



ONCE UPON A TIME

Case Study

How Once Upon a Time
achieved consistent growth supported by
LighterHR outsourced HR services.

Table of Contents

Let Us Tell You a Story	02
The Story of Once Upon a Time Before Outsourcing HR	04
Their Challenges	05
Why Once Upon A Time Chose LighterHR	09
How We Helped Once with Outsourced HR	13
The LighterHR Experience	15
Happily Ever After	17
Key Takeaways	19
About LighterHR	23
Our Services	24
Our Vision	25

Let us tell you a story: Once Upon a Time...





Whilst that does sound like the start of a great story, it's actually the name of one of our clients.

Once Upon a Time (Once) is a full-service creative agency supporting global brands with the marketing and promotion of their products.

The clients they work with include Disney+, NetFlix & Amazon Prime, and they support clients in the music, entertainment, hospitality and consumer brands sectors.

Once have grown substantially during the 6 years in which we've supported them and this growth has been both organic and through acquisition.

Once now operates in multiple locations in the UK, US and Australia.

Our work with Once gives an excellent example of how HR Outsourcing can work for growing businesses and, in this case study, we'll tell you the story.

The Story of Once Upon a Time Before Outsourcing HR

We were first contacted by the Operations Manager of Once back in February 2018. What he explained to us is a scenario that we have now heard many times.

Once had tried a few different approaches to getting the HR support that they needed.

But despite numerous attempts, they couldn't seem to get the right support at the right time and HR had become a real headache.



Their Challenges

Their initial approach was having an **internal Office Administrator** who took care of HR admin whilst using a solicitor for advice on specific matters.

This worked for a while but, as they grew, more problems kept arising and it became very expensive to continuously get advice from a solicitor.



They then moved **HR in-house** and created an HR function and quickly came to realise **two key issues with this approach**.

Firstly, most of the time the **HR Manager really didn't have tasks to complete that were aligned to their skills, experience and salary level**.

Once found they were often paying for an HR Manager who was spending at least 50% of their time completing HR Administrator tasks.

The second issue was that there were times when in-house **HR was too focused on doing what was right for their friends** and colleagues rather than on what was right for the business overall.

Of course, the role of HR is to ensure that employees are treated fairly, consistently and that the business behaves ethically.

However, there are times when difficult decisions have to be made.



Once found that in-house HR individuals (and it did happen more than once) became reluctant to move forward on difficult decisions that would result in a detrimental impact on their friends/colleagues.

So they moved on to the next model they tried, which was to engage with a **freelance HR Consultant**.



With this model, HR support was provided largely remotely with some on-site visits and the consultant worked a certain number of hours per month.

The consultant worked these hours on a fairly ad-hoc basis meaning that Once had no consistency nor certainty around when tasks would be actioned.

The consultant would also take time off (which of course is completely understandable) but this meant that, during these periods of absence, Once found themselves without HR support.

The lack of structured HR support created a lot of issues within the business.

One of the issues was managers were unsure when tasks would get actioned, so they tended to go a little rogue and complete tasks themselves rather than waiting for HR support to be available.

This led to starters joining that no one was expecting, employee documentation being held by managers rather than being stored centrally, inconsistent terms & conditions and a general level of chaos.

As we said, this story is something that we have now heard many, many times.

NOW YOU MAY WONDER, WHY US? WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT?

Why Once Upon A Time Chose LighterHR

Once went through a robust procurement process which involved meeting with a range of different providers before selecting us.

We asked them why they picked us and **Rob Ward (Founder and Group Managing Director)** said:

“

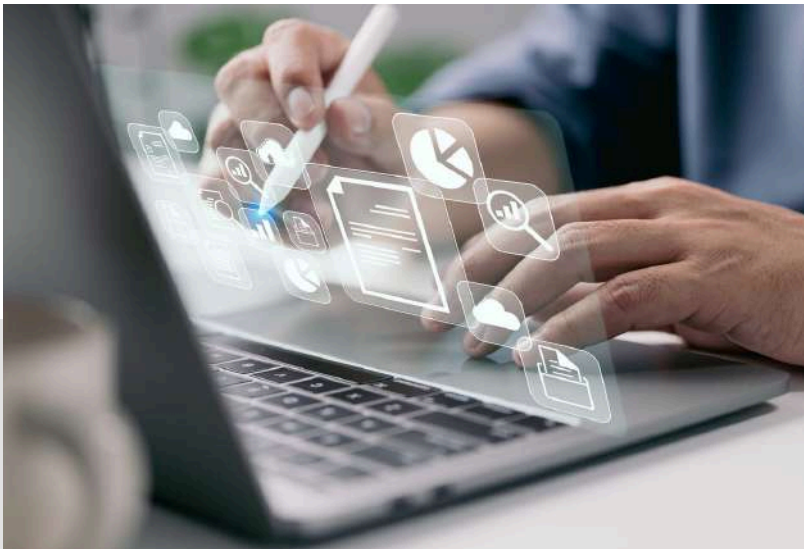
“We wanted a provider who we felt really fitted with our culture and values. HR plays a key part in our employee’s experience and we wanted to make sure that we had a provider in place who were going to help us in our drive to be a great employer.”

”

During the early meetings, Once explained to us exactly what they wanted from their chosen HR provider. Of course, they wanted to engage with a provider who knew their stuff. If you're engaging with an HR consultancy then they really need to know HR.

They then wanted a provider who would commit to a service level agreement that was **tailored to their business**.

They are a very fast-moving business, and they need HR processes to be efficient, relevant as well as executed in a timely fashion.



Then there was the question of cultural fit.

They wanted a provider with consultants experienced enough to operate strategically and engage with the founders (Joe Garton, Diane Charlton and Rob Ward).

They wanted to know that the provider would provide feedback and challenge to an appropriate degree so that they could be confident that they were making the right decisions when it came to HR matters.



It was also important to them that the provider would have HR professionals who could build relationships with managers and employees and who everyone would feel comfortable approaching.

As a creative agency, there are a broad range of personality types working at Once and it was, and remains, very important that different communication styles are adopted depending on the audience.

Finally, Once wanted to get the benefit of insights into best practice from the wider market.

Clearly, through the procurement process we were able to demonstrate that we could meet all of their requirements and they believed us to be the right provider for them.

6 YEARS ON AND ONCE FEEL LIKE THEY DEFINITELY MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE



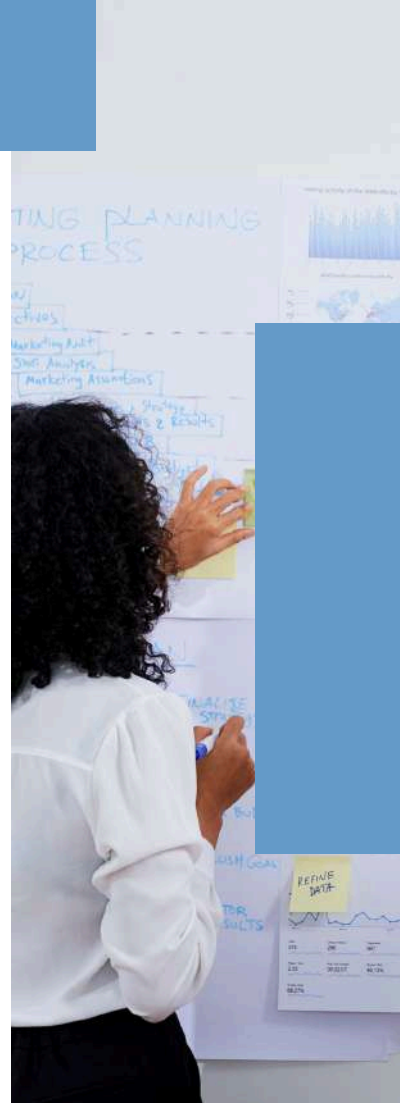
How We Helped Once with Outsourced HR

When we first started working for Once, the first activity was **to complete an HR audit.**

Whilst this sounds very administrative, it is a really good way to get a feel for what is currently happening in the business, what is working, what isn't and what would make the biggest difference.

The audit involved looking at records to check for compliance, however and just as important, it also involved meeting with managers and leaders to hear from them about what would make their lives easier.

From there, we agreed an HR plan that covered the first 12 months.





The key priority for Once was to get strong HR systems and processes in place to put a stop to the chaos!

We started by documenting processes and agreeing who was going to be responsible for what.

When these were approved by the business, we held training sessions with the managers to explain what they needed to do and when, as well as what we would be doing.

Of course, it did take ongoing support to get those processes fully embedded, but now, things really do run like clockwork when it comes to recruitment, onboarding, changes to terms and conditions, and processing leavers.

After these basics were in place, we were able to turn our attention to more strategic priorities.

This also involved supporting on acquisitions, implementing a more robust approach to performance management, and a range of other employee and manager initiatives aligned to the achievements and goals of Once's business goals.

The LighterHR experience

As we said, we've been working with Once now for 6 years and in fact, they have just signed a multi-year agreement with us.

We asked them what it was that they valued about the service we provide and here's what they had to say.

“

“For us, the service provided by LighterHR is exactly what our business needs: knowledge, flexibility, strategic thinking and efficiency. We know that we can talk to you about issues or future plans, and you will think of the best approach for us, by mitigating risks and prioritising the business's goals. You are not about wanting to implement “your way” but rather implementing what works for us. This is invaluable!”

”

Working with Once on a daily basis has expanded our involvement beyond the basic HR function.

We've become involved in strategic initiatives, such as diversity and inclusion initiatives, employee engagement surveys, and career frameworks programs.

This growth and evolution were enabled through building trust and strong relationships with the leadership team.



Happily ever after

Through this real story, we wanted to share with you what our consultancy can bring to your business and how outsourcing your HR could help you to make your business operations more efficient.

Our experience in working with Once and other clients like them for so many years, has made us **experts in outsourced HR**.

Working with the same client over an extended period of time offers unique opportunities for growth, both for us as a consultancy and the client.



It also underlines the importance of flexibility, continuous learning, and the ability to adapt to ever-changing business landscapes.

Through telling you about Once we wanted to illustrate all the complexities, but also the rewards of a long-term consultancy relationship.

We wanted to demonstrate that no matter where you are at with your business, no matter your size, we will be there to support you in fixing, growing, improving, right-sizing, maintaining, implementing and optimising your operations!

This is what we do and we do it very well.



Key Takeaways

Industry

Once Upon a Time (Once) is a full-service creative agency that supports global brands in marketing and promoting their products.

The clients they work with include Disney+, Netflix, and Amazon Prime, across sectors such as music, entertainment, hospitality, and consumer brands. Once operates in the UK, US, and Australia.



Key Takeaways

Problem:

Once faced significant challenges with their HR functions as they expanded.

Initially relying on an office administrator and a solicitor for HR support, the growing business encountered inefficiencies and high costs.

Transitioning to an in-house HR function revealed further issues, including misalignment of tasks with the HR manager's skills and reluctance to make difficult decisions impacting friends and colleagues.

Engaging a freelance HR consultant lacked consistency and structured support, leading to confusion among managers about HR processes.



Key Takeaways

Solution:

Once chose to partner with LighterHR for outsourced HR support, selecting them through a robust procurement process for their cultural fit and tailored service offerings.

The first activity was to conduct an HR audit to understand the current state and needs of the business.

LighterHR implemented structured HR systems, trained managers, and provided ongoing support to ensure smooth operations in recruitment, onboarding, and employee management.

The partnership also focused on strategic HR development, including supporting acquisitions, performance management, and employee initiatives aligned with Once's business goals.



Key Takeaways

Results:

The partnership with LighterHR transformed Once's HR operations, **resulting in efficient and consistent processes that aligned with the company's fast-paced nature.**

Once benefited from strategic insights and best practices from LighterHR, enabling them to manage acquisitions effectively, promote diversity and inclusion, and enhance employee engagement.

The collaboration led to high retention rates, streamlined operations, and continued growth for Once, demonstrating the value of outsourced HR support in achieving business objectives.



About LighterHR

At LighterHR, we specialise in providing practical and pragmatic HR consultancy and support services to businesses with 2 to 250 employees.

We have a current client base of around 200 clients, from many sectors including barristers chambers, architects, charities, consultancies, designers, financial services, hospitality, healthcare, insurance, IT, manufacturing, marketing, PR and technical consultancies.

We provide HR services tailored to our clients in accordance with their requirements and organisational structure.



Give us a call on

- 0203 535 5750 - London
- 0161 529 7478 - Manchester



Or drop us an email at
contact@lighterhr.co.uk



Our Services

Our Experience

All our consultants are CIPD qualified and have many years of experience in HR in a range of industries and settings.

We've worked in a broad range of sectors and between us there's very little that we haven't encountered before – although our clients often like to test that claim by presenting us with the weird and wonderful.

We provide a wide range of HR services tailored to meet diverse client needs.

Outsourced HR

As well as providing support on HR issues as and when they arise via our Pay As You Go option, we also provide a fully Outsourced HR service.

The service offers complete flexibility, enabling you to increase the level of support during busier times and decrease the level of support at quieter times.



Our Vision

Our aim is always for our consultants to quickly feel like “one of the team” and we employ HR consultants with a full range of HR experience to maximise consistency in consultancy relationships, - whatever the project.

A recent quote from one of our clients:

“...this was definitely an excellent financial investment into the growth and stability of the company, a consistently professional service, you provide excellent, timely feedback where direct open communication is maintained throughout.

After your initial consultation and the engagement of our first project, I very quickly began to realise the benefits and peace of mind that came with your teams’ hand-in-hand support and guidance.”

You can see some of our clients, and nice things they say about us, at <https://lighterhr.co.uk/about-us/client-testimonials/>



Give us a call on

- 0203 535 5750 - London
- 0161 529 7478 - Manchester



Or drop us an email at
contact@lighterhr.co.uk



We hope the information in this document has been useful. If you need more information or want to chat through your HR requirements, get in touch.

Book a free consultation:



Give us a call on:



0203 535 5750 - London
0161 529 7478 - Manchester

Or drop us an email at:



contact@lighterhr.co.uk

At LighterHR, we don't have any salespeople, so when you contact us, you will always talk with an **experienced HR consultant** who will understand your situation and be able to help you straight away.

We look forward to hearing from you!

www.lighterhr.co.uk