Blueboard   ⠿ medidata

How we built this: Spot Recognition

Best practices from Medidata for motivating and recognizing top talent.

How we built this.

Inspired by the NPR program that we know and love, we've launched a series of webinars and planning guides called "How We Built This." This is an intimate showcase of the work our top clients have done to bring their recognition programs to life.

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The power of spot recognition.

Spot recognition is a powerful tool for building employee motivation and productivity rates. It's the opportunity for your company to formally outline what great work looks like, creating a **shared standard of excellence.** And from there, a tool for inspiring employees to exceed those expectations, leveraging a blend of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

Beyond their ability to create clear guidelines, we also love that **spot recognition programs are inherently social.** They offer a platform for celebrating the great work of those top performers across the organization through ceremonies and communications, spotlighting their above and beyond actions, milestones or achievements.

Socialized recognition programs not only **create a ripple effect** across the organization inspiring others to model similar behaviors, but also confirm that leadership believes in seeing and valuing the hard work of individuals across the org.

A successful spot recognition program has the ability to lift behavior across the entire organization, **improving productivity rates** and building a more **positive culture of celebration** and support of each others' achievements.

What is spot recognition?

Spot recognition programs typically come to life in a variety of forms:

1. Manager-nominated programs:

Employees are nominated by their managers or leadership after demonstrating qualifying behaviors or actions. Winners are selected by a committee and announced through a variety of public forums. Winners receive a reward to commemorate their achievements and to inspire ongoing performance.

2. Peer-nominated programs:

Employees are nominated by their peers after demonstrating qualifying behaviors or actions. Successful programs select winners by committee to ensure fairness, and are celebrated through a variety of public forums. Similarly, winners receive rewards to commemorate their achievements and to inspire themselves and others to continue producing great work.

Which behaviors are we rewarding?

Company values

Employees who model your company values, and through their efforts have made an impact on the business.

Above and beyond achievements

Employees or teams who go above and beyond to exceed personal or departmental goals, OKRs or other identified and measurable business metrics.

Intangibles

Inclusive programs designed to celebrate the intangibles (i.e. less metric-oriented, measurable) like developing a training program, culture advocacy, internal process improvements or fostering strong client relationships.

How are we rewarding these behaviors?

Rewards serve as an extrinsic motivator to drive motivation and program adoption, while also commemorating the point in time that the behavior was demonstrated.

The best rewards are thoughtfully-designed and personalized to the individual's preferences, but personalization can be challenging to deliver at scale. Managers don't always have the time or personal insight to find the perfect reward for their employees. So as a result, they often give the quickest (and most impersonal) options available - cash or gift cards.

But here's the problem, cash rewards are broken.

1.

Cash is alienating

The clear, absolute value of cash aligns with our need for fairness. This much time and effort should equal this much money in return. But when a reward doesn't feel proportional to the effort it took to earn—say a $200 gift card for back-to-back 60-hour work weeks—cash shines a spotlight on the disparity. These low value bonuses make employees feel disengaged and even downright resentful. We want your rewards to make people feel truly valued.

2.

Cash is forgettable

Cash is a purely rational reward. It doesn't hook into our emotions, shape our identity, or create new stories to share—all of the things that make lasting memories. So even in the best case scenario where someone receives a cash reward that feels commensurate to their effort, the impact quickly fades. Why? Because over time, people don't remember what it feels like getting a one-time bump in their take home. We want your recognition efforts to be remembered for a lifetime.

3.

Cash is silent

Companies feel confident talking about the recognition half of the R+R equation, but the reward half is confidential. And employees keep their cash rewards private as well—no one wants to be the jerk who brags about their bonus. This lack of shareability is a big reason why many recognition programs don't have a larger impact on engagement and performance. Bottom line, people don't talk about cash rewards so their impact ends with the person who receives it. We want the impact of your rewards to ripple out, motivating far more people than recipients alone.

That's why our clients choose to invest in building their spot recognition programs with Blueboard. We take the guesswork out of spot awards programs: **employees choose the reward that's most meaningful to them** from a menu of hand-curated experiences, enabling your managers to send meaningful, personalized rewards in seconds. It's a win-win.

Now that we've laid some groundwork, let's explore how our client Medidata built their spot recognition program, from ideation and inspiration, to program planning, to launch and roll-out.

Let's explore how Medidata built their respective program. ❯

O2 Building a business case

medidata

Building a business case.

Medidata Solutions is an American technology company with 2,000+ employees headquartered in NYC, that develops and markets software as a service for clinical trials.

It was 2018, and Carrie Theisen, VP Global Total Rewards, had been overseeing a multi-year recognition program but realized with changing employee interests, lifestyles and needs, the recognition program was in need of a refresh to better motivate employees towards shared goals and behaviors.

She began by building a business case, rooted in data and deep insights. Her first focus was around retention. Medidata was growing fast, and the talent market was heating up - according to Payscale[1], 66% of leading organizations agree that retention is a growing concern. But as a rewards professional, she had to turn inward and ask herself, "As a total rewards professional, what am I doing to ensure that my rewards programs will retain (top talent)?"

Sadly, just **8% of organizations feel their rewards programs are effective** at creating personalized, flexible solutions[2] - meaning their rewards programs follow a "peanut butter spread" mentality - the same reward for everyone, regardless of their own unique passions, interests, or motivators.

Yet at the same time, **91% of employees at small and medium-size businesses view nontraditional benefits as important to their job satisfaction**[3]. They crave the power of choice, and the ability to customize their benefits package in a way that's best suited to their personal needs.

With this data in hand, Carrie knew that total rewards was a big deal, and she knew they needed to get it right. So, where did they start?

> "As a total rewards professional, what am I doing to ensure that my rewards programs will retain (top talent)?
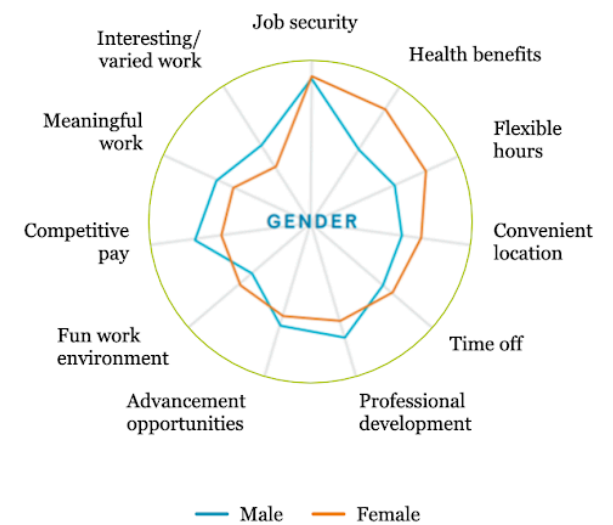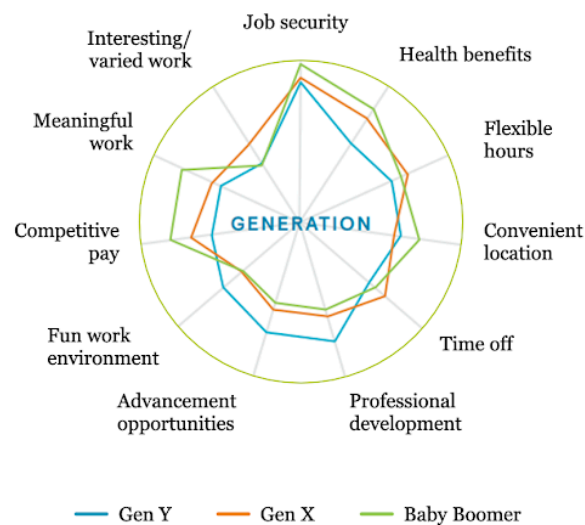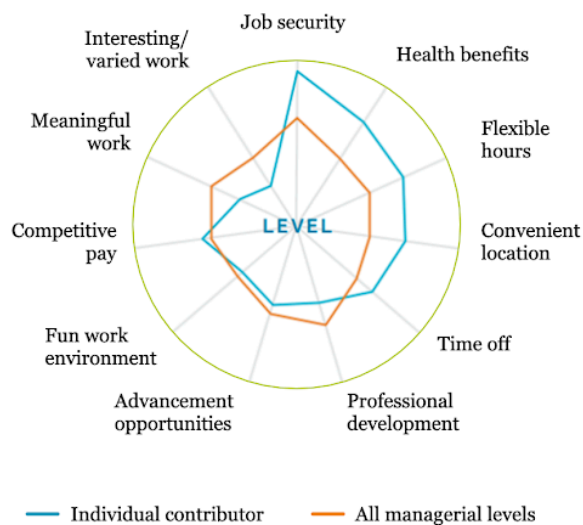
Carrie T.
VP Global Total Rewards at Medidata

Gathering employee insights.

The first thing Carrie started with was really understanding her employee population - not only was she responsible for a global team, but also a team with a number of generational segments represented in Medidata's workforce. And they all want and need different things.

Carrie leveraged insights from Mercer's 2019 Global Talent Trends Report below, which divides employee needs and interests in their benefits offerings by job level/ seniority, generational segments and associated gender. The consistent theme across all slices was flexibility - reiterating Carrie's hypothesis around the power of choice. She needed to design a total rewards program that would appeal to her employees at all levels.

Radar chart: LEVEL — categories: Job security, Health benefits, Flexible hours, Convenient location, Time off, Professional development, Advancement opportunities, Fun work environment, Competitive pay, Meaningful work, Interesting/varied work. Legend: Individual contributor, All managerial levels.

Radar chart: GENERATION — Legend: Gen Y, Gen X, Baby Boomer.

Radar chart: GENDER — Legend: Male, Female.

Software Application Developer Talent

Value proposition by importance	% Agree in importance
1 Good work-life balance	63%
2 Excellent compensation and benefits	62%
3 Challenging work	44%
4 Flexible work arrangements	40%
5 Colleagues and culture that inspire employees to do their best	39%

Core Values

What employer value propositions are most important?

Product Talent

Value proposition by importance	% Agree in importance
1 Excellent compensation and benefits	61%
2 Good work-life balance	57%
3 Colleagues and culture that inspire employees to do their best	40%
4 Open and effective management	36%
5 Challenging work	35%
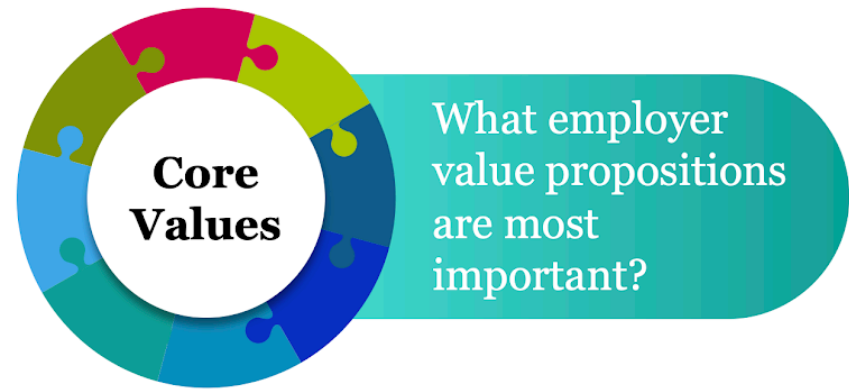
Data Science Talent

Value proposition by importance	% Agree in importance
1 Excellent compensation and benefits	57%
2 Good work-life balance	53%
3 Challenging work	45%
4 Colleagues and culture that inspire employees to do their best	40%
5 A company with a purposeful mission	35%

Leveraging insights from external data, Carrie next looked inward, to better evaluate her own employee's interests and core values - to determine which employer value propositions are most important. She partnered with LinkedIn and other external agencies to run analysis across her primary job functions, the groups that made up the greatest employee populations at Medidata, which included Software Application Development, Product, and Data Science.

As you'll see from Carrie's Core Values snapshot above - these groups while different in job function, ultimately ranked the same two value propositions by the greatest need: good work-life balance, and excellent compensation and benefits.

> "We needed a program that would appeal to people at all levels. And with this data we could see that this key group of people valued two things - compensation and benefits and work-life balance.

Carrie T.
VP Global Total Rewards at Medidata

O3 Program planning

Program planning.

Armed with her Core Values insights, Carrie went on to create a total rewards program rooted in the ability to deliver good work-life balance and excellent compensation and benefits.

Her program planning strategy is rooted in these three objectives:

Competitive base salaries

Compensation is the foundation of your program - without competitive pay, you'll struggle to attract the best talent. Here's how Medidata adjusted their program:
- Compensation is reviewed and adjusted more than once per year.
- Medidata enhanced Fair Pay Practices to attract and develop a more diverse employee population.

Bonus and incentive plans

Carrie wanted to make sure that her bonus and incentive plans aligned the goals of the organization with payments to the employee to ultimately drive the kind of behaviors that the organization needed.
- Aligned their bonus and incentives plans to Medidata's Pay for Performance culture.
- Crafted flexible programs providing the ability to deliver real-time recognition and rewards (more on that soon!).

Long term incentive plan

Beyond recognition and rewards, Carrie wanted to offer long term incentive plans to meet additional employee needs.
- Medidata offers stock awards to attract, reward and retain top talent in Tech.

Recognition program planning.

Carrie leaned on one additional resource to drive her recognition and rewards strategy - Medidata's internal employee engagement survey. **That year's report marked two big areas of opportunity:**

1. Employees wished their company offered more flexible work options (this was important across the board, but even more so with Medidata's growing working parents population).
2. Employees wanted to be seen and valued for their contributions (i.e., not feeling recognized in a meaningful way).

Carrie began building a flexible and personalized recognition and rewards program that delivered across three key areas:

Social

Carrie wanted the opportunity for peers to celebrate each other's accomplishments, and rewards that were comfortable and exciting to share and socialize.

If you're looking for efficient ways to promote peer-to-peer recognition, invite your team to Lift Up, our free recognition note builder.

Flexible and financial

Financial wellbeing is top of mind at Medidata, with many employees living in markets where cost of living is high (like NYC). She wanted a program that allowed flexibility, with a variety of means for managers to reward their employee's great work.

Experiential

Carrie wanted to make sure that employees had a choice between a spot bonus and experiential rewards. So she partnered with our team at Blueboard to offer employees their choice of a meaningful and memorable experience or adventure, brought to life with ease through our celebrated Concierge service.

O4 **What Medidata built**

What Medidata built.

Carrie's vision and strategy were to align Medidata's recognition and rewards program directly with their mission and company values. She constructed her offering into three specific programs that we'll outline below, in the order of how many employees they affected (from company-wide, to top performers).

Daily recognition

Carrie wanted to facilitate the opportunity for daily recognition all the time, so they built a program that supported regular, year-round appreciation of employee performance and achievement from both peers and managers. Recognized employees get their choice of a Blueboard reward or spot bonus.
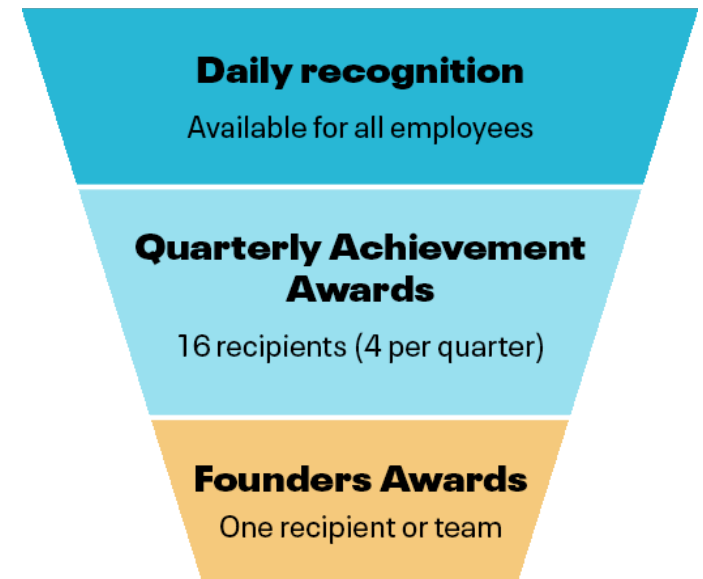
Quarterly Achievement Awards

Carrie also wanted to make sure that the program enabled the best performance to rise to the top. She rolled out Quarterly Awards that are aligned to the mission and values set by Medidata's leaders (President & CEO) each year.

These Quarterly Awards recognize the great work of four individuals or teams in each of their four company pillars: Master the Core, Innovate & Disrupt, People, & Financial Metrics.

Founders Awards

And for the highest form of recognition, a Founders Award is given to the top team or individual throughout the year. Along with their reward, these recipients receive a trophy and get featured in a video that is shared company-wide to further celebrate their achievements.

Daily recognition
Available for all employees

Quarterly Achievement Awards
16 recipients (4 per quarter)

Founders Awards
One recipient or team

05 **Building awareness and utilization**

Building awareness and program utilization.

For her recognition program to succeed, Carrie knew that communication would be key. So, her team laid out a strong and frequent communications plan to educate, inspire, and motivate Medidatians to participate in the new rewards and recognition program.

BrandBuilder initiative

BrandBuilder is an internal employer branding initiative to gather and share Medidatian recognition stories

Internal communication

Internal blog posts/articles to outline the communications strategy that are posted to Medidata's intranet, Medex

Sharing stories

Multiple communication channels (Slack, Medex) to feature stories and videos as employees go out and about on their Blueboard reward experience

"One of my favorite examples of our winning partnership was when Blueboard made the very timely decision to expand their menu to include In-home experiences during COVID-19. We were able to continue our recognition program and strategies as people were sheltering in place."

Carrie T.
VP Global Total Rewards at Medidata

06 **Measuring the impact**

Measuring the impact.

Carrie crafted a program designed with both internal and external data signals and insights in mind, so of course, crafted an equally well-designed plan for measuring the program's effectiveness.

Carrie wanted to make sure the program would be 1) highly utilized, and 2), able to move the needle on recognition sentiment (improving employee engagement stats around employees feeling adequately seen and valued for their contributions).

Carrie uses three main tools for measuring performance:

1. Annual employee engagement survey

2. Utilization reporting via Blueboard's Admin Tools reporting suite

3. Employee feedback and focus groups, including the Post-experience Engagement Survey data collected after employees complete their Blueboard experience

"**When managers can give the employee their choice of an experience, it creates a memory. And that memory is always tied to your company. Giving them a spot bonus will probably pay for a bill, and they're not going to remember that in a year, versus an experience that will last for their lifetime.**"

Carrie T.
VP Global Total Rewards at Medidata

Measuring the impact.

Medidata has sent hundreds of employees on Blueboard rewards since beginning their program in 2018, and their program continues to be a huge internal success. While data is shining across the board, these top metrics have been most valuable to Carrie when championing the Blueboard partnership:

Feeling appreciated

4.9/5

Of rewarded employees felt appreciated for a job well done when receiving their Blueboard reward

Avg. experience rating

4.8/5

Medidata employees rate their Blueboard experience at a 97% approval rating

Feeling motivated

4.85/5

Of employees feel motivated to perform at a higher level after completing their Blueboard experience (as employee performance increases, so does the impact to Medidata's business)

Retaining talent

4.8/5

Of employees believe Blueboard rewards are a great tool for retaining top talent (directly correlating to Carrie's original goal of supporting retention rates)

Medidatians out #Blueboarding.

Michelin Star Dining in Tokoyo • Indigo reward

"I had a wonderful dinner with my wife at Gizna Ukai Tei thanks to Blueboard! #Blueboarding"

Matias L.

Glorious Getaway to Vail • Tiburon reward

"All the way up! I think I am a mountain girl now! #Blueboarding #Vail"

Jana H.

Dine in the Dark • White Gold reward

"What a fun date night dining in the dark last night. We enjoyed our meal blindfolded, forced to focus only on taste, smell, feel, and even sound to identify each course. Thank you Medidata for this awesome first Blueboard experience."

Edward F.

Blueboard

GETTING IN TOUCH

Want to learn more?

If you're interested to learn more about spot recognition programs, company values awards or other tools for motivating employee performance, we'd love to connect.

Simply reach out and Request a Demo on Blueboard.com, we'll look forward to hearing from you. And in the meantime, check out our complete How We Built This: Spot Recognition recording and recap, including an additional program planning story from Tyler Cahill, Manager of Organizational Development at Addison Group.

GET IN TOUCH