How BARK united a distributed workforce under one culture
BARK is a company that’s all about dogs. Launched in 2012 with BarkBox, a monthly subscription box of treats, toys and accessories, the company has since become one of the fastest-growing e-tailers in the direct-to-consumer market — and has expanded to offer their own products, experiences, and content. If you have a dog in America, you’ve likely heard of BARK.

However, as the retail seasons ebb and flow, so too does BARK’s workforce. By the time the holiday season hits each year, the company’s workforce almost doubles in size to meet seasonal customer demand.

Christina Donnelly, Director of Organisational Development at BARK, discusses how the company uses Peakon to better understand and navigate the needs of this seasonal workforce alongside their permanent team, and how empowering managers and the C-Suite has been central to this goal.

“Peakon plays a critical role in helping BARK build a culture of continuous communication — meaning our managers and executive team can be responsive and proactive.”

Christina Donnelly
Director of Organisational Development at BARK

Results achieved

- 1,200+ anonymous two-way conversations started between leaders and employees
- 14-point increase in BARK’s Employee Engagement Net Promoter Score (eNPS)
- Launched an annual whole-company summit to communicate BARK’s strategy, vision and goals
- Improved engagement and driver scores across New York and Columbus, Ohio offices
Christina’s story

Identifying the employee experience gaps in a distributed workforce

When I joined BARK back in the early days, we could all fit in the same office. At that size, it was easy for managers and leaders to gauge the employee experience and understand how everyone was feeling.

However, in the last five years, we’ve grown exponentially. We now have a more distributed workforce, and during peak holiday season we almost double in size, with employees all over the world each experiencing life at BARK a little differently.

It’s not only a big team, but a diverse one which includes college students and people rejoining the workforce after raising a family. In addition to two offices in New York and Columbus, Ohio, we also have lots of remote employees that we only see on a quarterly basis.

As we scaled, I realised that as a member of the People team, I could no longer say that I understood the experience each of our employees has every day. It became a no-brainer that we needed a more sophisticated communication channel to collect and respond to employee feedback.

"Peakon gives our employees a way to feel safe giving feedback anonymously, and it helps our leaders understand the experiences our people are having and start an ongoing conversation that generates actionable insight."

Our CEO believed in the importance of employee engagement from day one, and before we started using Peakon, we ran a barebones annual survey. It gave our people the chance to offer their feedback about what was and wasn’t working, but the questions were open-ended, leading to long-form answers that weren’t quantifiable or segmentable.

Line managers didn’t have visibility into their team’s feedback — let alone a way to open a dialogue about how to improve. Our leadership was getting lots of feedback, but without the context of which team was having each experience, it was hard to know how to translate that into meaningful change.

I began to see the impact of this when employee feedback began bubbling up in other places, such as in office Slack channels. This told me that we needed a better place to have these conversations, where we could respond to this feedback before it led to turnover.

This is what ultimately led us to Peakon. Peakon gives our employees a way to feel safe giving feedback anonymously, and it helps our leaders understand the experiences our people are having and start an ongoing conversation that generates actionable insight.

Peakon is also really customer service-oriented. Any time I don’t understand something, there’s either a robust guide to it, or I can lean on our customer success team for hands-on support.

Empowering managers to take positive action on employee feedback

Since we started using Peakon, it has become an important part of employee life at BARK at all levels.

One key way we use Peakon is to support our seasonal workers. As we hit peak season, there are a lot of tools that our new hires need to become acclimated with quickly. Although we have a relatively flat hierarchy, we have a lot of young managers who are learning to lead a team for the first time.
We use Peakon to make sure we’re not only giving our managers the support and tools they need, but also so they can hear where the gaps are within their own teams.

We put a lot of responsibility on them to support our seasonal employees and provide them with a good experience of working here. We use Peakon to make sure we’re not only giving our managers the support and tools they need, but also so they can hear where the gaps are within their own teams.

At a higher level, Peakon plays a critical role in helping BARK build a culture of continuous communication — meaning our managers and executive team can be responsive and proactive.

Everyone who has direct reports has access to their team-level dashboards, so they can identify these trends and respond to them. We hold surveys on a monthly basis, so each month, BARK managers from similar teams meet to talk collectively about their Peakon results. They respond to comments together, use the data to better advocate for their teams, and build cases to present to the executive team. It’s an integral part of their workflow — and it’s really opened up the flow of communication from employees to managers and the C-Suite.

When our managers do need extra support, Peakon’s “Improve” feature provides them with targeted training content — such as relevant articles and videos — to self-direct their learning in an easy and intuitive way.

Keeping the C-Suite connected with the employee experience

Peacon has been instrumental to help us better understand the experience our teams are having, and the support they need from us as a company. Our employees now have a tool to communicate directly with our founders — and they know they’re being listened to.

This is something we’ve seen in our data. Internally, our overall employee engagement (eNPS) score has increased 14 points since launch. In our Columbus location, our environment score increased +67 points since launch, and in our New York location, engagement increased +38 points since launch.

Peacon has also helped us better understand the experiences different teams are having. Taking the case of our remote workers, for example — we now have the data to prove that we are nailing that experience. They have a high level of satisfaction and all the tools they need. And if that ever changes, I’m confident they have a vehicle where they can communicate that to us.

This is in part due to how actively involved our C-Suite has become with our employee engagement. The first day a survey goes out, our CEO and executive team start tagging me in comments, responding, observing trends and trying to understand what has changed in the last month.

They now hold a two-hour meeting each week with a focus on driving discussion around key problems, and as a result, I’ve seen a big difference in their awareness of the experience that team members of all levels are having.

Having the comments directly in front of them keeps transparency and communication top of mind, to the point where I have Henrik, our founder, reaching out and saying he’d like tools to be a better manager in specific areas that have been flagged from his Peakon feedback. That blows my mind — it’s amazing to have that level of engagement from our founders.

One of our biggest successes using Peakon was how it has paved the way for clearer, more transparent communication. When we first started using it, one of the main things that immediately surfaced was that our people don’t know what the goals or vision at BARK are.
The CEO can’t talk to everyone every day, but he devotes time every week responding to the comments surfaced by employees. When anyone in the organisation can ask a question and get a real answer that they can work with — that, to me, is a big success.”

Most of our team is based in a different office to the C-Suite, so as BARK’s goals evolved as a company, they weren’t hearing those watercooler conversations. Based on that feedback, we started hosting our annual summit. It was the catalyst we needed to bring everyone in one place to say, “this is what we’re trying to do”. When we came back from that, we saw an uptick in those key drivers in Peakon that showed there was better alignment through our whole organisation.

Ultimately, Peakon has given us an increased level of interaction with leadership that’s undeniably valuable — especially with our remote and seasonal teams.

The CEO can’t talk to everyone every day, but he devotes time every week responding to the comments surfaced by employees. When anyone in the organisation can ask a question and get a real answer that they can work with — that, to me, is a big success. We say that we’re transparent, so let’s be really transparent. This is something Peakon is helping us achieve.

Hundreds of happy companies - from startups to Fortune 100 - use Peakon.

Contact us

To learn more about how Peakon can help you predict attrition risk and reduce your costs, contact our team at mail@peakon.com or book a demo at peakon.com/book-a-demo