

Partnering with OpenBlend to get people talking

In conversation with
Lorraine Robinson,
Learning & Development Lead, Dr Martens



THE CUSTOMER

Dr Martens is a globally recognised British footwear brand loved for its unique sense of style and self-expression. The company's iconic boot, which remains immensely popular +60 years after it was first launched, represents one of the most enduring styles in footwear history.



THE CHALLENGE

Having grown rapidly over the past half century, Dr Martens now employs ~3,000 employees and operates 147 retail stores across the UK, North America, and Asia alongside a growing ecommerce and wholesale business.. In 2019, company leaders recognised the need to align operations more closely across different markets – a move intended to support better efficiencies and more consistent people experiences.

Key challenges included:

- Performance conversations were happening on an ad-hoc basis with no ability to record or measure success
- Many managers lacked the soft skills needed to support great employee experiences
- One-to-ones typically focused on business-critical tasks and short-term priorities, which meant that employee wellbeing and development was sometimes overlooked
- There was no consistent pan-geographic approach to performance development (and no way to tailor performance conversations by region, department, or location)





THE TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY

Dr Martens' global HR team developed a cross-functional three-stage action plan to support the company's transition from ad-hoc appraisals to ongoing conversations and coaching. This involved educating employees and managers about what 'good' conversations look like; supporting managers with soft skills development; and engaging a technology partner to facilitate the growing appetite for more frequent and effective conversations at work.

Step one: shifting the mindset

The first priority was to engineer a critical shift in how both managers and employees viewed one-to-ones. This element of the program – known internally as 'My Record' – saw the Dr Martens team introduce a conceptual framework that advocated for more regular and more holistic conversations that would factor in wellbeing and development, as well as performance.

Step two: creating the right skillset

Next the team focused on helping managers to develop the necessary soft skills to support the transition to regular conversations – a program that was delivered through ongoing training and development.

Step three: providing the toolset

The final piece of the puzzle involved procuring the right technology that would not only support the desired mindset, but facilitate its execution at an operational level – and in a way that would work for the individual employee.



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Lorraine Robinson,
Learning & Development Lead,
Dr Martens



WHY OPENBLEND?

“The right fit”

Lorraine explains that she first became aware of OpenBlend, and the philosophy behind it, after her HR Director met the company’s Founder & CEO, Anna Rasmussen, at an industry event:

“There was a definite synergy in terms of what Dr Martens wanted to do and OpenBlend’s ability to deliver on that. It was really clear that the platform would provide the right fit for our people, our culture, and our brand.” Talking about the key factors that sealed the deal, Lorraine cites OpenBlend’s modern take on the manager-employee conversation: “Dr Martens has a great company culture that pervades every aspect of the business. Because of this, we knew that anything too corporate or annual appraisal-like simply wouldn’t gel with the needs and wants of our people. OpenBlend is modern and very user-friendly. People genuinely want to use it and so it really encourages those great conversations – but in a non-prescriptive way.”

Other key drivers in the decision to engage OpenBlend?

- Ability to measure wellbeing with data-led insights
- Encourages broader conversations
- Facilitates the GROW coaching and feedback model
- Focused on outcomes over performance objectives
- Supports effective conversations in the world of hybrid work
- Defined multi-language product plans



THE LAUNCH

“A collaborative effort”

After launching My Record in 2019 and focusing on upskilling managers during 2020, Lorraine explains how Dr Martens and OpenBlend rolled out on a collaborative launch in 2021:

“We began by assigning local market champions to drive adoption of OpenBlend across our geographic regions. In conjunction with this, a team of internal HR professionals, external partners, and OpenBlend experts delivered manager onboarding sessions and employee webinars to reinforce the value of regular conversations and train people in how to use the platform.

“At the same time, we continued to layer our manager skills training over the top of this, communicating the importance of ongoing feedback and coaching. It was a collaborative effort that OpenBlend was central to – and it worked really well.”

Less than a year after implementation, managers and employees are now having more frequent and more effective conversations. In fact, Lorraine says that OpenBlend has enabled people to continue building relationships and create meaningful connections during a period of significant change and continued growth.



THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE SO FAR...

So as a company that prioritizes customer success, what does Lorraine have to say about her experience as an OpenBlend customer?

“It’s been a fascinating process and we’ve received continual guidance and support from the OpenBlend team along the way. The team is super flexible and is always willing to adapt to our evolving needs. They really take the time to listen to our challenges and help us to navigate towards the right solution. It feels very much like a partnership rather than your typical vendor-customer relationship.”



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