



Case Study

Industry: Specialty Retail

Active Users: 11,000

Use Cases: Talent and Performance Management, Succession Planning, Social and Collaboration, Formal and Informal Learning

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Chris Salles
Director of eLearning
Guitar Center, Inc.

Saba Cloud Lets Guitar Center Orchestrate Talent Management, Learning, and Collaboration for its Young, Passionate Employees

Challenge

Engage a young and passionate workforce by providing more efficient and effective talent and performance management, learning and collaboration, and succession planning

Benefits

- Provides a single, cloud-based solution for talent, succession, performance, social and collaboration, and learning management
- Serves more than 11,000 employees nationwide in more than 260 Guitar Center stores, over 100 Music & Arts band sales and rental locations, several direct response operations, and corporate headquarters
- Enables the company to use informal learning and Web 2.0 social collaboration capabilities to more effectively connect with and engage a young workforce

- Allows the company to capture real-time feedback on employee performance throughout the year via its Saba-based social network
- Supports more than 1,500 formal learning modules on Guitar Center products

Guitar Center is the world’s largest retailer of guitars, amplifiers, drums, keyboards, and pro audio and recording equipment. The company has over 11,000 employees in more than 260 Guitar Center retail stores nationwide — as well as in the company’s direct response businesses, its more than 100 Music & Arts locations that sell or rent band instruments, and its headquarters in Westlake Village, California.

While the company has consistently achieved traditional measures of retail success, the way in which it does this is anything but traditional. Guitar Center sales associates are often young, passionate about making music, and interested in helping customers experience the joy of being a musician.

So, when Guitar Center's rapid growth created the need for a technology-based talent and learning management platform, the company knew it required an innovative solution that could connect with its young, creative employee base. After a comprehensive analysis, Guitar Center selected Saba, which makes next-generation, cloud-based talent management solutions for continuous learning, engagement, and development in any organization.

"We're using Saba Cloud for talent, succession, performance, social and collaboration, and learning management," said Chis Salles, director of eLearning for Guitar Center. "The ability to have the entire organization go through a true talent and performance process with succession planning is really exciting for us."

Sales Associates That Are Rock Stars

While referring to someone as a "rock star" has become synonymous with "extraordinary performer," at Guitar Center many of the sales associates actually aspire to being rock stars and professional recording artists.

"Often, the individuals we hire aren't looking to become professional sales people," Salles explained. "They're young. They love music and are looking for a job in a related field, and that's how they end up at Guitar Center."

Saba provides a talent management solution that's easy to use and supports the social, mobile, collaboration, and gamification capabilities that Guitar Center's employees have grown accustomed to through personal technology.

The solution:

- Helps everyone understand the company's business plan and their role in its success
- Keeps people aligned with Guitar Center's strategy and goals, and enables them to uncover learning content, ideas, and experts to be able to contribute to them
- Identifies the true retail "rock stars" and recognizes them in creative ways that increase retention and foster development
- Allows for continuous coaching and feedback that keeps its workforce in perfect harmony
- Provides for a mix of formal and informal learning and collaboration and makes every Guitar Center employee part of the dynamic learning process

"One of the best things about Saba is that it lets our communities — from individual retail stores to the entire enterprise — decide on the best way to collaborate, learn, and grow together," noted Salles. "We're able to really tap into the knowledge of our sales associates. Our people not only sell gear, but they also use it. Their experiences inspire stories that speak to the musicians and artists we serve."

Creating a "Cool" Factor

One of the strengths of Saba Cloud is its ability to incorporate the latest Web 2.0 social collaboration capabilities such as blogs and groups, sharing and commenting on posts, following individuals, rating content, and bookmarking items of interest for future reference.

"Ours is a very passionate and connected business," Salles remarked. "Having a solution such as Saba that's social and collaborative helps keep our employees engaged. People stay in the loop and talk amongst

themselves — sharing information about guitars, gear, and sales situations they may have faced. Swapping stories is fun and it translates into how our sales associates interact with customers."

Among the talent and performance management features that Guitar Center sales associates have embraced are impressions and badges.

Saba Impressions allows Guitar Center to capture real-time feedback on employee performance through its social network. Rather than relying on managers' memories when writing reviews covering a 12-month cycle, Saba Impressions provides a Twitter-like interface for anyone to submit feedback at any time. These "impressions" are automatically recorded and can be incorporated into reviews.

Badges are fun ways that Guitar Center recognizes achievements and rewards employees when they complete a key task, reach a business milestone, or do something special for a customer. Of course, the badges include the "Rock Star" designation. But there are also "Customer Hero," "Customer Service Star," and many more social recognition badges that employees can earn with pride.

In all cases, Guitar Center enjoys the latest technology features of the Saba Cloud such as its highly intuitive, user-friendly interface. Saba looks "cool" and is easy to use right from the start, which is critical for Guitar Center's young workforce. The company can even change welcome pages at any time, allowing them, for example, to spotlight a photo of the Rolling Stones on the anniversary of the band's first U.S. tour in the 1960s.

Powerful Learning Platform

When Guitar Center first deployed Saba in 2008, the retailer used it to manage and streamline learning. Although the company created an extensive library of more than 1,500 training modules, Guitar Center also readily embraced the concept of informal learning. Saba's real time collaboration and virtual classroom platform can be used to quickly disseminate information via video or audio meetings of any size or spur-of-the-moment virtual get-togethers. Speed of learning has been greatly improved, with Guitar Center able to set up video chat sessions about any topic to share with stores across the U.S.

Guitar Center employees are empowered to create, host, or attend meetings. Sessions can also be recorded for later viewing. This provides Guitar Center employees more and better stories to tell — enhancing the way they interact with, inform, and educate customers.



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Saba delivers a cloud-based Intelligent Talent Management™ solution used by leading organizations worldwide to hire, develop, engage, and inspire their people. Intelligent Talent Management uses machine learning to offer proactive, personalized recommendations on candidates, connections, and content to help your employees and organization lead and succeed.

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