



Building an Employer Brand from the Inside Out at The Beer Store

COMPANY OVERVIEW

The Beer Store operates 450 retail stores and employs just over 6,500 people across Ontario, Canada. The Beer Store was established in 1927 and is owned by 25 Ontario Brewers, including Labatt, Molson Coors, Sleeman, Moosehead Breweries, Brick Brewing, Steam Whistle and 19 other Ontario Craft Brewers.

EMPLOYER BRAND AWARDS OF NOTE

Although The Beer Store operates retail outlets in just one Canadian province, the organization has been recognized as one of the country's top employer brands and preferred employers at the Randstad Awards every year since 2012.

EMPLOYER BRAND EXCELLENCE – A CASE STUDY APPROACH

This case study originally appeared in "Employer Brand Excellence – A Case Study Approach" compiled by global employer brand thought leader Brett Minchington, published in 2016.



BEER BRINGS US TOGETHER



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TED MOROZ, PRESIDENT

Objectives

For Beer Store President Ted Moroz, the desire to begin employer branding work was rooted in his vision of a happy and stable workforce that knows the business really well and looks after The Beer Store customers with passion. As the champion who brought employer brand strategy to the organization, Ted knew that if his employees felt that they were valued and treated with respect, they would reflect that investment in the way they built relationships with their customers and the marketplace.

In 2012, Ted began looking at employer branding as a key strategy to align employees and build internal engagement. Although he had already been working with a top employee engagement research and consulting firm, he wanted to further explore employer branding strategy as a means to rapidly elevate engagement and build internal brand ambassadorship. For The Beer Store, the work was less about addressing talent attraction challenges, and more about making a significant and lasting impact on the employee experience – ensuring people felt valued and respected within the organization.

The Beer Store had already been recognized as a preferred employer through the Randstad Awards research, but Ted felt employee engagement scores had room for improvement. He knew that in order to transform the business and impact customer experience, he needed a comprehensive strategy that would nurture communications, employee recognition and pride. The challenge was finding a way to execute the strategy in a retail organization operating as 450 small businesses across the province of Ontario. For the President, this was “not just an employer brand tagline exercise, but an effort to impact employees. Our business is not bricks and mortar - it is all about the people.”

The business was in the middle of a massive rebrand of the retail locations in terms of store layout, look and feel in order to drive an elevated customer experience. This required the retail team to shift focus to front of store, despite substantial accountabilities in the back of house handling bottle returns and recycling to meet The Beer Store’s significant environmental commitments.

A distinguishing aspect of The Beer Store’s business is the fact that their product is highly regulated, with provincial government playing an influential role. Looming legislative changes and associated attention from government and the general public meant it was becoming even more critical for The Beer Store to have a transparent and clear communications strategy that would ensure employees understood their value and their role in the organization’s future.

Moving the Needle

There were three metrics identified at the onset of the employer branding work. The Beer Store wanted to achieve clear and measurable impact on:

- ① Employee Engagement
- ② Customer Satisfaction
- ③ Increased Sales

What We Did and What We Achieved

THE INITIAL EFFORT – YEAR ONE

Ted Moroz hired Blu Ivy Group to conduct the initial employee value proposition research for The Beer Store. Retail talent from across Ontario participated in workshops and leadership interviews. A sample of part time, full time, store managers and regional leaders took part to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the perceived value offerings from The Beer Store as an employer. We also sought to understand what was needed to improve the employee experience most urgently to impact engagement and the personal connection to the employer brand.

Employees were incredibly open and honest and enjoyed the experience. Knowing that they were being asked to help build the employer brand together gave them a strong sense of pride and ownership in the process. In less than 3 months, feedback from more than 150 retail employees and 20 managers and leaders had been used to form the employer brand strategy and an engagement and activation plan was in place to share the key findings and next steps with the entire retail division.

“I really wanted to ensure that regardless of division, our employees felt that they were living a consistent experience that reflected the promise we were making to them and delivering on what they collectively valued most about their Beer Store career experience.”

TED MOROZ, PRESIDENT

A COMPREHENSIVE EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION – YEAR TWO

The following year a company wide effort was conducted to validate the retail value proposition and better understand how employees across all divisions felt about their work experience. Specifically, The Beer Store wanted to determine if the employee experience uncovered in the retail division was consistent in other parts of the business. Was there a unified EVP across the organization, or did employees in other divisions feel differently?

The renewed focus enabled the organization to build a clear employer promise and roadmap for leaders, managers and employees to communicate where The Beer Store was headed with the employer brand and culture in the year to come.

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INTERNAL ACTIVATION

Part of the internal launch strategy included a storytelling contest and invitation to become a part of an inaugural Employee Brand Ambassador program for The Beer Store.

Employees were encouraged to share a personal narrative or recount a story about a colleague in line with the newly defined employee value proposition. Participants would be eligible for inclusion in the Brand Ambassador program focused on driving a highly engaging employee experience across the organization at the grassroots level. Nominations were also welcomed in

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KELLY MCINTYRE,
HUMAN RESOURCES



order to ensure a full picture of potential ambassadors was captured through the storytelling campaign.

Incentives such as tickets to major sporting events and branded Beer Store merchandise were offered to encourage employees to participate, but the potential to be featured in internal employer brand marketing materials and the opportunity to be a champion amongst peers was a real draw for The Beer Store team. Participation was terrific and the stories shared about what people valued in their work experience were more poignant and genuine than the project team could have anticipated.

BRAND AMBASSADORSHIP

The storytelling campaign yielded many shared employee experiences and 21 Employee Brand Ambassadors from across regions and divisions were invited to be the founding members of an internal advocacy program. A one day launch event was held where the Brand Ambassador team came together to define and build the program. Collectively the team developed a shared mission statement and a position description to guide actions and behaviours. The team identified how they would like the employer brand to be communicated and activated inside the organization and challenged one another to ensure the program would be sustainable and impactful for the organization.

A professional photography session was held to capture the real people behind the employer brand. Their personal and career stories were collected and used to build internal communications and external branding to tell the unique Beer Store narrative. The team energy was truly incredible during the early days of the Brand Ambassador program and engagement continues to build from the fantastic efforts of these individuals who are truly driving the program at a grassroots level.

The Ambassadors have uniforms with special logos identifying them as Brand Champions. Small monthly budgets are provided for spot recognition. When Ambassadors see employees doing great things on the job aligned with organizational values, they can give a gift card as a thank you. Ambassadors are provided with work time each month to devote to this initiative, which further validates the importance of the team to the business strategy and culture.

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In April of this year, the president booked a suite for the Employee Brand Ambassador team at a Toronto Blue Jays game to celebrate their amazing work and recognize the contribution these 21 people are having on the culture, employee and customer experience.

CONNECTING FOR CONTINUED IMPACT

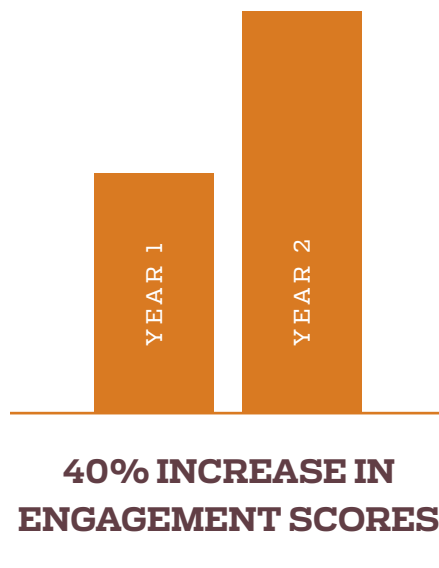
A Facebook page dedicated to the employees of The Beer Store was launched simultaneously to the Brand Ambassador



program. Employees and Brand Ambassadors were empowered to share their personal career stories, pictures and stories through the social media channel.

The Ambassador Team has done a tremendous job sharing their regional efforts with the broader organization on the Facebook group and the positive energy continues to grow as a result.

The Ambassador Team communicates with President Ted Moroz to share the feedback and learnings garnered from their colleagues across the company. They are able to make recommendations while receiving mentorship directly from the top of the organization to help share consistent messaging and drive the key behaviours Ted wants to see in the business to drive a great employee and customer experience. This process continues to evolve the Brand Ambassador initiative into a true development opportunity for all involved. It's a great way to reward those who commit to building the brand and the success of The Beer Store.



The Impact

Employee engagement scores have steadily been on the rise since The Beer Store began this journey over two years ago – in fact, engagement scores went up by a whopping 40% between year 1 and year 2! Customer satisfaction survey results continue to climb and The Beer Store had a record sales year in 2015. These results are all the more impressive when the major legislative changes and the accompanying uncertainty which led up to those changes are considered.

The organization has also seen a significant spike in their rankings on Glassdoor. Overall rankings, culture and values rankings, leadership and overall business outlook rankings have spiked dramatically since employer branding efforts began.

Key Learnings

The Beer Store Employer Brand work began with a clear objective to impact employee pride and engagement and the incredible success they have achieved through the internal strategy and ambassadorship has been remarkable. The enthusiasm and momentum being built by the Brand Ambassador team is the biggest win in Ted's eyes. It has been truly heartwarming to see the team not only embrace the role, but to take such ownership and work so hard to impact employee engagement.



What's Next?

Blu Ivy Group has developed creative concepts to bring the employer brand to life both visually and in written form. This will be the foundation for activating an employer brand creative campaign both inside the organization and externally in the retail stores, on social media channels and Company website so that customers further connect with the interesting, dynamic and passionate people who are so critical to their interaction with the brand.

An employer brand playbook will soon be launched with management and leadership. The playbook is a guide to ensure that they understand the employer brand work done to date, how that translates in terms of the promise to employees for their career experience and how leaders deliver on that promise. The Beer Store is also looking at management and director level training workshops on how they can live The Beer Store Employer Brand as leaders. The combination of leadership programs and creative marketing will continue to entrench the employer brand work in all aspects of their culture including communications, marketing, management and social media.



About Blu Ivy Group

Blu Ivy Group is a leading employer branding and employee engagement consultancy that aligns your organization with contemporary workplace paradigms. Our mission is to help clients build award-winning people practices, inspire extraordinary employee engagement, and cultivate unique and desirable workplaces. We provide integrated solutions in employer brand and engagement research, strategic consulting, employer brand integration, creative and talent communications.

Blu Ivy Group is a trusted partner to many of North America's most respected employer brands. For more information, visit us online at bluivygroup.com or contact Managing Director Stacy Parker at sparker@bluivygroup.com.