

Meet Michael Grad, the new Loyalty Manager at IKEA Atlanta. While he was born and raised in Palm Beach, Florida, he moved to the Atlanta area right before college and has loved Georgia ever since! When Michael is not working at IKEA, he enjoys walking with his two dogs around town and cooking. He also enjoys experimenting with cocktail making and, during the pandemic, has taken up with brewing his own beer. As a person, Michael is optimistic and thrives in an environment that is structured and organized. A big reason why he is grateful for being a part of IKEA is the great teamwork! Read about upcoming projects.

IKEA is a well-known furniture company with its roots in Sweden. IKEA opened their doors in Atlanta's Midtown neighborhood in 2005. Most of the stores in the U.S. are usually placed outside city limits since it is easier to maintain a large space. IKEA Atlanta is placed in the heart of metro Atlanta, close to the popular shopping district Atlantic Station and the Georgia Institute of Technology. Microsoft is also building its new headquarters 3 blocks away. Today, IKEA Atlanta has about 330 employees.

Big dreams

Michael has a background in marketing and events. He started in entertainment and broadcasting and stayed in the industry for 15 years. Right after college, he worked as an office assistant at Turner Broadcasting System (TBS) in an entry-level position with the company. With his advertising degree and his growing skillset, he wanted to work more with marketing. Michael said that it all started with sorting mail and fixing copiers to get his foot in the door and ended up with a marketing assistant role at TBS where he managed client entertainment activities. The client entertainment could, for instance, involve handling client hospitality for the Masters Golf Tournament or the NCAA Men's Basketball Final Four Tournament. Once Michael

moved into consumer marketing as an Assistant Marketing Manager, he also managed website promotions, digital marketing and marketing campaigns for projects like the iHeartRadio Music Festival and the SAG Awards.

Another set of eyes

Starting an event and communication role at IKEA in the middle of a pandemic seems like a tough challenge – but not for Michael. As he began the role in October last year, IKEA has created various COVID-friendly projects for both customers and employees. For instance, he helped manage a drive-thru trick-or-treat event for Halloween. Kids were dressed up in costumes and drove through IKEA's covered parking deck - they counted over 400 cars. – “I had to rethink how to communicate and started to streamline IKEA Atlanta’s communication process slightly and it was well-received. IKEA Atlanta has been thinking outside the box and has arranged fun virtual and pandemic safe events.”

“Working in communications and events, you have to be ready for everything and things always come up”

He further explained that every year, co-workers look forward to the annual holiday party which is generally a big bash. This past year, IKEA threw their first virtual holiday party and had a DJ playing music throughout the whole event with prize giveaways, and appearances by store management speaking to the year’s success.

The challenging part of the pandemic

Michael stated that having to deal with customers who are also enduring pandemic fatigue is a big hampering of excitement. “People were not as excited to interact like they normally would – which was challenging. Trying to connect with co-workers and meeting customers is harder than it looks like when having a mask on.” He said that he cannot wait to get back to a day where we can use events to gather as a group of people.

“One of the important aspects of my job is co-worker engagement. I work towards making sure that every single person that is employed at IKEA Atlanta is heard, seen and appreciated”

IKEA Atlanta has become more careful with events to be on the safe side. They are very happy to be able to engage their customers in new creative ways with craft activities for children and grab-and-go projects which have been great, Michael states.

Cool things coming up.

IKEA has partnered with a local charity called 100 Black Men in Atlanta that was formed to support and enhance educational and economic opportunities particularly for African-American youth. They are also involved in a nonprofit project called Family Promise, where they are helping transform a new space purchased by the non-profit to help make as functional as possible for homeless families. Last but not least, IKEA Atlanta is investing monetarily in small black-owned businesses that have been affected by the pandemic. In that way, they have established a relationship with the local Black Chamber of Commerce to help them identify businesses in need and distribute funds to them.

“Being able to harness the power of togetherness to create an even stronger connection is what I really can't wait to get back to.”

One of IKEA Atlanta's key values is togetherness. Michael explained that the key value is important since a lot of what he is doing is connecting people with different ideas and through communication. He strives for being in a place where both IKEA and SACC Georgia can exchange ideas that would benefit our members and IKEA Atlanta customers and be able to lean on each other for support when needed. The reach we both have separately is enormous with a huge opportunity to get in front of an even larger segment of the Atlanta population, he said.

Favorite places in Atlanta.

Michael's favorite places to visit are the Botanical Gardens where they have several stunning exhibits throughout the year. On Saturdays, he enjoys visiting the local farmers market near his home at the Carter Center, which is the center dedicated to former US President Jimmy Carter, a Georgian. He also suggests visiting an area outside the city called Arabia Mountain for some beautiful and somewhat quiet hiking trails.

Finally

Michael is very passionate about interacting with people and exchanging ideas. If you have any questions or ideas, whether they are IKEA-specific or if they are around how to partner or communicate together, please reach out to Michael Grad.

