

## ENGAGEMENT ON WHEELS

What food trucks can teach you about effective employee engagement

John O'Brien, Vice President, Employee Performance Group  
BI WORLDWIDE

Stand to the right. Decide on your order before you get to the window – then open wide. The current trend for truckside dining is continuing to grow and the National Food Truck Association estimates that restaurants-on-wheels generate \$1 billion of sales annually in the U.S. What's interesting to note is that only part – and probably not the largest part – of this phenomenon is about food. The rest of the buzz centers on the highly personal experience of the individual diners.

Standing in line for lunch at our favorite food truck location, we got to thinking about how similar this experience was to a well-designed employee engagement strategy (and yes, that is the kind of thing we thought about in the food truck line, because we'd already decided on the pork belly taco with the cilantro-lime reduction, so we had some extra time). Here's what we mused before we got ready to chow down:

**It's all about social:** Many food truck owners say they couldn't do what they do, or sell as much food as they do, without a heavy reliance on social media. Twitter and Facebook are the chief connection points between one mobile food unit and its legion of uber-urban hipsters who follow its location the way rabid sports fans follow the play-by-play. The lesson for your engagement program: if you aren't out in front with social media allowing your managers and employees to follow, recognize and reinforce each other in ways they prefer, then you might be giving your engagement program a hard-to-overcome flat tire.

**Customizable experience:** Diners love being part of an experience they can personalize. That's why they follow their favorite food trucks to certain corners, events or taprooms, perhaps creating a traveling dinner by stopping for their favorite menu item at a number of trucks. The secret here is that it's all about the individual's personal choices and, no surprise, that's the secret of a well-designed engagement program too. Allow your employees to choose how they want to be recognized. Let them opt-in or opt-out of social participation. When an engagement program is completely personal, it's closer to becoming completely effective.

**Mix it up:** One of the coolest new trends in the food truck craze is what's being called a Food Truck Jam, where an area's top mobile venues gather in one location to allow for prime grazing with minimal schlepping. People love the "little of this, taste of that" experience that sampling from lots of different places can bring. No two experiences are the same and there's always something new to try. That's a good strategy to keep in mind when you're planning an engagement strategy too. The element of surprise – and the thrill of getting something that might be in limited supply – can keep your employees totally on board and interested in what's coming up next.

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**Be where they are:** The folks who drive food trucks have become masters at anticipating just the right corner where their most likely customers will be congregating. Ten a.m. on a Monday morning, they might be right outside an ad agency, ready to help all those who had a little too much fun over the weekend get a hearty start to their day. At five o'clock on Wednesdays, they might be parked between a school and a daycare, ready to pick up orders from ravenous students and treat-seeking moms. By Friday night, they'll have settled into their regular spot at the local taproom, ready to reel in plenty of customers when the beer-munchies hit.

The point for your program: don't take for granted that any one place you're expecting employees to "run into" your messaging is always going to work. Posters in the lunchroom? Maybe for those who eat lunch but not for the busy errand runners. Updates on the program website? Not for those who are out of town and with clients most of the week. Think about all of your audiences as customers you need to find and then position your messaging in places where they're most likely to see it.

**Worth their while:** No matter how terrific the graphics on the truck, no matter how long the line and no matter how clever the menu (Bacon-cronut-quinoa kabobs, anyone?), the only way to build up a loyal fan base for a food truck is to deliver good food in a fun environment, time after time. People won't bother to track you down and wait in line if it turns out that you weren't really worth the wait. In the same way, too many engagement programs leave employees with a bad taste in their mouths ... big hoopla for the kickoff, then no follow-up communications. Goals that aren't clear. Rewards that aren't in line with the effort that's required. Rules structures that seem to favor the "same old" winners instead of letting others have a chance. It takes time and skill to create a just-right engagement strategy for your employees that will keep them excited and ready to participate.

To learn more about how **BIWORLDWIDE** can help you develop an engagement strategy that will really whet your employees' appetites, visit: [BIWORLDWIDE.com](http://BIWORLDWIDE.com) or email [info@BIWORLDWIDE.com](mailto:info@BIWORLDWIDE.com).

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