

Does engagement work? You BET it does...

The rise and rise of online and mobile gaming channels have changed betting for ever. Traditional bookies were in danger of being left behind but Ladbrokes – who had been edged out of their number one position in the UK market – decided to fight back, using the passion, attitude and behaviours of their employees.

Grand National day in a betting office is like Christmas in a toyshop - there's a state of excitement among both staff and customers.

When Ladbrokes realised it was slipping behind in the gaming marketplace because of online competition, it was that kind of buzz they went looking for.

"Our brand stands for excitement," says Drew McMillan, internal communication and culture director at Ladbrokes. "That's effectively what we're giving to our customers. We realised that over the past few years we'd overlooked that this is an exciting place to work.

"We needed to enhance that and we needed to do it by using stuff that's already

in our DNA, our heritage."

Drew admits that the business may have gone a little stale. Bookies hadn't changed fundamentally since the Gaming Act of the 1960s until the rise of online and mobile betting.

"Also, a lot of our people in our shops had been with us for a long time," he adds. "They have seen a very rapid transformation and evolution of what it means to work in our industry and they were working very hard. There was lots of pressure and their vision tended to be on the day-to-day business."

The answer was to create a new Vision and set of Values for Ladbrokes – but the key was to get employees to come up with their own ideas for how to get excitement back into the business.

"All the evidence demonstrates that the more people can identify with a bigger goal, the more they'll go for it," says Drew. "They'll strive towards ►

► it even more if it matches their own personal objectives.”

Ladbrokes joined forces with employee engagement specialists Involve to create an experiential Vision and Values programme aimed at involving all 16,000 workers in finding pioneering ways of making every day as energetic and high-performing as days like the Grand National.

“Everyone said that day was like a big party and always quite exciting,” says Involve’s MD Jeremy Starling. “We had to come up with an engagement programme that worked and that was absolutely vibrant and present everywhere in the business.”

Ladbrokes and Involve devised a programme of activities that focused on unleashing the power of the Values to:

- improve the customer experience
- drive business performance, and
- support long-term culture change within Ladbrokes.

Firstly, ‘breakthrough events’ were held with two clusters of shops. These were initially set up to trial the effectiveness of the event format, but

they actually had a positive impact on the shops – sales and customer scores increased by 22% and sickness absence dropped by 4%.

Eight one-day ‘activation events’ were then rolled out, involving 2,300 shop and office managers from every Ladbrokes location, including overseas markets. The events were given a sporting theme with venues adapted to look like arenas and race-tracks.

Colleagues worked in teams to build the ultimate Values-led employee - mapping out their attitude, behaviours, and actions.

They also generated ideas to live the Values - Buzz, Bold, Team and Winners. Participants donned paper jump suits and wrote their ideas on them, while asking others to bet on their success.

Later events included a Values Casino where you could only win by demonstrating you understood the Values.

“Delegates wrote their own Values toolkits,” explains Jeremy. “We wanted to help them to take ownership of initiatives and drive them themselves through collaboration and co-operation. If you hand out a pre-made toolkit made by a consultancy or the L&D team, people aren’t necessarily going to use it. If they designed their own with tips they know will work, they’ll use it because they built it.”

Drew agrees, saying: “You can’t invite people along for a full day of PowerPoint presentations and expect them to go away excited unless you have a bit of fun.

“It was about getting them excited, helping them to want to do this stuff. It was about selling them the idea that it was in their best interests as managers – not as an optional add-on but as a fundamental part of their job.

“We also used stats to prove that it would work. We showed it could increase performance by 15%. You’d be crazy not to see it.”

The toolkits were shared with managers a month after the sessions and Drew adds: “There’s no way a manager can look at that and say ‘That’s been created in head office by theorists’, they look and say ‘I helped create that’.”

Drew says it’s the third major Values programme he’s been involved with and adds: “What’s become clear every time is that the more you can grow it from the grass roots, the better it is. If you create it in isolation in a head office, that’s the road to failure.

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Dare to be different

Ideas for generating excitement came thick and fast at the activation events and one of the most successful was 'dare cards'.

Employees can dare each other to do something to boost morale, customer service or profit. Examples include going to a competitor's betting shop and convincing a customer to come and have a free bet in Ladbroke's.

They might go out and have a cup of tea with customers in the shop, or dress up in fancy dress to get more punters in.



Gamble pays off

Two years into a five-year engagement programme the difference in employee engagement and business performance is tangible at Ladbrokes.

- June 2012 saw a record upward swing of 12% in colleague engagement scores
- 85% of employees said they 'know and understand where the company is heading as a result of the campaign'
- Group net revenue grew by 7.4% to £1,053.3 million
- Profit per shop was up by 15.7% to £82,000
- Group operating profit grew by 8% to £206.1m
- Customer net promoter scores were up 7% 