, greater business value, increased clarity, the ability to better compete, building a wider talent pool and lowering the barrier to productivity – data democratisation is truly transformative.
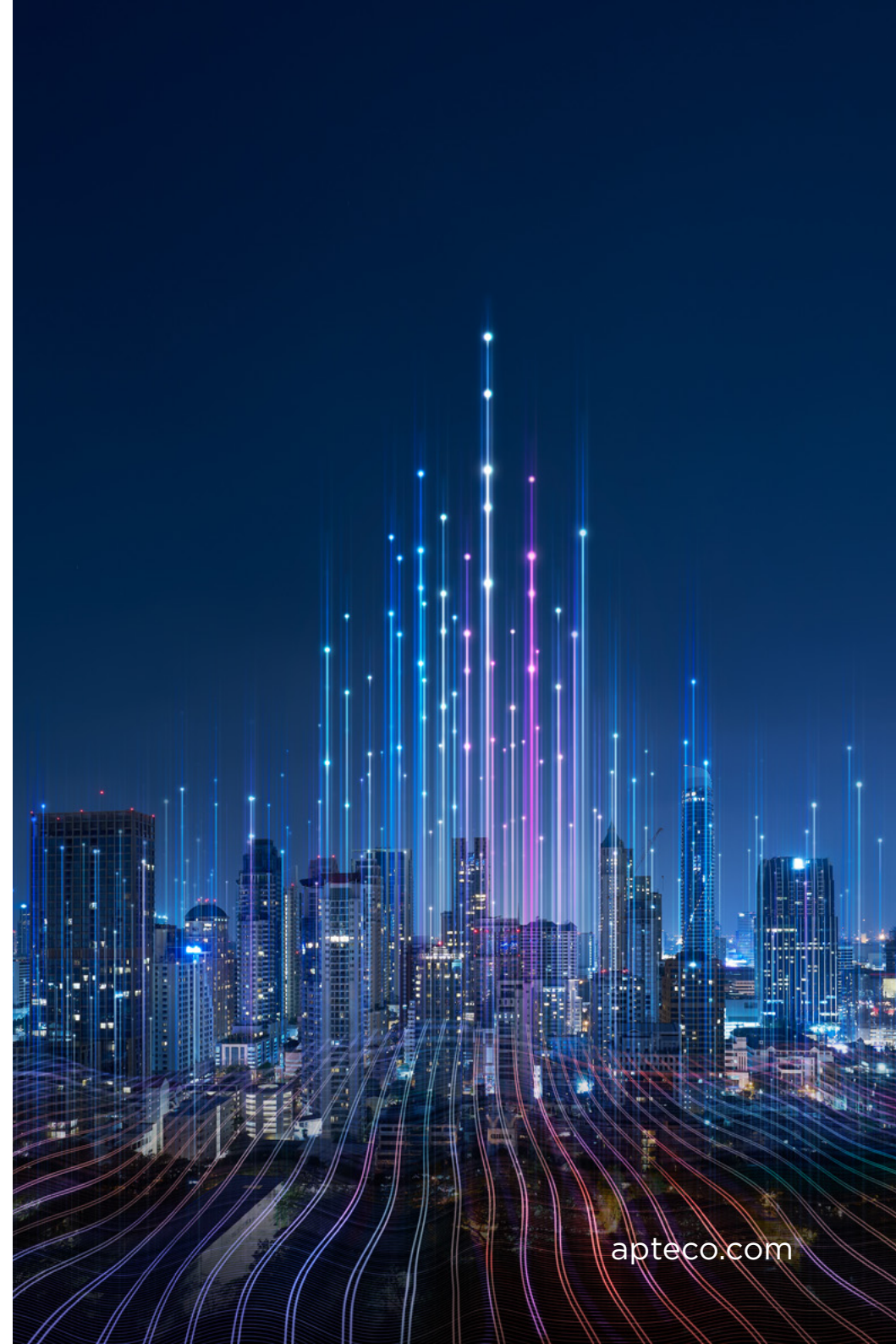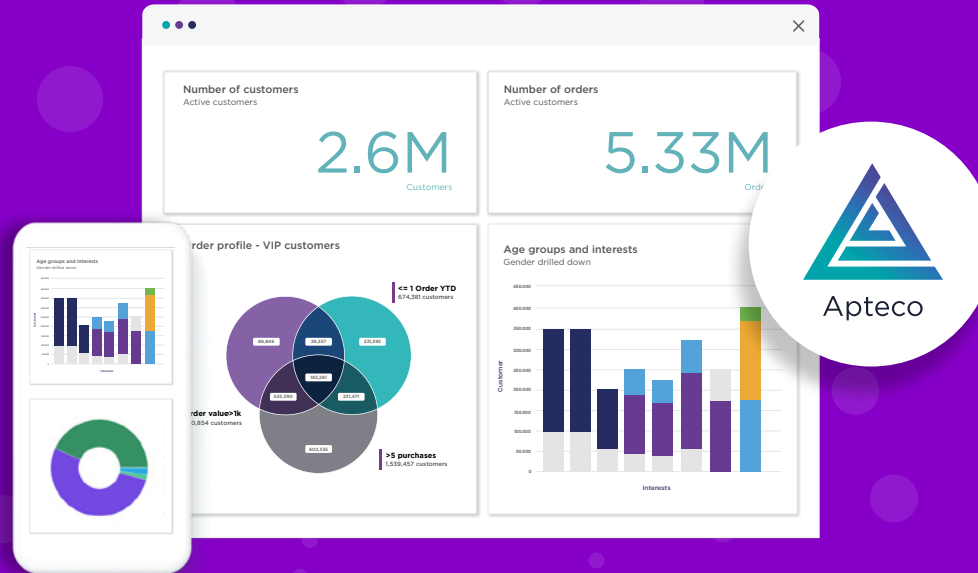
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