

# The Value of a Centralized Recognition System

Client: Delta Air Lines, Inc.

Platform Name: My Delta Rewards

## About Delta

Delta Air Lines, Inc., headquartered in Atlanta, offers service to more destinations than any other global airline. With the merger between Delta Air Lines and Northwest Airlines, Delta became the world's largest airline. The company has a long history of taking care of its people and in 2009 was honored as receiving RPI's Best Overall award for employee recognition best practices.

## Recognition Needs

Recognition has been an important part of the Delta Air Lines culture since the company was founded. Delta founder C.E. Woolman set the standard for Delta's workforce recognition strategy when he stated, "If we take care of our employees, they will take care of our customers."

Delta's numerous recognition programs, in place since 1996, have evolved as the larger organization's needs have changed. This was especially true over the last eight years, as recognition became even more closely woven into the company's business strategy and as employee engagement initiatives took on a larger and more strategic role.

In the beginning, recognition was fragmented, with a mix of officially supported programs alongside unofficially supported ones run by local managers and business leaders. Over time, these decentralized efforts resulted in recognition programs that were not all aligned with Delta's business objectives. To align all of the company's recognition programs, a Recognition Plan was developed.

Goals of the new Recognition Plan included making recognition accessible to the entire Delta workforce and recognizing each employee more than four times a year. The program also had to have a strategy for measuring return on investment and had to be grounded in behavioral science.

## Solutions Overview

The solution jointly developed by Delta and Inspirus (then Diamond H Recognition) was MyDeltaRewards (MDR). MDR is an enterprise-wide points-based recognition platform that supports most informal and all formal recognition and reward programs at Delta. With a centralized platform, employees have one place to go to access all of the company's recognition programs. Each individual is now able to enter a recognition portal with access to companywide recognition programs, as well as those that are specific to their business unit.

MDR has become such a valuable tool that it remained in place through Delta's bankruptcy and through the company's merger with Northwest Airlines. Through these dramatic, strategic shifts at Delta, the recognition system and strategy have helped guide the organization. There are currently more than 25 recognition programs operating on the MDR platform.

Like most organizations, Delta is focused on valuing and connecting with its workforce, and it views recognition as a driver of employee engagement. The recognition programs currently in place fall into three categories, for a three-dimensional recognition approach:

1. Day-to-day recognition to positively reinforce employees for the work they do every day.
2. Informal recognition, which gives leaders and managers the tools they need to recognize employee contributions on the spot.
3. Formal recognition, delivered via programs that are both enterprisewide and divisional, and that have established guidelines and criteria that help support Delta's broader business goals.

This broad recognition foundation supports all enterprise and business unit reward and recognition programs.

### Delta's Focus on the Seven RPI Best Practice Standards

To ensure success, Delta incorporated all of the RPI best practice standards into its recognition efforts. The focus on these best practices earned Delta an RPI Award for Events and Celebrations Best Practice Standards in 2008 and for Best Overall Award for all standards in 2009, honoring the company's advancements in recognition over those years."

I. **Strategy** – Recognition at Delta is more than just one program. It is a suite of programs from across the enterprise that encompasses all of the following:

- Milestone events
- Corporate enterprise recognition
- Localized recognition

Delta's recognition strategy takes each of these programs into account and uses a three-dimensional approach for the organization that is made up of day-to-day, informal and formal recognition.

II. **Management Involvement** – Recognition as part of corporate culture at Delta not only has buy-in from senior management, but it has their involvement at a high level in defining and documenting the recognition strategy and policies for the organization.

III. **Measurement** – Measurement is a critical element to Delta's recognition success. Program results are reviewed against specific program objectives and the larger overall organization recognition strategy, and then the results are measured for effectiveness.

IV. **Communications** – The primary goal of Delta’s recognition programs communication plan was the successful branding of the recognition experience at Delta overall and of specific recognition programs. This goal was met by:

- Establishing MyDeltaRewards as the brand of recognition at Delta, and
- Centralizing and unifying all recognition programs.

V. **Training** – Delta’s recognition training provides managers and employees with a suite of userfriendly, on-demand tools to educate, inform and support recognition in the workplace.

VI. **Events and Celebrations** – Recognition events and celebrations are a key element to recognition at Delta. These events are all aligned with the recognition strategy by prescribing specific guidelines and processes for informal celebrations, local events and formal events.

VII. **Change and Flexibility** – Delta uses a standard framework to develop, deploy and assess program performance. Based on informal feedback and a formal annual review, Delta’s recognition programs are adjusted to meet the diverse needs of individuals and teams.

Employing each of these standards has allowed Delta to develop and maintain a culture of recognition.

However, Delta’s experience and recognition needs are not unique to corporate America. The company operates in an extremely challenging and competitive environment, and it looks to serve and recognize more than 80,000 employees across multiple countries who speak multiple languages. Delta continues to grow and adapt in its recognition efforts, but it has maintained a foundation in the RPI best practice standards.

## About Inspirus

Inspirus believes employees make up the foundation of culture, which is shaped and evolved through everyday experiences that are essential to the development of strong, high-performing organizations. We seek to influence the employee experience through our six Quality of Life dimensions: recognition, health and well-being, personal growth, physical environment, social interaction, and ease and efficiency.

Only Inspirus combines an integrated rewards engine, learning courses, communication tools and analytics into a single global platform spanning recognition, well-being, safety, milestone awards and community involvement. Through Sodexo’s broader mission of improving the Quality of Life for all we serve, Inspirus aims to [bring joy to work](#), one experience at a time.

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