

## Supporting EVP and recruitment through effective conversations

In conversation with **Lucy King**, Director of Talent & Performance, and **Maria Giannakopoulou**, HR & Recruitment Coordinator, A+E Networks EMEA



### The customer

A+E Networks EMEA is a global broadcaster that creates and shares stories that matter for +100 markets, and employs almost 300 people across the UK, Spain, Italy, South Africa, Germany and Poland. It's an organisation with wide-ranging HR needs – but one that places universal importance on employee wellbeing, coaching, and performance. Every employee has a voice, and is encouraged to be themselves, and as befits an organisation with offices in London, Madrid, Rome, Warsaw, Johannesburg and Munich, difference and diversity are also widely celebrated.

Another thing that's very evident is the company's strong belief in the individual – something reflected in one of its core values statements: **embrace responsibility, invent for tomorrow and channel your passion in everything that you do.**"

### The challenge

When Lucy joined the business in 2016, the company's existing appraisal system was geared towards annual performance reviews. Lucy's first initiative was to make the appraisal process voluntary whilst she assessed longer term needs. It soon became clear that A+E Networks EMEA needed a solution more in keeping with the company's status as a creative organisation that champions the individual. As part of that, the chosen solution also needed to align with its core values: "Be You, Own it, Love What You Do, Fight Like a Family / Win As a Team, Think Next".

On top of this, the team wanted a solution that would help to boost its Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and recruitment marketing by underlining the company's commitment to enabling open conversations and continuous development. The team

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Maria Giannakopoulou, Recruitment Coordinator, A+E Networks UK.

looked at a wide variety of tools but all seemed to be based around a ranking system. **For Lucy, the solution needed to be coaching-based, inclusive, and designed to inspire employees to perform at their best.**

## The solution

When Lucy came across OpenBlend, she was instantly drawn to the importance it placed on coaching conversations. Alongside this, the team responded to the importance that OpenBlend places on employee-led performance, and its flexibility in creating those employee-led experiences. **It seemed a perfect reflection of the culture they wanted to create: supporting people through meaningful dialogue and ongoing coaching – something that would also help to drive talent attraction in a competitive market.** The system was tested by the HR team for three months before the solution was then shared with the leadership team.

A+E Networks EMEA is a storytelling organisation, and the stories that came out of that initial HR test helped communicate the benefits of OpenBlend to the wider



team. HR spent time training its managers, encouraging them to “dive in” to OpenBlend and take advantage of its simplicity and intuitive style. In addition, the OpenBlend team supported the launch on-site, training up key champions within the business who then helped to guide other managers and employees as they began using the new tool.

## The results

**OpenBlend is now a key part of A+E Networks EMEA’s internal culture, as well as its recruitment and employee value proposition.** Maria Giannakopoulou, A+E Networks UK’s HR & Recruitment Coordinator, always tries to discuss OpenBlend with new starters or when an offer has been made. “We are looking for candidates that can be themselves and are owning their career development. This goes hand in hand with our “Be You and Own it” values. OpenBlend helps us create a safe space for employees to have open and honest conversations, be themselves, own their development and really love what they do, as it supports them in a holistic way.”

New hires occasionally have concerns about discussing wellbeing with their manager – often a hangover from previous jobs, where discussing personal challenges might have affected their career prospects. At A+E Networks EMEA, people are encouraged to speak up and express what they

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need in order to perform at their best. That all-important ingredient for high performance – psychological safety – can be difficult to get right, but Lucy and Maria have made a point of encouraging that honesty and candour from the moment a new candidate begins the interview process. They feel the importance of showing commitment to those values in a genuinely holistic way.

Lucy and Maria also provide the OpenBlend team with regular feedback and suggestions. **OpenBlend’s flexibility – from adapting the language on the system, to helping managers understand how to leverage the insights they get – has been a key benefit.** Even when managers aren’t natural coaches, or find it difficult to express themselves in that way, OpenBlend gives them the guidance they need to support effective conversations.

Five years into their partnership with OpenBlend, Lucy and Maria are now receiving consistently positive feedback from employees who say they’re being heard more, and more

often, by their managers. This change has had an incredibly positive impact on their culture: a real demonstration of how A+E Networks brings its values to life. Lucy and Maria often hear the phrase **“I never would have had that conversation with my manager without OpenBlend”**: a testament to the tool’s effectiveness and A+E Networks’ focus on helping its people to perform at their best, both as individuals and as part of a team.

This culture of openness extends further than employee-manager conversations, too: the team are currently planning a “Refresh and Reset” launch in order to meet employees’ evolving needs. They have a better understanding of what their people find useful and how they’re using OpenBlend, and this has helped them to respond to the impact of the pandemic and the changing business environment. Today, OpenBlend is a fundamental part of the company’s culture and continues to support broad and effective conversations around wellbeing, motivation, development, and performance.



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**To learn more about the OpenBlend platform and how it can support conversations in your organisation, get in touch.**

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