

BSkyB case study

Company profile

BSkyB is a world leader in multi-channel digital television. Launched 16 years ago, the Company owns 28 channels including Sky One, Sky News, Sky Sports and Sky Movies and has almost eight million sky digital customers.

BSkyB employs 11 000 staff in multiple geographical locations, including London, Harrogate, Chilworth and Scotland. Their occupations are wide ranging, from television producers and satellite engineers to presenters, production staff and call centre employees.

In May 2005, following an independent audit, BSKyB won an international award from the British Safety Council for its lower than industry average accident rate.



The problem

BSkyB has grown rapidly since its birth thanks to the energy and commitment of its people. The challenges faced by the various areas of the business to deliver world class service and products and the speed of delivery created a sense of pride in the company as a whole, but fostered a sense of belonging to a local team rather than to the larger whole. James Murdoch, the new Chief Executive Officer appointed in 2003, saw the unification of the company's diverse population as one of his key objectives. Management were in full agreement with his policy that all strands of the business should be connected in order to work together on common goals. James saw the importance of effective communication between workforce and management as a method of delivering that aim.

The solution

To help achieve James's objective the company decided to create a Forum which would bring together the views of the company workforce and the executive management committee – Worker Involvement. The Forum evolved from



*James Murdoch,
Chief Executive Officer, BSKyB*



*Beryl Cook,
Director for People, BSKyB*

two previously established bodies: The Sky Speakers, consisting of the field engineers and the contact centre, and the Employee Forum from the company headquarters in Osterley, Middlesex. Both bodies consisted of volunteer representatives from the workforce. Beryl Cook, Director for People, said: 'Our aim was to establish an effective two-way communication channel that 'plugged in' employees from all over the UK and created a partnership between management and employees.

'We considered feedback from the members of the Sky Speakers and the Employee Forum before deciding to create just one forum for the whole organisation. This had practical



A BSKyB call centre in action

advantages in that there had been a large degree of similarity between the issues raised by the two separate bodies, and there was duplication in management answering these queries.

‘We created the Forum by dividing the business into representative constituencies, taking into account the remote geographical locations and the differing communities.’



Christoph Williams,
Forum manager, BSKyB

Christoph Williams, the Sky Forum manager, said: ‘Although the actual setting up of the Forum took about three to four months, we were still tweaking some of the operational processes six months on. Staff were made aware of and involved in the establishment of the Forum through posters, an internal publicity campaign using email flyers and pamphlets, and mail shots to their homes. A total of 70 Forum members were

elected by company employees through a secret ballot process, overseen by the Electoral Reform Society. Once appointed, elected members took part in induction training.’

The role of the Forum members was discussed and agreed with them as was the entire shape of the body and its processes. Members were to represent the views and issues of employees and to consult on health and safety matters. Having actively promoted employee involvement in health and safety at all levels as part of its two-year health and safety improvement programme, it was of prime importance to management that health and safety was at the top of Forum agendas. The company’s health and safety department is also empowered to add issues to the agenda as and when necessary.

The Forum meets on a national level at least three times a year in Osterley or Edinburgh, as well as holding local meetings across a range of different sites. James Murdoch and other members of the executive team attend the Forum – a demonstration from the highest level of the company’s commitment to the importance of worker involvement to its business performance.

A Forum website, internal mail and a paper based system enable employees to raise any topic, idea or concern with their elected representatives. At regular intervals the members vote to decide which issues are dealt with as agenda items at the national or local meetings. If an item does not make it onto an agenda, however, a response is given via the website.

The results

The Forum has created greater employee engagement and awareness of health and safety. Since its launch one year ago, Forum members have found almost one hundred ways to create a safer and healthier workplace, working with health and safety and general management. Distinct achievements have included the resolution of safe access and egress issues at the Dunfermline call centre, the revision of the fire safety procedures within the main transmission control room in Osterley, and a review of the roof working procedures for field engineers, resulting in the development of a revised process.

Mark Sayer, Group Head of Health and Safety, said: ‘Our experience with the Sky Forum has been very positive. ***When health and safety issues were raised we were able to engage in in-depth two-way consultation with the Forum members, which secured an operational ‘sense check’ leading to practical solutions that were fit for purpose. This enabled us to implement revised health and safety strategies robustly and effectively.***



Members of the executive team responding to questions from the floor

‘Forum members played a key role by ensuring that our solutions were aligned with the needs of the staff and the business through commenting on the practicality of the suggestions made. This helped us to secure a key element of our solution driven focus within BSKyB’s health and safety revitalisation programme.



Beryl Cook leading a Forum meeting

‘Other benefits include a more robust accident reporting process, which was discussed and agreed by the Forum, and a clearer understanding of staff priorities in the health and safety arena.’



Jane Reekie, Forum member and Recruitment Administrator, Dunfermline, said: ‘The Forum has given the workforce a voice and has allowed people to think for themselves. It is breaking down barriers and eliminating the ‘them and us’ mentality between management and workforce. ***It has given the workforce responsibility to deal with situations without having to consult management on every issue. This in turn leaves management more free to deal with the major problems and at the same time gives employees independence and a belief in themselves to take charge.***

‘The Forum is making a huge difference. The executives are very approachable and when issues we raise go onto the table we know things are going to happen. (the Forum) really does matter, we believe in it, and we believe in James (Murdoch). It is definitely gathering momentum and we believe it is going to stay and make BSKyB a better place to work.’

Beryl Cook, Director for People, said: ‘The Forum has made a difference in health and safety and has also achieved the broad aim of enabling communication and getting people thinking together around a larger vision for the business and the organisation. An employee survey has shown greater buy-in to the company’s direction and vision, and the role employees believe they play.’



The future

Both the workforce and management are buoyant with regards to the business future of BSKyB.

The Forum is now into its second year and continues to develop. It is an ongoing project, building better and stronger communication between management and workforce with an ethos that both parties are keen to embrace and improve.