

Case study

Balancing objectives with wellbeing at the height of the pandemic

In conversation with **Sarah Mason**,
Chief People Officer, Foxtons



The customer

Foxtons is one of the UK's best known estate agents. With around 1,100 staff operating across more than 50 offices, the company is a recognisable fixture throughout the capital's high streets and a key player in the London and Surrey property markets.



The challenge

Like all estate agents, Foxtons is a sales-led organisation. Performance conversations tended to focus on targets, and because Foxtons did not use a formal performance management platform, those conversations varied from site to site and manager to manager. Conversations were also not being routinely tracked, which made it difficult for the business to adopt a consistent approach to performance.

“Each manager would hold these conversations, but their approach varied... some would use standard Office technology to track what was agreed, but many didn't. It was informal, unstructured, and although the managers were aiming to have effective reviews, they might have missed key areas due to the lack of structure.”

Sarah and the two Chief Sales Officers met with a number of leadership training companies: the aim was to upskill

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“OpenBlend drives performance by enabling people. It’s not formulaic and process-oriented, as many of these platforms are. Having something that takes account of wellbeing, balance and motivation: it was the perfect solution.”

Sarah Mason, Chief People Officer, Foxtons



their managers, enabling them to have better and more frequent check-ins with their teams. But after seeing several presentations and weighing up their options, the leadership team agreed that a traditional training programme would not provide the sustainable solution it needed. Instead, they wanted a tool that would create positive and lasting behaviour change – and in particular, they wanted to inspire managers and employees to have broader conversations: addressing targets and key objectives, but also motivation, wellbeing and development.

The solution

Sarah makes sure she stays across developments in business technology, both to keep herself informed and to have plenty of ammunition at her disposal when she encounters a problem that technology might be able to solve. A meeting with OpenBlend’s Founder & CEO, Anna Rasmussen, a few months earlier had shown her the potential benefits of having holistic conversations and getting to the heart of employees’ motivations.

Those presentations from the leadership training companies gave Sarah the context she needed. Rather than a one-off training course for managers, she saw how OpenBlend could encourage a change in behaviour throughout the business. Sarah needed no convincing as to the benefits of broadening the manager-employee conversation. Objectives – particularly for a sales-led organisation – will always be crucial, but it was the breadth of OpenBlend’s offering that really appealed to her. Sarah saw it as a tool which could enable managers to help people be better at their jobs: clear objective-setting, a focus on the quality and breadth of the conversation, and with the GROW model baked into the system.

The Foxtons team ran a number of webinars throughout Q4 2019, with the aim of preparing people to adopt OpenBlend in Q1 2020. The platform was rolled out during performance review time to an initial ~800 front office staff: the boots on the ground, so to speak. Crucially, this happened during the first COVID lockdown, which placed even more emphasis on employee wellbeing. In collaboration with OpenBlend, Sarah’s team issued guidance on what to cover in these conversations and how frequently to have them - advice that was well-received and which ultimately contributed to a successful launch.

On top of this, Sarah also consulted with the Foxtons Employee Engagement Committee to capture a wide range of employee feedback on how OpenBlend should be used, all of which fed into the company’s framework for best practice.



“I just had the best conversation I’ve had with John* in years!”

Foxtons branch manager

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The results

From the outset, the Foxtons team was rigorous in their efforts to measure success. In the first year of engagement, they saw substantial increases in both the number of employee-manager check-ins (162% up on the previous year) and objectives (a 288% increase). Alongside this, Sarah ran her own assessment using the classic Kirkpatrick model, and received enthusiastic feedback on both the value of the platform and the impact it had made in how people were approaching one-to-ones.

“We reaped the benefits both from the rollout - which we took great care with - and the fact that we’d picked a crucial time of the year for performance and feedback. It focussed everyone’s minds and contributed hugely to the success of the launch.”

On top of this, Sarah points to tangible increases in employee engagement, particularly the areas of “happiness and confidence” and “stress management”. The fact that Foxtons was able to see an increase in employee engagement during the height of the pandemic is a remarkable feat – and Sarah cites OpenBlend as a key driver.



Finally, and most importantly of all, Foxtons can draw a line from its implementation of OpenBlend to a series of marked increases in key business metrics. These include increased market share, and a substantial spike in both negotiator performance metrics and total group revenue. During a challenging, stressful time, both for society and for business, Foxtons and OpenBlend are finding a way to excel.

“Our partnership with OpenBlend goes beyond the typical customer-vendor relationship. We work together in what is a genuinely collaborative partnership. There’s very much a feeling that our success is their success, and that’s been evident from day one. The team really took the time to understand our pain points and what would make a positive difference.”

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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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