

Storelink Stocks Its Shelves With HR Expertise.

How Clarian supported Storelink to gain clarity on where to focus their energy, to improve operational efficiencies and better handle employment matters whilst not losing touch with its unique company culture.

CASE STUDY

Background

Even the most successful companies with solid business models need help to develop their core business strategy and align their people strategy and staff development initiatives to ensure successful delivery of the strategy.

That's what the senior management team at Storelink discovered after 10 years in the field. Storelink is a third party sales and merchandising business providing an outsourced option to other companies who do not have their own sales force or their own merchandising team.

The Storelink sales team sells products on behalf of leading consumer brands to New Zealand retailers on a commission basis focusing on maximising shelf space and introducing new products. Meanwhile the Storelink merchandising teams go into stores up and down the country on behalf of its customers and place products from leading worldwide consumer brands on the shelves in return for a fee. The third part of Storelink's business is wholesale; they are the distributors for the Nature's Organics range from Australia, with a large portfolio of over 60 products.

"It's a very complex business – people don't often understand the extent of what we do," says Brendon Korner, General Manager at Storelink. "We are a company of 307 employees and contractors, but we don't have internal HR resource. We had never had a proper strategy workshop or put HR procedures in place."

The senior management team at Storelink recognised they needed to bring in some outside expertise to understand how best to manage and develop their people assets.

Storelink brings in Clarian

Clarian's Managing Director Clare Parkes approached Storelink to discuss whether the company required HR support and whether they had considered outsourcing their HR needs.

Storelink had previously been approached by a variety of HR firms, however none were considered to fit comfortably into their unique company culture. "We're a family business and a fun place to work," says Korner. "Outsiders think we're a bit mad, laughing and joking and enjoying ourselves and this is in part what supports us to be increasingly successful."

Korner says Clarian's Senior HR Consultant Dawn McLean was able to fit easily into the company from day one. "This is something that other HR firms would never be able to do," he says. "This was important to us, as while there are a number of things within our business that need improvement, the one thing we will never change is our company culture as it is at the core of who we are"

Dawn spends two half days each week on site at Storelink, where she is able to immerse herself in the business and works on and offsite at other times according to the needs of the Storelink business using other members of the Clarian team as required. Each member of the Clarian team has different areas of expertise which has proven invaluable to Storelink to ensure the right solution is delivered at the right time.

Storelink's business needs and challenges

Storelink has been in the sales and merchandising business for over a decade and with over 300 employees and contractors, didn't have a job description for anyone in the business. There were no measures for staff performance or set criteria on how staff should do their jobs and their recruitment process was outdated too. "We thought we were doing okay in these areas, but once we had Dawn assessing what we were doing it became evident we weren't," says Korner.

The uniqueness of the business means that a manager within Storelink needs to cope with a wider workload than colleagues in similar positions. Managers can have up to 30 clients, so there is a lot they need to be aware of. "We needed to determine first whether we had the right people in the right positions," says Korner. "It's about recognising who has the right talent for the right role. Previously, we had simply brought people into the company, and then figured out what they were meant to do later."

Now, with Clarian's help, the management team identifies a role, writes a job description, and only then goes and finds the right person for the job. "We're going about this in a structured way now," Korner says. "We previously did not have an induction programme even, and now we do."

Putting new HR projects in place

Storelink and Clarian commenced the outsourced relationship by holding a two-day strategy workshop. The purpose of this workshop was to develop a company vision.

"We were able to formulate our vision within a short time," says Korner. "Your brands, our people', is a statement that sums up our business in a nutshell."

For Korner, the workshop was about the company recognising they are one of the top service providers in the industry and to start planning with that in mind.

Another aim of the workshop was to prioritise some key projects that would help deliver the newly created strategy. One of these projects focused on team engagement and encompasses all people related activities including recruitment processes, job descriptions, retention and remuneration.

The management team also wanted to work on improving operational efficiencies and hence other projects were identified at the strategy day that would focus on reviewing the company's mix of products and clients, research margins and profitability, review internal processes and implement continuous improvement processes.

Now, once a month, the senior management team comes together from all around New Zealand to be part of a management development programme delivered by Dawn that incorporates individual coaching and workshops to address common team development needs. "These are things we could not have done on our own," says Korner.

The value of working hand in hand with an HR partner

"Now that we have procedures and projects in place, the biggest success of having a HR partner like Clarian has been the buy in from our team," says Korner. With the capabilities of the Clarian HR team being so diverse, Storelink have moved from putting the basics in place, to supporting managers develop themselves and their team, to looking at ways to increase staff engagement and ultimately the bottom line. "Dawn has been able to engage the whole team, first and foremost because she understands the culture of our business. She does it in a non-threatening way – staff are often scared of HR people, and of saying or doing the wrong thing. This isn't the case with Dawn."

Dawn works with Storelink's team on a day-to-day basis, and has taken on some important projects. An example of her working with the team is with the Sales Manager. He had been with the company for a long time and had always struggled with effective planning. Dawn has worked with him to improve his planning and response time to emails. "There has been a dramatic change," Korner says.

Storelink managers now go straight to Dawn for advice on staffing issues. "With so many employees, employment issues crop up every day," says Korner. "It's crucial to have that sounding board so that we ensure that we are making the right decisions consistently."

Not shying away from outsourcing

"Many companies want to retain all functions in-house, and be all things to all people," says Korner. "By doing that you risk losing focus on your core business. We value outsourcing because we ourselves are an outsourcing business" Storelink did attempt to take on functions that were outside their area of expertise initially but in the past two years Storelink has aligned itself with third party companies that are experts in their fields. "We had to identify what we were good at, and outsource the rest," says Korner. "We contract out to Tosco for marketing needs and DSV for warehousing and logistics. It made sense then, to outsource our HR needs to Clarian."

Bring in the experts

"Ultimately, Clarian helped us recognise that we shouldn't be afraid to go out and get some advice from experts who know what they are talking about," says Korner. "For too long, we thought we knew everything, and we made some errors in employment matters that cost us. Now, however, we have the confidence to focus on what we do best, knowing that the employment side of our business is well and truly taken care of."

"The ability of the whole Clarian HR team to understand the culture, needs and expectations of the business, and deliver to us, means Storelink has benefitted from a seamless provision of HR support."