

'What's right for our business'

A case study: Re-sorting roles to promote growth

Introduction/Business Situation

Yakima has been a world leader in the design and manufacture of cargo management equipment solutions for outdoor enthusiasts for three decades. Products include vehicle racks for bikes, boats, ski equipment and gear, a line of cargo boxes and bags for a variety of needs, as well as high performance multi-sport trailers. Yakima Products is headquartered in Beaverton, Oregon.

When Yakima purchased Hubco Automotive, Inc. (the Whispbar brand) another cargo management equipment company, Ron Ten Berge, Yakima's Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer, decided to take a deep look at his company's sales and marketing capabilities and the way they handled multiple brands.

"Yakima's case for change was well defined. They had a business requirement for the organization to better align its go-to-market strategy," said Richard Spoon, ArchPoint CEO. "The case for change was well understood and the team working on the project understood the benefits for getting it right."

When the team started working on the project in early January 2011, Christine Holland, ArchPoint Partner, took the lead working with a five-person project team at Yakima.

"We needed help in best practices to help guide us through the process," said Ten Berge. "We knew there were a number of ways to approach it but needed an outsider's perspective. I have great confidence in Richard's organizational work. He's not afraid to push me out of my comfort zone. I think that's what good consultants do."

Evaluating roles and responsibilities

Using the RACI model, a tool used to clarify roles and responsibilities, Spoon and Holland helped the Yakima team to clarify where they had muddled accountabilities and responsibilities.

"They challenged us to really prioritize what we wanted to accomplish in the reorganization, forcing us to make choices and rank and prioritize them," Ten Berge said.

Once clear on where the work resided, Spoon and Holland led the Yakima team in re-sorting the roles. Once the team agreed on a new structure, they used the results of the RACI exercise and wrote new job descriptions. The biggest change in the structure was where product and category managers resided within the company.

"The major change we recommended was to pull some specific roles out of product development and put them into sales and marketing. Plus, we made the go-to-market unit report to one person," Holland said. "Their thinking had been that they needed to have brand alignment. As we talked it through, we all came to the conclusion that the new structure makes more sense and works more efficiently and effectively setting them up for growth."

For the Yakima team, Ten Berge said the *aha moment* came when the whole executive team realized that they were going to have to put a stake in the ground in where they put their leadership roles.

"The exercise forced us to go back and revisit our strategic plan and think about the next two or three years in the business. What are the big decisions we have to make?" Ten Berge said. "The organizational design was about, 'How do we prepare ourselves for growth?'"

Yakima had a sound strategic plan in place they were following, but the process forced them to step back and ask: Are we still firm in that strategic plan?

"The key decisions for us were in domestic and global growth, product and brand management decisions, design and engineering decisions and what numbers of resources were needed to support each of those areas," Ten Berge said. "The team absolutely became more cohesive because they had greater clarity of their roles and decisions. The team is stronger as a result for sure. I believe any time you have people on a team really clear about what they own in decisions, it's a really powerful thing."

Integrating customer needs into the product roadmap

Thus far, the implemented changes are resulting in a very positive outcome at Yakima. "The big move we made was integrating product and category business management into the design team. That's been exceptionally well received," said Ten Berge. "Any time you can link the future product roadmap and your go-to-market teams, you're going to get a better result."

Notably, Ten Berge said the watershed moment was at their recent national sales meeting. "It was an outstanding session because everything felt much more cohesive and integrated to our sales people."

As an organization or business grows, clarifying what's the right size for personnel expansion and building out brand and product teams is critical.

"The thing I appreciate in working with ArchPoint is that ultimately it's about challenging me as a client in thinking about things I don't think about," Ten Berge said. "They bring a perspective that's always helpful and useful. It's about what's right for our business. They bring me various perspectives that cause me to reflect on what's best for our business. ArchPoint has an amazing ability to prompt me specifically—and the company at large—to step back and say, 'Hmmm, that's interesting. I've never thought about it that way, and it makes a lot of sense.' "