

How L.L.Bean uses Zipline to drive world-class store execution and frontline employee retention

In 1912, an avid outdoorsman named Leon Leonwood Bean set out to make a boot to keep hunters' feet warm and dry. His ingenuity sparked the beginning of one of the most successful family-run businesses in the United States: L.L.Bean.

Over a hundred years later, store associates across L.L.Bean's more than 50 retail locations keep L.L.'s core values alive, providing world-class customer service to help customers enjoy and discover the outdoors, whether it's the thrill of sea kayaking, the quiet of early morning fishing or the vigor of a challenging climb.

It's only natural that a company with such a rich heritage and singular mission would seek out the most passionate individuals to comprise its frontline workforce. Associates, or "Store Guides" as they're called at L.L.Bean, are held to high standards - tasked with not only sharing their knowledge of the outdoors with customers, but also with upholding merchandise presentation standards, promoting company programs, and handling day-to-day operations.

"Guides are the people we rely on to bring our brand to life," explains Justina Griffin, L.L.Bean's Manager of Store Operations. "They're really 'it' for us." L.L.Bean's Store Guides are more than just sales reps: "In smaller stores, especially, everybody is cross-trained," says Griffin. "Nobody is just a men's clothing expert, or a footwear expert - they have to do it all." When they're not greeting customers or tidying shelves, Guides are expected to complete operational tasks in the back of house, or ring up transactions at the POS. "They can deliver the entire brand experience," says Griffin.

Fortunately, L.L.Bean is able to put everything - from product line updates to new policies and procedures - in the palm of their front line employees' hands using Zipline.

It wasn't always that way. Long before Zipline came into the picture, there was a strong need and desire to close the gap between Home Office and frontline communication. "It had always been a game of telephone," explains Griffin.

In order to keep part-time associates up-to-date on company initiatives, priorities, and strategies, headquarters teams had to rely on exempt (full-time) leaders in stores to verbally cascade messages received via email down to their frontline teams during brief shift start-up meetings - a process rife with error.

Beyond that, part-time employees had access to information posted on backroom "comm boards" and could, in theory, access a company intranet page via a computer in the back office. But with customers demanding the majority of their attention, few employees took advantage of that technology.



L.L.Bean rolled out Zipline to its store leader population in April of 2020 - right at the beginning of the first wave of Covid-19 closures. From the beginning, adoption was close to 100%, especially because Zipline “was the only way (leaders) could get any information during the time their stores were closed.” When stores began to open again, the momentum continued to build. Feedback for Zipline was so positive among leaders that L.L.Bean’s Store Operations team knew it was time to take the next step and close the gap between HQ and frontline employees for good

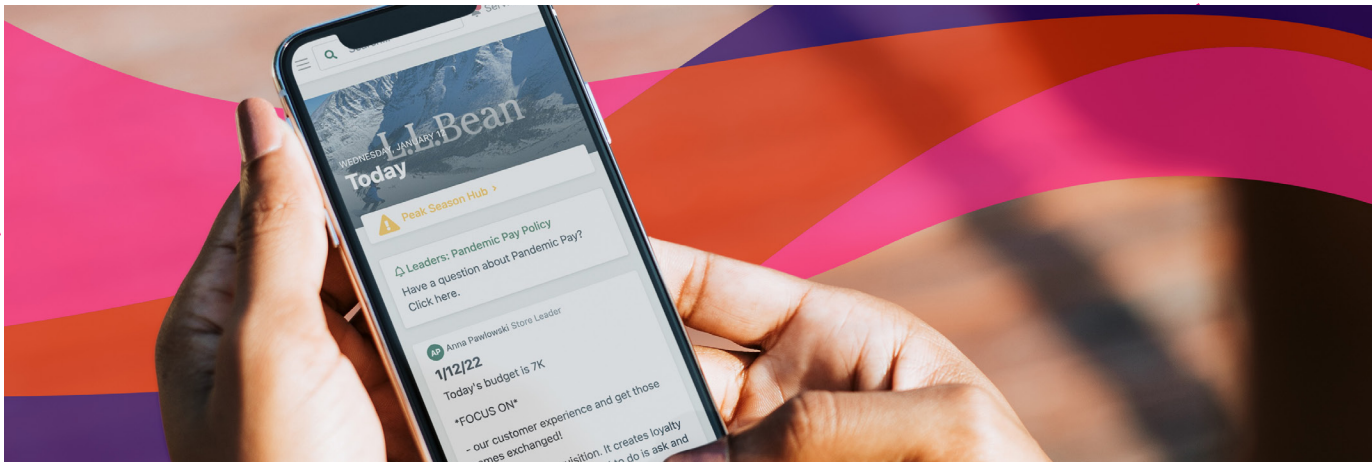
The Power of Pilot

The L.L.Bean Store Operations team always knew that a successful associate-facing communication strategy would look different than a leader-facing one. “In many ways, this was a completely different population of employees,” says Griffin. “Unlike store leaders, Guides may only work a few days a week, so getting communication to them takes longer.”

To shape their long-term strategy, L.L.Bean found piloting the technology with Zipline immensely helpful. The company tested Zipline’s Associate Experience in two different-sized stores for two months to make sure they got everything just right. Griffin explains: “We were able to take time to decide what things we wanted to direct leaders to do, and what things we would instead ask them to cascade to Guides - with the help of company-provided talking points, of course.”

Taking time to test and learn in stores before rolling out full-fleet also helped the team feel comfortable about deploying Zipline’s slimmed-down Associate Experience (rather than the full experience).

“ Ultimately, our testers liked the streamlined interface of Zipline’s Associate Experience much better. It isn’t overwhelming for those employees who only work a few days a week, and it only gives them the exact information they need to know for their shift ”



Navigating BYOD Concerns

While “Bring-Your-Own-Device” policies have traditionally been slower to catch on in retail settings, L.L.Bean knew that a successful Zipline deployment would require fully embracing the potential of BYOD. Allowing Guides to access Zipline on their personal phones would help ensure everybody had access to pertinent information, even if a stores’ company-owned devices were all in use.

Of course, the convenience of BYOD comes with serious considerations, such as how to account for employee time on devices amid varied state legislation. “When you need legal and security team buy-in for a roll-out, you have to proceed with caution. But what made it easier with Zipline was the ability to have a mobile prompt with a policy acceptance,” says Griffin. Prior to granting access to company information, Zipline prompts employees to acknowledge that they are, in fact, “on the clock” and cleared to work with a simple pop-up notification.



L.L.Bean is also excited about the future possibility of integrating other systems directly into Zipline - like their HR management system, Dayforce - to take advantage of the Clock Content Control feature. If they choose to implement the integrations, L.L.Bean's Guides would be able to clock in for their shifts directly from the Zipline dashboard, and any work-related communication would remain hidden until they do so. This could help ensure non-exempt employees in stores don't work "off-the-clock," giving HR and Legal teams even more peace of mind.

The Benefits

Thanks to Zipline's Associate Experience, L.L.Bean's Store Guides now have a true one stop shop for all of the information they need from corporate. And that one stop shop has also increased the brand's speed of business. "Now that Guides are in Zipline, we don't have to worry about how long that verbal cascade will take," says Griffin. Nor do L.L.Bean communicators need to give field teams a week's notice to get something up on the back room comm board. "We can get communication to everybody, faster," says Griffin.

Zipline also increases a Guide's access to store resources, which has dramatically improved in-store productivity. Giving Guides the ability to access documents in Zipline's Resource Library has been "transformational." Now that they are able to browse visual and floorset directives from the palm of their hands, teams can take initiative like never before. "They're saying, 'hey, we're on the floor, we could be recovering and updating these visual standards!' Leaders don't need to delegate these tasks anymore. The team can be proactive and support in a way they couldn't before," says Griffin.

But perhaps the best outcome of L.L.Bean's roll-out is the positive impact on employee retention. Zipline has taken the "delivering information from corporate" role off of store leaders' plates and automated it. As a result, precious time with direct reports can be put to better use. "Leaders still spend five minutes with each Guide at the beginning of their shift," says Griffin, "but those start-up meetings aren't about regurgitating the 'business stuff' anymore. They're spending time getting to know that employee, recognizing their hard work, coaching them, connecting with them."

About L.L. Bean

L.L.Bean, Inc. is a leading multichannel merchant of quality outdoor gear and apparel. Founded in 1912 by Leon Leonwood Bean, the company began as a one-room operation selling a single product, the Maine Hunting Shoe. While its business has grown over the years, L.L.Bean continues to uphold the values of its founder, including his dedication to quality, customer service and a love of the outdoors. L.L.Bean operates 54 stores in 19 states across the United States.

About Zipline:

Zipline is the leading provider of execution solutions for brands with field locations, driving better business agility, sales execution, and employee engagement. Zipline helps brands coordinate communications with the field in a way that streamlines operations and ensures accountability, ultimately improving sales and the customer and staff experience. Brands that use Zipline experience a 130% increase in sales execution and millions of dollars in labor savings annually. Today, more than 60 brands like Rite Aid, Sephora, Gap Inc. and AEO Inc. depend on Zipline to align and empower their field teams worldwide.