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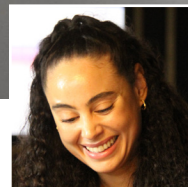
Blue Square: powering performance through meaningful conversations

Sector: Media & Marketing

Number of employees: +400

Reason for change: Create a culture of coaching following Covid disruption

Results (so far): 200% increase in one-to-ones in under a year!



Natasha Rose,
Head of HR



Truseet Patel,
People Business
Partner

The customer

Blue Square is at the forefront of retail marketing innovation. The agency connects audiences with brands by harnessing the power of human touch in the physical and virtual world using insightful data and frictionless technology in the moments that matter. Blue Square grows sales, increases loyalty, and builds love for some of the world's biggest brands.

With over 400 employees, Blue Square is a culture-first organisation that puts people experience at the heart of everything – something that is evidenced by its partnership with OpenBlend. To learn more about this, we sat down with senior HR leaders, Natasha Rose and Truseet Patel, to get the lowdown on the journey so far...



Key challenges:

Inconsistency of one-to-ones across the business

Arduous and admin-heavy processes

Existing HR tech lacked requisite functionality

Difficult to extract data insights for reporting

The challenges

Due to the pandemic – and the disruption that followed – Blue Square’s leaders wanted to revitalise the company’s approach to people management by creating a culture of coaching for performance.

Commenting on the key challenges that existed at that time, Natasha says: “Performance conversations were happening inconsistently. Some teams were doing quarterly reviews without fail, while others weren’t following a particular cycle – when they did happen, for lots of our teams, they were very much centred around KPI achievement.” Adding to this, Truseet explains: “The existing process was arduous for employees in particular who were having to do a lot of preparation in order to evidence their work and performance.”

Blue Square’s incumbent HR system also lacked the functionality needed to support effective conversations around motivation and wellbeing: “Our previous HR system was able to facilitate basic manager–employee conversations, but it wasn’t built for purpose and so the people experience was much less intuitive – it felt like a process, not a conversation.” (Natasha)

There were issues with reporting, too: “It was difficult to extract data from our existing HR tool, says Natasha. That created headaches with regards to reporting & gaining insights.”

Objectives

To solve these challenges, the team set out four core objectives:

- Encourage two-way, employee-led performance conversations with a focus on employee development and the employee experience
- Drive success by enabling conversations that support an understanding of the individual – their personal motivations and wellbeing factors
- Shift from evidence-based ‘reviews’ to little and often meaningful conversations that promote a better understanding of people’s needs and the support available to them
- Drive a true culture of coaching by giving leaders the tools to ask the right questions, provide valuable feedback, and facilitate the growth of their teams.



“I first heard about OpenBlend on a webinar and was struck by its potential to drive the new behaviours we were trying to instil. It really blends those crucial elements of culture, wellbeing, and performance.”

Natasha



OpenBlend has provided me with an opportunity to talk about subjects otherwise not discussable in a standard review format. It allows my manager to understand what's going on with me, my work, my personal circumstances, and wellbeing, [and we can] discuss how those things may affect my performance. It makes it a lot easier to track progress and we get to see where our strengths are and areas for improvement should be.

Andrew Alves Gouveia, Employee

Why OpenBlend?



User experience

Truseet cites this as “a massive priority” because the team wanted to make sure that one-to-ones would no longer feel like a process. “It had to be all about the conversation and OpenBlend is built to support that. The prompts and notifications are really useful, and we love that the employee is able to lead the conversation around the topics that are most important to them.”



Ease of reporting

Given the existing challenges with reporting, OpenBlend's real-time dashboard was especially appealing to the Blue Square team: “We recognised that OpenBlend could make our reporting a lot easier, said Truseet. The technology enables us to view high level data points and make comparisons to pull out particular themes, and importantly, shape our plans around those.”



Meaningful conversations

It was OpenBlend's modern take on the manager-employee conversation that ultimately swayed the team's decision, however. Natasha explains: “Our overarching ambition was to move towards better quality

conversations, so we were looking for a framework that focuses on the individual and supports a deeper understanding of their needs to ultimately help drive performance. That's very much what OpenBlend does.”

A phased implementation

The platform was subsequently rolled out to Blue Square's people over a six-month period beginning in April 2022. But before this, OpenBlend was piloted by the People team who spent time learning about the system to ensure they would be able to answer questions and help others down the line.

Truseet explains: “We opted for a soft launch to allow for manager training and we deliberately didn't train employees because we wanted managers, not HR, to be the cultural heroes for this way of working. The OpenBlend team trained us first and then we took responsibility for sharing the tool with our management teams, which worked really well.”

This initial training also served as a vital means of communicating the reasons for the transition to meaningful conversations, as well as the benefits to be gained.



“I think [OpenBlend] is fantastic – one of the best investments in personal and employee development. [It’s] a great tool that supports managers in creating regular, personalised, and productive one-to-ones with team members – having a real impact on productivity, performance, wellbeing, engagement, and also retention. My team feels OpenBlend is driving the right behaviours and their voices are heard and supported with ongoing meaningful conversations.

Roisin Thompson, Manager

↑ 200%

increase in the number of employees having regular one-to-ones within a year of using OpenBlend

Results (so far)

So nearly a year on, what do Blue Square’s managers and employees have to say about OpenBlend? “They love that it’s employee-led and focused on the individual, says Natasha. “Our people are able to have much broader conversations because one-to-ones are not simply about goals and performance ratings anymore. OpenBlend is enabling a very different kind of conversation that really seeks to get the best out of every individual.”

Perhaps the biggest indicator of success is that in less than a year, the number of employees who are having regular one-to-ones has increased by 200%!

What’s next?

Talking about the next stage of the journey, Truseet says: “We’ve already seen a huge increase in the number of manager-employee conversations. To get to 90% is fantastic, but we want to reach 100% – that’s our next goal and we believe it’s achievable.”

“More than anything, adds Natasha, we want to make sure that people are continuing to have meaningful conversations that add value and increase performance as a result.”

To learn how OpenBlend can support regular and effective conversations in your organisation, get in touch with our team

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