

Sowing Seeds of Quality

LexisNexis® Helps Wild Oats Maintain Top-Notch Employees



Wild Oats Markets, Inc., a nationwide chain of natural and organic food markets, currently operates in more than 110 stores in 25 states across the U.S. and British Columbia. The company currently employs more than 8,600 people and adds between 10 and 12 new stores every year.

Growing Pains

The chain's growing popularity, while great for the company, however, often posed significant challenges for the Human Resources department. This team is required to not only fill all staff positions for new stores, it must also stay on top of normal employee turnover at the existing stores—hiring an average of 675 new employees every month. The department's goal is simple: to fill open positions with high-quality employees who have cleared all required background screenings — as quickly as possible.

“Every day a store position sits unfilled, the company risks losing customer satisfaction because the store can't provide the level of customer service that people expect,” says Gloria Fletcher, Prevention Manager. “So it represents a loss of income for our company and a loss of satisfaction for our patrons.”

Upon close evaluation, the company discovered a hiring bottleneck in one critical area: the background screening process. Until three years ago, these background checks were being obtained from a third-party provider, but the process had its share of challenges.

The background checks were fairly expensive and often required as much as five to seven working days to complete a report. The process also required that all applicant data — from every store — be transferred to company headquarters in Boulder, Col., and entered by a single employee. This data entry alone required at least a half-hour per applicant, and the physical transfer of data added another layer of delays, possible confusion and potential errors to an already cumbersome process.

Worse still, the former screening process occasionally netted false reports — erroneously stating that either an innocent applicant had a criminal record, or that someone didn't have a criminal record who, in fact, did.

Partnering for Success

Because the company's priority is to protect its assets and provide

a safe environment for its staff and customers, Wild Oats was committed to obtaining the most current and correct background screenings possible. Therefore, three years ago, Wild Oats decided to switch to another screening provider — LexisNexis® Screening Solutions.

LexisNexis® Screening Solutions not only proposed a solution that was more affordable for Wild Oats, it offered a host of benefits that promised to simplify and streamline the company's entire background screening process.

A Smooth Transition

Once Wild Oats decided to go with a new background-screening provider, it began the complex task of putting the new process in place. Fortunately, this implementation went much smoother than Wild Oats ever expected.

“Switching to LexisNexis® was such an easy transition,” explained Fletcher. “We had every store call in to one of four regional conference calls, which provided a full explanation and real-time training on the new system. All the people that were

going to use the new system were online, and we were online with them and LexisNexis® — all at the same time. Basically, LexisNexis® taught everyone how to use the system by phone, and it was absolutely wonderful.”

As a follow-up, LexisNexis® helped Wild Oats create a training document that can be used for new users. This can be e-mailed to new users, along with their individual access codes, passwords and a step-by-step process for using the tool.

“We are growing so fast, and LexisNexis® Screening Solutions can definitely keep up with us,” said Fletcher. “They can quickly adapt the program to our needs, and can help us add a new store simply with a phone call.”

Faster, Better Background Checks

Once the new process was underway, Wild Oats noticed immediate improvements to the background screening process. Unlike Wild Oats' previous provider, LexisNexis® Screening Solutions reported “clear” background checks directly back to each store — enabling them to continue with the hiring process without further delay.

Plus, each store can enter applicants' data directly into the LexisNexis® system, which initiates the background screening



WILD OATS

process immediately. This not only creates a more streamlined — and efficient — process, it freed up the resources of Fletcher, who was previously entering the data, so she could focus her attention on more important matters.

“Now, all the stores have to do is enter applicant data right from their system — a process that takes only a few minutes,” said Fletcher. “This was a huge selling feature for LexisNexis® Screening Solutions. It takes key managers only about three minutes per applicant, and they love it because the software is so user-friendly.”

Within 48 to 72 hours, the store director, assistant store director or service manager then receives a report back for all cleared applicants, enabling the store to move forward with the hiring process and getting the person on the floor.

Meanwhile, all background check findings that need further investigation are automatically delivered directly to Wild Oats headquarters in Boulder, Colorado, where they can be reviewed by the corporate HR team. Since the bulk of the background checks are clear—and automatically sent to the individual stores—Fletcher can devote more time to addressing legitimate background check issues — such as any criminal activity, warrants or charges, including DUIs, DWIs, and issuance of bad checks.

“Plus, if an applicant wants to contest any items on their background check, they are directed to work with LexisNexis® Screening Solutions — not us — for resolution,” added Fletcher. “This takes one more responsibility off our shoulders.”

Customization and Complete Satisfaction

Although LexisNexis® background checks are completed in a consistently fast timeframe, Fletcher also touts their quality. “LexisNexis® Screening Solutions never sends out background check reports before they are absolutely done,” she says. “Even if I put a rush on a report in order to fill a certain position, the LexisNexis® specialist will do his or her best, but refuses to provide a complete report until they’re sure it’s totally right. I feel good about that too.”

When it comes to customer support, Fletcher is equally pleased. LexisNexis® Screening Solutions works closely with Wild Oats to customize the software for its individual needs — providing a different menu of background checks for different job titles. For example, Wild Oats obtains one social security number search and one county criminal record search for basic applicants; but for key managers, Wild Oats’ process automatically adds a national criminal search, as well.

“LexisNexis® quickly and easily adjusted the software so it would be very quick and user-friendly for the people in our stores,” said Fletcher. “The software includes unique drop-down menus that are unique to our company — and LexisNexis® worked with us directly to establish our individual parameters.”

Using Wild Oats’ customized rules, LexisNexis® Screening Solutions instantly verifies an applicant’s social security number — thus helping Wild Oats halt the entire application process for invalid numbers and eliminating the expense continuing with

more advanced background checks.

By verifying social security numbers, Wild Oats weeds out illegal immigrants and avoids the hefty fines associated with hiring them. If an illegal immigrant applies for a position, the system can recognize the invalid social security number and Wild Oats refers the applicant to the Social Security office for resolution. Typically, the company never hears from the applicant again.

In fact, Wild Oats recently encountered this situation in one of its Florida stores, where five illegal immigrants had applied for store positions using fraudulent social security numbers. Because the LexisNexis® background check caught this early, the company turned the applicants away, and thus avoided a potential fine of \$10,000 per person — a possible total of \$50,000.

Furthermore, Wild Oats always receives personalized service.

“I’m always called back or sent an e-mail reply to my questions immediately,” says Fletcher. “Whether I need a customized report summarizing our average monthly expenditures, or up-to-date information on laws in various states, LexisNexis® is always ready to help.”

For example, LexisNexis® recently provided Wild Oats with the most current information on which states require DMV permits for company drivers. Because these regulations vary from state to state, LexisNexis® Screening Solutions’ comprehensive expertise prevents Wild Oats from having to become an expert in laws from 24 different U.S. states and Canada.

“After the transition to LexisNexis®, our store personnel was a lot happier because they were getting their results back so much quicker and they could more rapidly fill their open positions,” said Fletcher. “And our customers are happy because there are enough people on the floor to service their needs.”

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