

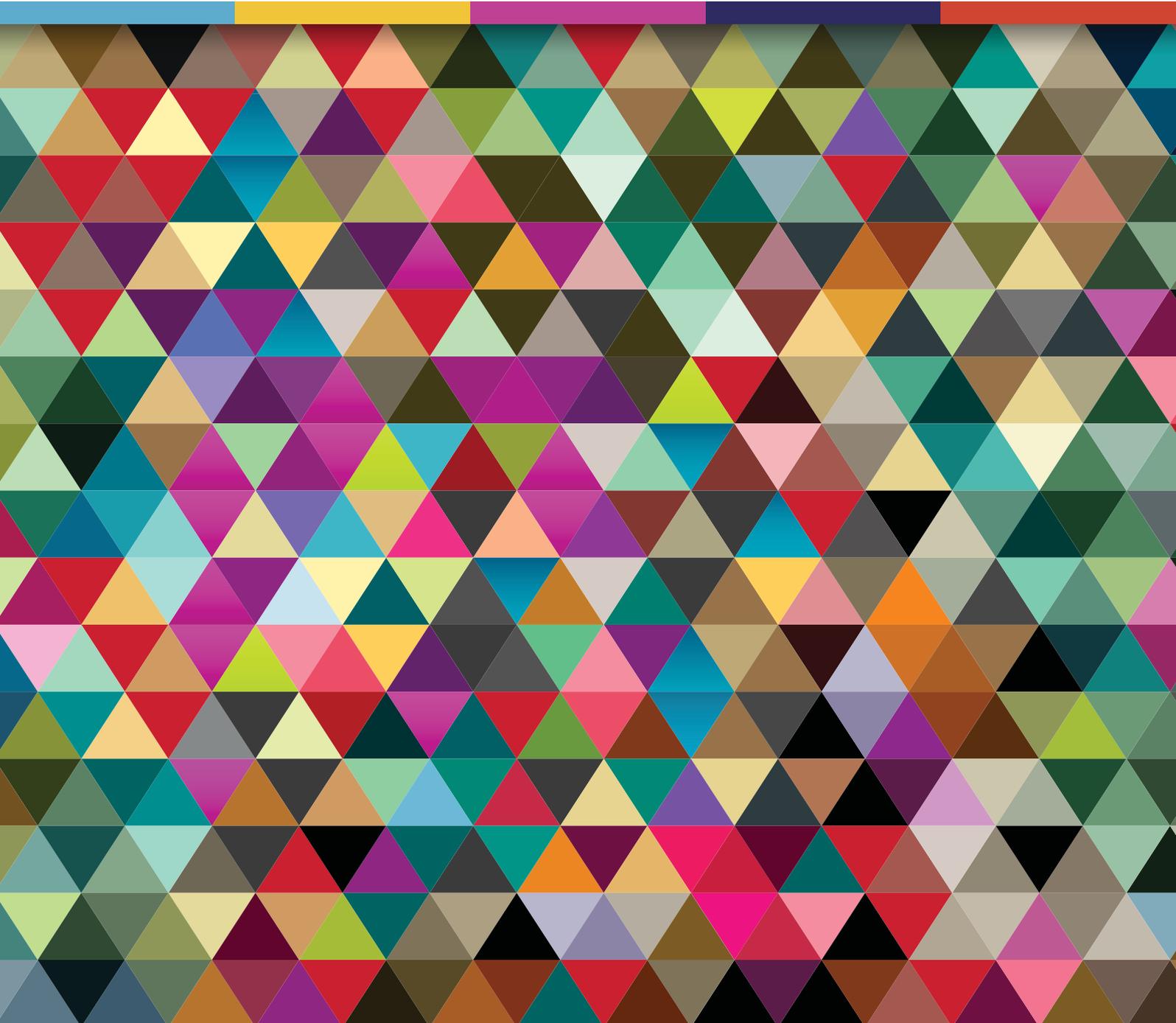
Case Study 2019

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Walgreens Boots Alliance



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**Transforming engagement
through leadership**

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Transforming engagement through leadership

The Walgreens Boots Alliance (WBA) explains the approach taken in helping its leaders become role models in employee engagement.

In 2014, two industry-leading brands with shared values, Walgreens and Alliance Boots, merged to form the Walgreens Boots Alliance (WBA), which is now the global leader in pharmacy-led health and wellbeing retail, and a multi-billion pound business. Across both Walgreens and Boots, the company has over 415,000 employees and more than 18,500 stores in 11 countries. With more than 390 distribution centres, WBA is the largest pharmaceutical wholesale and distribution network in the world. WBA sells some of the most iconic brands in the beauty space, including No7, Soap and Glory, Liz Earle, Sleek, Botanics, YourGoodSkin, and many more; it is also one of the world's largest purchasers of prescription drugs and other health products.

Kathi Leon, International Senior Communications Director at WBA Group, introduces the company further. "The WBA's vision is to be the first choice of pharmacy in wellbeing and beauty, and to care for people and communities around the world. Global Brands is part of WBA, and its vision is totally aligned to the WBA's, aiming to give the world health and beauty brands they truly love in an affordable, accessible way." She continues: "We have a very long heritage with Boots of over 170 years, and 119 years with Walmart."

In 2017, research was published that quantified the positive impact that employee engagement can have in business performance and financial results. Leon says: "This is evident in a wide range of our business metrics, from sick

absence and staff turnover, to productivity, sales volumes, and customer satisfaction."

She explains that it is understandable that when leaders invest more time and money in engaging their employees it boosts results and productivity internally to improve output, rather than investing far more in marketing, to get more of a return on investment (ROI). She says: "We are hoping that by making changes in line with this WBA can achieve a better ROI".

Furthermore, Leon describes why a new, multi-channel, 360° communications campaign was needed within the company, as opposed to a singular 'one-size fits all' approach. "Our employee audience in Global Brands consists of around 2,500 people spread across several sites in the UK, New York and Chicago in the US, and Shanghai and Hong Kong in Asia," she says. "This is a multicultural, geographically dispersed workforce operating in different time zones, and in both Shanghai and Hong Kong English is not their first language."

She elaborates: "In addition to this, different people consume information in different ways and have different channel preferences. Therefore, we needed to provide the same message in a multi-channel format, and that is why a 360° communications campaign was absolutely needed."

One purpose of this new communication campaign was to ensure that all employees



Kathi Leon

International Senior
Communications Director
WBA Group

understood and felt engaged in the company's new business plan prior to the start of the new financial year, and felt able to hit the ground running, understanding fully what was expected of them and their role to play. Leon says: "We carried out an Employee Engagement survey and many people couldn't see how their role contributed to delivery of the 2019 Financial Year plan (FY19), and we wanted to fix that."

The WBA's business plan for the 2020 financial year (FY20) has six pillars of strategic focus. Leon says: "Four of the pillars are an evolution from the previous year, and then two are completely new. One of these new pillars aims to help us grow by saving more money to invest back into the business, and one focuses around protecting our planet and communities." This environmental effort has been recognised publicly, as Walgreens was named in FORTUNE magazine's 2019 Companies that Change the World list, and Boots UK was recognised as Responsible Business of the Year 2019-2020 by Business in the Community.

Leon describes how the WBA is effecting this plan: "We have face-to-face activities in support of the campaign and we make sure we have effective management briefing tools available throughout the business. The WBA aims for all employees to feel proud to work for Global Brands and to understand the company vision."

Another key element of engaging the WBA's workforce to make their aims a reality is by earning the support and involvement from the company's leaders. "It's really important to remember that leaders are employees as well. We shouldn't assume that their profession means that they are engaged and will automatically promote what we want them to do. They are consumers of our communications and recipients of change just like the people who work for them."

"They play a very critical role in informing and engaging their team members, and as a result can either be really helpful, or can block, the changes we want them to encourage," she says. "Some employees don't have access to communication channels, such as field staff or warehouse teams, where for some of them English is not their first language, and really need their leaders to play a very important role as part of our communication channels to translate information and help their teams to understand their role to play in their business area."

Leon describes how the leaders were supported in this process. "We had dedicated face-to-face sessions with Global Brands. We did a session with our leaders where we gave them clarity on their roles, what is expected of them, gave them the chance to ask questions. In addition, we continue to have a weekly newsletter for our leaders with channel reminders." This approach has proven successful so far, with employees rating the launch a 4.2/5 and stated that it gave them emotional connections and real results.

Moving forward, Leon says that WBA will be "developing" their "operations, marketing, and commercial teams to ensure they understand that they are driving and energising their teams to achieve the desired outcomes of the new business plan, and keeping the momentum going." The 360° communication channels will also be utilised further. "We will check in quarterly on how we are progressing with the business plan execution, and this progress will be broadcast to all of the people in Global Brands' via our Global Brand leadership teams."

"Finally, we also try to bring employee skills to the brands and products so they can become brand advocates, and continue to have updated stories and celebration stories in our fortnightly newsletter, as well as the WBA Global Brands intranet."

If you are interested in becoming one of our featured speakers, please contact our Editor, **Elizabeth Akass**, at

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