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Profiles International®

CASE STUDY

Young BrickStreet Insurance Performs Like Seasoned Veteran

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The metrics for BrickStreet Mutual Insurance Co. are healthy. Holding more than half of the market share in West Virginia and an A.M. Best rating, the organization conveys an image of strength, trustworthiness and years of experience.

And the company is indeed strong, with $450 million in surplus and $1.3 billion in total assets. Customers trust its integrity, as shown by the insurance carrier's market share. Yet BrickStreet Mutual Insurance is a young company, with a launch dating only to January 2006. That's the year BrickStreet took over the responsibility of fulfilling West Virginia's workers' compensation claims as the state's first private insurance carrier.

The company's achievements to date are not surprising, however, because BrickStreet leaders have a vision for what customer service looks like. They ensure the company's spot at the top of the A-list by employing a unique business model called BrickStreet 360 and by adopting a mission of superb service. A strong relationship with Profiles International helps the insurance carrier find and maintain the high-performing workforce that sustains both day-to-day performance and future growth.

The Background

BrickStreet takes its name from the sturdy brick streets in Charleston, W.Va., home to the company's headquarters. Overseen by a seven-member board of directors and Greg Burton as president and CEO, the organization began providing workers' compensation coverage for West Virginia after the state abolished the financially troubled West Virginia Workers' Compensation Commission in 2005.

The transition from government-run agency to private enterprise was historic. In January 2006, BrickStreet began offering coverage to 42,000 West Virginia employers. For two years -- until 2008 -- the organization was the only source of workers' compensation coverage for all employers doing business in West Virginia. Then the market opened to all private carriers, except for several state agencies. By the end of 2012, however, all state agencies can purchase coverage from any carrier. That BrickStreet enjoys 60 percent market share is customer testament to the company's expertise.

Meanwhile, BrickStreet is not sitting still as market competition increases. The organization's customers now include employers in West Virginia and surrounding states. By the end of 2014, BrickStreet will be writing policies in 13 states, including the District of Columbia.

Challenges

- Transitioning from a government-run commission to a private entity.
- Putting workers in new roles by finding the smoothest fit between worker and position.
- Getting the company off and running with a need to communicate with customers who had relationships with BrickStreet's competitors.

Solution

- Use the PXT for screening, job candidate fit, coaching, and consulting.
- Review the PPI with the employee and give the management report to the supervisor to review. Later they use these reports for a team building exercise
- BrickStreet certifies their HR team managers on how to use the PXT, PPI, and CSP so that they understand the need for these assessments.

Results

- Their goal is to have 100% manager use of the assessments so that they can use those for all discussions whether it is performance issue to career path.
- From 2011 to 2012 Employee turnover decreased by 50%.
- From 2011 to 2012 Manager turnover decreased almost by 41%.

Company Hallmarks

Two things hold significance in the office culture, says Director of Human Resources Terri McCormick, a 25-year veteran of HR roles in a variety of businesses. One is an attitude of caring for BrickStreet's 335 employees as individuals. This philosophy begins at the top and is more than mere words. "Our CEO is very concerned about employees. This manifests itself in personal ways." Workers might see the office close early on the day before a holiday, for example, or if severe weather is imminent.

Respect and concern for employees' well-being does not mean workers can overlook job tasks, however. BrickStreet leaders require performance aligned with the organization's corporate goals. These high expectations raise the bar for employee performance and dovetail with the organization's second cultural hallmark: customer service.

"Certification means that we can teach them in detail with more authority. We can speak to the how not just the what. That carries weight with our managers, who see us as being the authorities on assessments."

The company's mission statement spells out expectations for employee treatment of those with whom they do business: "Surrounding our customers with superior solutions and service." In practice, says McCormick, customers can be on the other side of the desk or a co-worker occupying the next desk. "We hire with that in mind and it works well for us."

Integral to the mission is BrickStreet 360, a business philosophy and service model designed to help customers manage and minimize risk. Instead of organizing the business by underwriting and claims, the company designed BrickStreet 360 to revolve around a company's specific coverage and safety needs while managing claims when they occur, says McCormick. "We give our policyholders a team of adjusters, underwriters, safety and return-to-work specialists supported by medical professionals, investigators, auditors and legal advisers. We have teams of professionals who can fulfill a customer's needs from A to Z."

The teams, known as the Strategic Business Group, make up the core of the company's business and work under the direction of the executive vice president. Each team's goal is to ensure fast and efficient service and handle everything from the beginning of the claim to an employee's return to work. It's a "full-circle model," says McCormick.

Each team has about 30 members, and they are divided this way:

- West Virginia small accounts
- West Virginia standard accounts and Mid-Atlantic accounts
- West Virginia large accounts and Midwest accounts
- Mining accounts

A fifth team, the South Region Team, will come online in 2012 when BrickStreet opens an office in Charlotte, N.C. This team will handle the company's Southern states.

Employees can join one of the teams from inside the company if a team position opens such as supervisor, underwriter, or claims professional, or externally if no internal candidate is available.

BrickStreet & Profiles

The BrickStreet-Profiles partnership occurred as early as 2005, when managers of the previous insurance carrier used Profiles Performance Indicator. When BrickStreet took over in 2006, managers decided to inventory and assess talent for new roles. The transition from a government-run commission to a private entity increased the urgency to take inventory of workers for new roles, McCormick says, and the assessment tools helped the company quickly identify the smoothest fit between the worker and the position.

Also factors in the partnership were a downward turn in the economy, a soft workers' compensation insurance market, a compressed time frame for getting the company off and running, and a need to communicate with customers who had long-standing relationships with BrickStreet's competitors.

The organization follows this process on recruiting and hiring: HR team members review all applications, and when they determine who meets the qualifications for employment, they send job candidates the Step One Survey II®, the ProfileXT® and the Customer Service Profile™. Once candidates have completed the assessments, the HR team reviews their scores on all three and determines whether to interview the person.

How BrickStreet Uses Assessments

The insurance organization uses PXT, which measures how well an individual fits specific jobs in an organization, to compare scores of applicants with the company's custom performance models. The resulting scores are a "huge advantage," says McCormick. "PXT helps us get people in a position who are best suited for it." This in turn increases efficiency, performance, job satisfaction and manageability.

The thinking style portion of the assessment lets hiring managers see this match clearly, says Melinda Fisher, a senior human resources generalist. PXT is also helpful throughout the employee lifecycle, she notes.

BrickStreet uses PXT for:

- Screening job candidates to determine whether the candidate, job and company are a good fit with each other.
- Looking at the scores to see how the job candidate might fit with a manager.
- Coaching employees when issues arise between managers and employees or between team members.
- Consulting reports when an employee is under consideration for promotion.

Examining what a person looks like from a PXT coaching standpoint is eye-opening, McCormick says, showing leaders the best way to approach coaching to get desired results.

Both PXT and the Customer Service Profile™ are helpful in screening candidates efficiently, giving managers confidence when they are narrowing their search for an employee and lending direction during an interview.

"We have teams of professionals who can fulfill a customer's needs from A to Z."

BrickStreet uses Profiles Performance Indicator™, which helps managers understand how an individual can be motivated and managed to improve job performance, in these ways:

- On the employee's first day on the job. The organization reviews the PPI with the employee and gives the management report to the supervisor for review.
- To conduct team-building sessions with the employee. BrickStreet hosted a team exercise with consultants to review the PPI and provided each participant with his/her report at the end of the sessions.

The Step One Survey II®, which is a brief screening tool used in the pre-employment process, gives human resources team members their first glance at the applicant. They use SOS II to determine whether they will go forward with the applicant. "The SOS II helps give us a great deal of insight about a person's integrity, honesty and employment history," McCormick says

The Future

McCormick, who respects the assessments' statistical validity, says BrickStreet is talking about two future uses for assessments -- completing performance models for all positions, and refining the validation. Performance models for key positions are already complete and in use at BrickStreet. The organization has a goal of 100 percent manager use of the assessments, so that eventually everything from performance issue discussions to career path considerations will take place with the assessments in hand. Leaders want day-to-day business usage and more questions about the assessments -- such as managers asking if something in a profile might help with an issue.

Four of the six team members in the Human Resources department hold certificates for teaching managers how to use the PXT, PPI and CSP. "Certification means that we can teach them in detail with more authority," says McCormick. "We can speak to the how, not just the what. That carries weight with our managers, who see us as being the authorities on assessments."

Meanwhile, the young organization is enjoying its success so far. Receiving the A.M. Best rating in January 2011 turned a spotlight on the company's healthy surplus, reserving methodology, investment strategy, and loss control policies and procedures. "That is a testament to our expertise and how well we serve our policyholders," McCormick says. "Overall, BrickStreet is proud of where we have been, where we are and where we plan to go."

"PXT helps us get people in a position who are best suited for it. This in turn increases efficiency, performance, job satisfaction and manageability."

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