

Case Study

Be Found Online

Location: Chicago, Illinois

2015 Revenues: \$4.5 million

Employees: 40

Industry: Marketing/Consulting Services

Highlights



Challenge

While the company was thriving, there was also a concern that its associates weren't as engaged in driving the business forward as they could be. At the same time, there was a desire on the part of the team to know more about the details of how their business worked.



Solution

Implement the GGOB at the start of 2014, starting with financial literacy training and the rolling out of a weekly, company-wide huddle to discuss not just the financials, but also updates to the sales and marketing pipeline as well as the status of current accounts.



Results

Year-over-year profits are up 100.4%, with more customers than ever signing up and renewing their contracts. Engagement among the staff is also up, and turnover is now practically non-existent even as the company operates in Chicago's red-hot entrepreneurial center.

“Our entire team is watching and paying attention to how the business runs.”



BFO (Be Found Online) is a Chicago-based digital marketing agency that delivers organic media, paid media, local search, and digital analytics solutions to medium-sized and enterprise-level businesses. The company discovered the Great Game of Business based on its interest in the so-called “gamification” of business.

Company Background

BFO's roots date back to 2009 when its two founders, Dan Golden, now president, and Steve Krull, CEO, left their big agency careers to create a more nimble and vibrant working environment. As Krull puts it: “We maintain a culture of passionate, fun people who cultivate enduring client relationships based on accountability, inspired by creativity, and driven by analytics.”

“There is no longer a sense of blissful ignorance about what it takes to run the business.”

Playing the Game Together

The biggest impact the GGOB has had on BFO's culture to date has been the level of engagement and communication that occurs in the company's weekly huddles. Prior to the GGOB, associates in both the sales and service teams struggled to understand how they actually impacted the business. Today, everyone understands how he or she plays a role in driving the company's critical number – net income before tax.

"New employees are impressed by our level of openness, and existing employees appreciate another level of involvement," says Krull. "I love hearing how our people now ask, 'Wait, how will this affect our profit?'"

The result of asking questions, like when the sales team brings in new clients, they also make sure their contracts are priced properly. One salesperson even landed a client precisely because he could intelligently talk about their P&L. At the same time, the service side of the business, which is tasked with upselling and cross-selling of existing clients, contributes to the bottom line by watching the scope of any new proposals to help ensure the company doesn't get stuck with any onerous contract terms.

Thanks to changes like that, the associates are now far more aware of its expenses – especially when it comes to travel budgets or the decision about whether to hire someone new, says Beth Spiegel, the company's operations manager. "We are now able to share the reasoning behind why certain decisions are being made," she says.

The company also invested in a new series of online scoreboards, which they call their "huddleboard", this past year as a way to help get different teams pulling in the same direction. And, rather than focusing on product level details and monthly results, the teams now focus on aggregate quarterly numbers.

"Employees understand the value of every win and every loss, and not only do they know how they affect the numbers, but how the numbers affect them."

Rapid Financial Results; Lasting Cultural Change

BFO hit the ground running with its implementation of the GGOB and its associates earned their Stake in the Outcome at the end of 2014. But 2015 proved more of a struggle when no bonuses were earned. Market conditions had shifted and sales weren't quite as robust as they had been the year before. To help get ahead of the market better, BFO embraced the High Involvement Planning process in August 2015. Teams reported their goals for the coming year and were then asked if they believed in those goals and could support them. "It was like peeling an onion where we allowed more people to raise their hands and provide feedback," says Spiegel. "It allows the groundswell to have impact and change where we are headed."

BFO started to reap the rewards of these changes in the first quarter of 2016, when they blew their first quarter's bonus structure out of the water and actually had to revisit to increase the payouts. "We had phenomenal sales growth, and realigned our organizational structure in order to facilitate such fantastic momentum," says Spiegel.

"The GGOB helps ensure that even as we grow, no one is a cog in a wheel or left in the dark, and that we are all invested in the future of the business."