Dairy Cooperative

Overview

This national dairy cooperative produces dairy products for consumers and businesses. The member-owned cooperative is widely known for its butter, and is also a large producer of cheese in the United States. The dairy cooperative is also a leading producer of animal feed, crop seed and crop protection products which it sells to farmers and ranchers through a network of farmer cooperatives.

"On the agriculture side of our business, we sell through distribution channels such as co-ops — independent businesses that are part of the our system," said the director of organizational effectiveness for the cooperative. “The owners of these businesses have retail operations too, where farmers go to buy supplies they need to run their operations." According to the director, 70 percent of the dairy cooperative’s agricultural services are sold through local co-ops.

Challenge

The dairy cooperative faced two key challenges with regard to learning. The first was making the independent business owners experts in the more complex agricultural products. This was especially important since one of the cooperative’s competitive advantages is its strong tradition of research, with a history of breakthroughs in agricultural products and services. To make this research and innovation pay off, the cooperative realized it must educate its people "to deliver superior insight to members and customers."

The second challenge was retaining its experts once they were educated. The dairy cooperative had seen some of the people in its distribution channels wooed away to sell for competing brands, and the organization wanted to develop a strategy for mitigating this loss of key talent.
Solution

As part of the solution, the cooperative developed an “expert seller strategy” that would create a consultative approach to selling, boost revenue and improve employee retention. To underpin the strategy, the cooperative knew it needed technology that would deliver extensive product training and industry knowledge, test the knowledge gained and tie all of it to sales incentives.

The dairy cooperative selected Meridian Knowledge Solutions to provide its training delivery platform. The company also implemented Meridian Anywhere to make learning available even when the trainee was not connected to the Internet. This allowed the large, distributed network of sellers to receive training through the centralized system even if they were not always online.

Results

According to the organization, the LMS-powered expert seller strategy has been very successful, as indicated by:

- Double-digit increases in sales for those who went through training via the LMS as compared to a baseline of people who didn’t
- 30 percent reduction in turnover among the independent sales people who sell the cooperative’s products to farmers

Additionally, the company has observed these benefits:

- Better training is helping people pinpoint which seeds ought to be sold in which climates and conditions, enabling farmers to maximize their investment in seeds
- Quality training has become an incentive on its own for sellers to stay within the cooperative’s network
- The LMS gives sellers of the cooperative’s agricultural services a way to pick and choose what they want to learn about and ultimately, sell
- Individuals who sell the cooperative’s products have the flexibility to take their training via the LMS in the evenings, or on weekends

About Meridian

What is your next step with learning? Meridian Knowledge Solutions helps you create measurable value with your learning strategy. Meridian provides technology platforms that empower enterprises, governments, and member-based organizations to develop their people by delivering learning, assessing performance, and fostering collaboration. We’ve been making customers our partners since 1997.

“Customers have come to value our sales people’s knowledge. And that means our sales groups are now valuable advisors at the point when customers are doing critical decision-making. This helps us impact the type of sale early in the process. We wouldn’t have seen this level of success without the Meridian LMS.”