



# Designed for growth

Maestro® Performance Insights Workshop  
Case Study

## FORREC

*Toronto, Ontario*

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FORREC is a mid-sized planning and design firm based in Toronto that specializes in the creation of entertainment and leisure environments around the globe. While the company began as a landscape architectural firm in the 1960s, it has grown to become a global leader in their industry. The firm's horizons were expanded when FORREC was called on to do all of the planning for Canada's Wonderland, its first foray into entertainment. It wasn't long before the developers of West Edmonton Mall came calling. "We started to realize there was a market for entertainment design," says President and CEO Gord Dorrett. "Now we have landscape architects, architects, interior designers, graphic designers, illustrators and story writers." In the last 30 years, FORREC has completed theme parks, indoor entertainment centres, water parks, resorts and retail and hospitality projects in more than 60 countries for companies like Universal Studios, Hard Rock Cafe, LEGOLAND Development Corporation, and Nickelodeon. "We design places where people like to spend their spare time." Still, it's not easy selling dreams, says Dorrett. "Everybody else is selling widgets. And we are selling ideas—and that's tougher."

While FORREC survived the recent financial downturn, this period of worldwide economic uncertainty led Dorrett to take a closer look at the company and where it stood in the industry, which made him realize how much potential it had that wasn't being tapped. "We have accomplished a lot and have built a successful company, ranked in the top three or four in the world in our industry, but had largely maintained the status quo in terms of our current size, revenue run rate with modest growth," says Dorrett. "I approached the shareholder group and said, 'We are at the tipping point. We can carry on as we are or we can decide to maximize our potential and create greater shareholder value.'"

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#### The challenge

To reach its full potential, FORREC needed to reorganize in order to improve and enhance the entire corporation and to grow in a structured manner. Dorrett reached out to the firm's bankers who directed him to PwC partner and National Maestro Champion, Michael Epstein. "I sat down with Michael and immediately got along with him," says Dorrett. "I told him I don't want a bunch of motherhood consulting statements. I want something that is for us, about us, something we can get our hands on." Michael introduced FORREC to a two-staged process: First, a strategic goal-setting session, followed by a Maestro workshop.

Particularly attractive to Dorrett, who was at first hesitant and skeptical about both phases, was the involvement of both the shareholder group and people at all levels of the company. "The fact that the entire team was involved in the Maestro survey process, not just executives, was really important. It meant we could begin to understand in a very clear way what our people thought of the company, what worked and what didn't and how we could improve and become better in their eyes."

FORREC took part in both the strategic goal setting session and Maestro workshop in March 2010. "Our goal was to learn about ourselves—to take a cold hard look at who we are and what we lacked in order to move forward," says Dorrett. "Bottom line: we wanted to create a better working environment for everybody, and recalibrate our organization's structure to achieve higher levels of growth, so that all of our executives could concentrate on their best efforts for the company."

#### Our approach

"Michael guided us through the program and stayed on top of our progress," says Dorrett. That hands-on input was particularly important when it came to establishing long-term goals, both quantitative and qualitative forecasting. "It is very uncommon for a mid-size consulting firm to make projections beyond twelve months. Michael changed that for us. Without setting goals and targets and things you'd like to achieve, you never achieve them."

Maestro helped Dorrett and his team identify 15 major and prioritized tasks, which have since been assigned to executives with completion dates. "That was critical. We sit down regularly to find out where everyone is at. Often, each task leads to four other necessary actions, but that's OK—at least you are going somewhere. I recently pulled out our Maestro document and one of the key things we loved about it was the one open question: If I could fix one thing about FORREC, what would it be? Not even a year later, I can go down that list and check off what we've done, what we're better at, what we are working on. That's exciting. I can't wait to share that with the staff."

Dorrett and his team were so pleased with Maestro, he asked Epstein to chair FORREC's strategic development team meetings. "We meet once a month. Michael comes in and works with us and keeps us on track. I now work with Michael on a regular basis," says Dorrett. "He is an advisor, a mentor and helps me fulfill my role as president better. Every once in a while, you start to slide, and I'll get an email from Michael: 'Have you done this yet?' That follow-up is so critical because, individually and as a group, we must be focused on executing on our goals and objectives."

#### The result

"I honestly feel that the best result, from a macro perspective, is moving from a reactive entrepreneurial-driven company to a proactive professionally-managed company, with an entrepreneurial spirit," says Dorrett.

One of the outcomes was "to re-align our organization's structure so that it is focused and fits better with our long-term growth objectives." We have approximately 75 employees and in entrepreneurial fashion, the executives did everything, from project management to marketing and sales. Now, within the new organizational structure, everyone has clearly defined roles and goals in order to reach both our short and long-term business goals. People are now tasked in terms of risks and returns on specific goals that will allow the company to grow. Another outcome of the Maestro workshop proved to be an unexpected wake-up call to the executive team. "The number one concern of our staff was the lack of communication from management back down to the rest of the staff," says Dorrett. "We thought we were good at it. Apparently, we weren't. It's a simple thing to change. We recently had a town hall meeting where we communicated where we have been and where we are going, including the organizational changes."

The impact of these changes was immediate and far-reaching. "In the past, we were reactive. Based on our name, reputation and brand, work was coming to us," says Dorrett. "As a result of Maestro, we are becoming a much more proactive company, and one that makes the best use of its talent. Based on our focus on new initiatives, we are already experiencing success in the marketplace. It's a lot of work, but we feel a real positive momentum both internally and externally."