

Expanding EMBARQ's Winning Talent-Management Formula

This is part of the Case Studies in Technology advertising supplement.

In 2007, telecommunications services provider EMBARQ Corp. began a talent-measurement initiative in partnership with PreVisor that proved ROI in the millions in the first round. Two years later, there is more to the story. Michael Blair and Kristopher Fritsche, managers of talent assessment, are the creative professional team responsible for these results based on best-practices selection and assessment design.

EMBARQ has approximately 16,500 employees serving more than 4.5 million households and 500,000 businesses in 18 states. It provides the total communication needs for its customers through wireless, local/long-distance phone services, data and high-speed Internet connections, and entertainment access. (An announcement was made Oct. 27, 2008, that EMBARQ is being acquired by CenturyTel, creating one of the leading telecommunications companies in the United States.)

The overall ROI for the new Consumer Solution Representatives' assessment process equated to \$233.33 per dollar spent.

Other business units are showing equally impressive results. According to David Cordisco, director of retail sales, "Since implementing the assessment in May of 2007, annual turnover for our retail sales consultants has decreased from 90 percent to 43 percent. This has resulted in significant costs savings and allowed us to shift training time away from new hires to employee development."

Kelly Blay, director of small business sales and care, adds, "After implementation, our first new-hire class had a 100 percent show rate and not one associate dropped out during the six-week training. Historically, we were losing 25 percent to 30 percent

of our new hires before they ever made it to the call-center floor. The new approach has proven successful in our fast-paced, competitive sales environment."

EMBARQ has expanded the use of assessments to more than 75 percent to 80 percent of its 2,500 annual hires.

The selection process gets targeted results using position-specific, Web-based screening and selection measures in both proctored and un-proctored settings. Tests may measure personality, interpersonal communication, decision-making, coaching, dependability, customer focus, sales, etc. Role plays and structured interviews are also used via teleconference or face-to-face.

Fritsche acknowledges the effort behind an effective talent-measurement process. "It's not a good idea to take shortcuts or just pull something off the shelf," he says. "It took close to 10 months working with PreVisor to develop a leadership assessment that spans across multiple internal organizations. Do the work necessary to understand what goes into the job and what differentiates success and failure."

"You also have to consider the business realities," adds Blair. "We could put together an assessment center for upper-level managers that would have high validity and be very predictive. But realistically, we can't take manager candidates offline for three days -- it would slow or shut down business."

The candidate experience is another very important consideration at EMBARQ, monitored through recruiters who have an intimate look at the candidate pool. It has found that the more technical the position, the more candidates seem to tolerate more complex, lengthy assessments. Hourly position candidates have low tolerance for long assessments.

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Putting this much thought into the process and experience for candidates has paid off.

“The optimized hiring process we’ve built in our call centers has impacted our business with bottom-line results. We’ve leveraged technology to put managers and recruiters in roles that maximize their efforts. This has positively impacted employee churn with new hires that match the work they are recruited to perform, managers’ confidence in the hiring process and overall better performance of agents,” states Lottie Ryans, EMBARQ’s director of solutions, call centers.

“From beginning to end, building a partnership with the business-unit leaders is the key,” concludes Blair. “Involve them up-front, listen to them, pilot the new program, let them have input, and make changes. Then watch the top and bottom lines grow.”

Download a complimentary report summarizing this case study and 32 more at:

<http://www.previsor.com/results/outcome/2009>.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Organization:** EMBARQ Corp.
- **Headquarters:** Overland Park, Kan.
- **Primary Business:** The corporation offers a complete suite of communications services, with operations in 18 states, and is in the Fortune 500.
- **HR Challenge:** To put in place a best-in-class talent-measurement system from the ground up, using assessments with measurable results.