



Texas A&M

Graphic Solutions Group Case Study

Customer Profile

Industry: Distributors of equipment, consumables and equipment services for both large and small graphic printing markets.

Locations: Dallas (headquarters), Austin, Baton Rouge, Cincinnati, Houston, Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Milwaukee

Employees: 275

Website: gogsg.com

Business Need

Graphic Solutions Group (GSG) is focused on growing its presence as a multi-regional supplier to being considered a national supplier. Years ago, GSG recognized that their growth often resulted in new challenges and opportunities. As a result, sustainability has become a priority as they continue to scale the business.

GSG saw that while individual employees perform well within their roles, there was a gap between excellent department performance and leaders learning to expand outside their departments to understand the entire business. For instance, an employee in charge of commission may not make the best decisions for purchasing or accounting departments etc.

To grow sustainably, GSG needed resources that went beyond their internal leadership programs to enable their employees to become experts not only in their particular fields, but in the company as a whole.

Solution

GSG sent their VP of sales and their VP of finance to Texas A&M's Master of Industrial Distribution program in 2010. They immediately came to trust its value as a program and became determined to continue investing in potential leaders by sending them through the program.

Since then, the company has sponsored eight more employees with the most recent two graduating in May of 2021. Not only has all but one of the employees who graduated from the MID stayed at the company, but the company has gone to great lengths to maximize students' capstone projects through steering groups. In steering groups, GSG assigns employees who are not in the program to partner with the employees who are in the MID. The groups support students as they implement their capstone projects designed to solve immediate problems at GSG.

One particularly effective capstone project involved a GSG outside sales rep who realized during his MID experience that one of his territories would be prime for another GSG location. He designed an expansion model for his project, developing a set of important criteria that the company could use in real time when deliberating acquisitions or new branches. It became a cohesive framework for opening new locations within the last five years by using the capstone like a checklist that transformed the company from a regional supplier to a national supplier.

"You can immediately see the results from students' capstones. When they graduate, not only do they have to present to Texas A&M, but often they must present to GSG management and walk the gauntlet in front of their peers," says George Temple, Regional Manager of GSG. "The result is a lot of leaders at GSG from the MID program that handle spur of the moment challenges well."

GSG now plans to send one employee from each of their departments through the program to raise up leaders in every part of the business who understand how the decisions they make within their department affects the entire supply chain. The MID program provides the professional development, experience and knowledge GSG looks to instill in their employees.

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Benefits

Retention

GSG sees the program as a retention tool, investing in their students' capstone projects not only serves to solve immediate problems within the company, but also fosters a sense of ownership in employees. Implementing capstone projects can sometimes take years. This creates opportunities for MID graduates to take on more leadership in spearheading projects and earning promotions.

GSG sends both lesser-experienced and highly experienced professionals through the program. Temple says, "Our president thought the program would help me move up. While I was earning my MID, I was promoted to inside sales manager. When I graduated, I became a branch manager and I've been fortunate enough to receive a few promotions since then. The program helped me prepare for management."

GSG attributes retention directly to the MID's specific focus on distribution as opposed to generic business training. Graduates are less likely to leave the company since their education directly relates to their roles at GSG.

Best Practices

Now that nine employees have gone through the MID, GSG has seen a major increase in what they refer to as departmental empathy. Employees who go through the program become leaders who transcend common categories and titles like sales, purchasing or accounting.

Instead, leaders with an overview of the entire supply chain focus on completing distinct projects, no matter their specialization. This has opened doors for graduates to "remarket" themselves within the GSG structure and not only advance their careers but advance the company's practices through cross-department projects.

"The MID's courses are not just based around management or sales. It's all specific to distribution. So even though not everything was directly related to my day-to-day role, I found it very relevant," says Temple.

By guiding students' capstone projects toward research that is needed within the company, GSG is able to gain valuable staff feedback that ultimately improves morale and provides leadership with critical information. The capacity for information gathering would often not be possible without the capstone projects.

Networking

MID students work in cohorts, studying with distribution professionals from other companies during their program. The exposure to other high-performing distributors serving different markets has been invaluable. Every GSG graduate has kept in touch with peers from companies across the country. Especially during turbulent times like the pandemic, the ability to check in with experts from other distribution companies to share action steps and problem-solve has been a major benefit.

Even employees who haven't gone through the program have connected with Texas A&M's MID program. GSG's VP of human resources attended a summit and learned about creating an employee value proposition internally to use as a recruiting method from the MID professionals there. GSG team members also support their colleagues in the MID through steering committees to assist with the capstone projects.

"When you have 10 GSG employees go through the program, they're not the only ones that get exposed to it," says Temple. "Dozens of people have worked with A&M that have never even done the MID program by sponsoring a student on a steering committee."

Results:

- 90% post-MID retention rate
- Implementing student capstone projects to solve immediate company problems
 - Developed an expansion model for opening new locations
 - Improved strategic sales and inventory KPIs through stratification projects
 - Streamlined processes in sales, accounting, purchasing, equipment service, marketing, management training and operations
- Cross-trained, prepared leadership
- Deeper distribution-focused knowledge
- Increased "departmental empathy"
- Increased employee satisfaction
- Access to valuable networking with other distribution professionals
- Non-MID employees exposed to MID training
- Maximized research capabilities

About Texas A&M's Master of Industrial Distribution

Texas A&M's Master of Industrial Distribution (MID) is a 4-semester, part-time, mobile learning graduation program designed for working professionals. By incorporating both academic professors and industry leaders who co-teach each course, students not only learn theories, but applicable supply chain management, logistics, and profitability of distributors and manufacturers in industrial channels.

Request more information about the program and learn more.