

PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

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Contents

Social Media

Measurement

Enterprise Communities: Adding Value via b2b Social Networks

When somebody uses the term “social network,” what is the first thing that comes to mind? Chances are, **Facebook**, **MySpace** or **LinkedIn** will be your go-to word association. These established online communities offer substantial benefits for executives in terms of identifying and engaging stakeholders, increasing brand

visibility and communicating key messaging. That said, their massive size and scope requires execs to cut through the clutter in order to have their voices heard.

Enter enterprise communities. These b2b online networks have the same advantages of consumer-facing communities—connecting global audiences, building trusted relationships, offering interactive access to information—but they go a step further to unite members

around a shared purpose and then contribute business value accordingly.

Because they have highly defined memberships based on a specific business topic—improving sales processes (**Jigsaw.com**), exploring trends in the wireless space (**INmobile.org**), sharing medical insights and case histories (**Sermo.com**)—and are invitation-only, enterprise communities are ideal for networking, improving bottom-line results

and solving specific business challenges simultaneously.

“A b2b user generally visits an enterprise community as an extension of his or her professional learning,” says Vanessa DiMauro, CEO of **Leader Networks**. “He may be seeking to solve a real and urgent business problem or may be looking to connect and engage with a peer in a working group style. All these uses are driven by the need to make a business point

Page 6 ▶

(DID YOU KNOW?)

Seven Things You Will Learn In This Week's Issue Of PR News

1. 35% of surveyed Americans have more interest in the environment today than they did one year ago. (p. 3)
2. 84% of surveyed organizations have a mission statement. (p. 7)
3. 81 Fortune 500 companies have public-facing blogs, and 90% of them have the comments enabled. (p. 2)
4. Acquisition of new friends is a good metric for tracking the effectiveness of Facebook campaigns. (p. 5)
5. The “click factor” of modern media relations can be leveraged by spokespeople to spend more time focusing on key messages instead of background information. (p. 8)
6. Enterprise community metrics include financial, editorial and operational measures. (p. 6)
7. 40% of global survey respondents trust online news. (p. 3)

Employee Relations

Internal Comms

HR

Engage Employees to Maximize the Impact of Your Corporate Messaging

Advertising, public relations and Web marketing are tactics that virtually every organization uses to reach their customers and prospects. Companies ultimately spend whatever it takes to develop strategic branding messages that will click with their target audiences to boost revenue and profits.

Then companies spend whatever it takes to deliver these messages, using a combination of print, online, mobile, broadcast and social media. But given the current economic crisis, corporate budgets are shrinking fast, and communications is not immune.

Ironically, most companies neglect or entirely overlook a communications channel—a secret weapon—that they have

in abundance and can leverage at no additional cost: their own employees, and not just the corporate communications, human resources (HR) and sales/marketing staff. These groups, by definition, are already part of the communications mix.

The secret weapon that so often goes untapped is getting employees in areas such as finance/administration, research/development/engineering, manufacturing, shipping and quality control on board with your corporate messaging so they can become powerful ambassadors for your external marketing efforts.

Think about it. These employee groups directly engage customers, prospects, suppliers and channel part-

ners in some combination on a regular basis. And these are the very audiences your finely honed corporate communications machine is trying to influence. Why wouldn't you want to add that kind of bandwidth to your marketing arsenal?

What's more, employees are an extension of your company when interacting with family and friends and when networking with peers at business events and other networking forums. These are intimate, highly credible word-of-mouth and off-the-record “point of sale” exchanges that mass-media tools like advertising, PR and Web marketing cannot match.

In these interactions,

Page 7 ▶



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How To

Assess & Respond to Negative Blog Posts

According to a research report released by scholars at the **Society for New Communications Research**, the **University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth** and **Financial Insite Inc.**, Fortune 500 companies are further along in their adoption of public-facing corporate blogs than previous data suggested.

The study, entitled “The Fortune 500 and Blogging: Slow and Steady,” examines the 2008 list of Fortune 500 companies in relation to their adoption of social media, and found that:

- 81 of the Fortune 500 companies, or 16%, currently have public-facing blogs;
- 28% of those blogs link to **Twitter** accounts;
- 10% link to podcasts;
- 21% incorporate Web video; and;
- 90% of the blogs have the comments feature enabled.

Perhaps the last statistic is the most surprising, considering senior management’s long-held fear of embracing social media because of the inherent loss of control over messaging. The most common question they ask when faced with engaging bloggers—be it hosting their own blogs or participating in others’—is, “What do I do when someone posts a negative comment?”

True, the hardest part of corporate blogging, and blogger relations in general, is knowing when to let negative sentiments run their course and when to nip them in the bud. Sometimes, going to the mat over a fleeting criticism in the blogosphere only fans the flames; in other situations, not responding presents greater reputational risks.

To survive and prosper in the world of corporate blogging, communications executives must establish their own

assessment tool for evaluating and responding to comments or external posts. Along those lines, the **United States Air Force**, for example, created a “Web Posting Response Assessment”—a simple flow chart to help executives decide the best course of action in the event of a negative post (see graphic).

The assessment has three basic steps for arriving at a response recommendation:

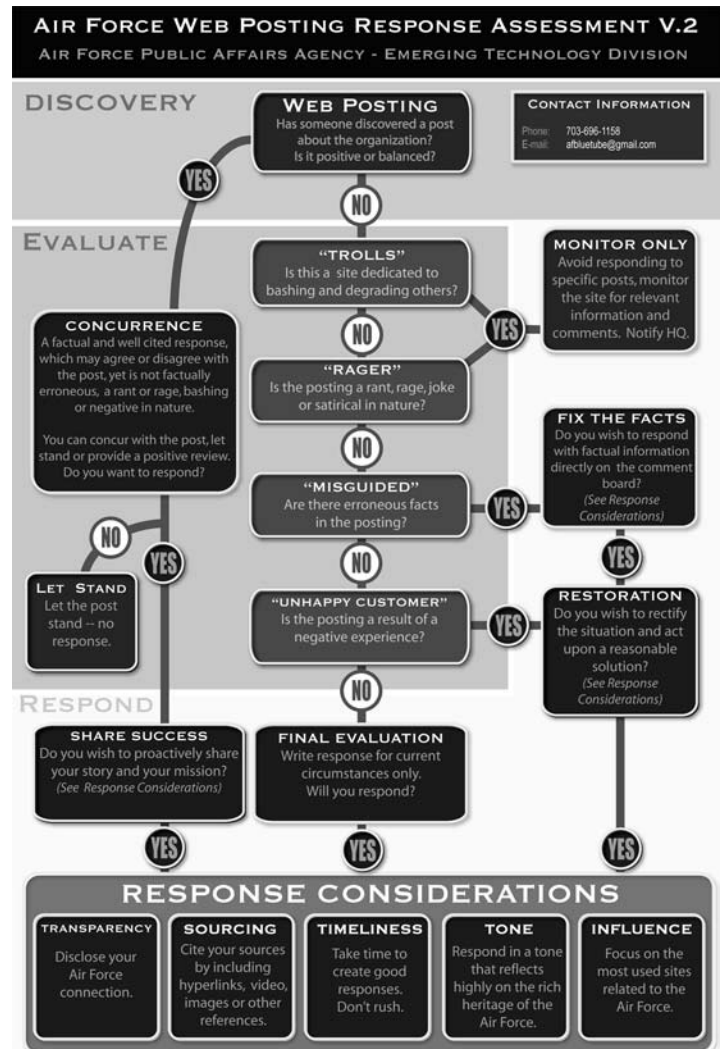
1. Discovery: If the post is “positive or balanced,” executives are advised to either let it stand or share the success. If it isn’t either of those things, they proceed to the next step to

characterize the commentator.

2. Evaluate: The commentator can be one of four types: troll, rager, misguided or unhappy customer. Evaluating which type is essential to determining the best response.

3. Respond: Based on the nature of the commentator, execs are urged to “monitor only,” “fix the facts” or pursue restoration.

This flow chart can be adapted to any organization’s needs and, in turn, ease the anxiety surrounding the blogging experience. **PRIN**



Reputation Paramount in a Recession; Green Products Rule; Online Content Skyrockets; Most-Trusted Sources

► **In Recession, Protect Your Reputation:** The Reputation Institute (RI) has released the results of its 2009 U.S. Reputation Pulse study, which ranks 153 companies in the categories of products/services, innovation, governance, workplace, citizenship, leadership and performance.

According to Kasper Nielsen, manager partner at the Reputation Institute, corporate reputation becomes paramount during tough economic times. Among the study's findings:

- Of the 153 largest companies in the U.S., Americans have the strongest amount of trust, admiration, respect and good feeling for **Johnson & Johnson, Kraft Foods, UPS, General Mills** and **FedEx**;
- If a company can improve its reputation by 5 Reputation Pulse points, it can increase recommendations of their company within the general public by 6.5%;
- In 2009, insurance giant **AIG** lost 27.52 points, the largest year-over-year drop of any one company, followed by **Goldman Sachs** (-17) and **Morgan Stanley** (-13);
- 75% of companies measured in both 2008 and 2009 saw changes of no more than 5 Reputation Pulse points; and,

- U.S. consumers feel the most respected and reputable industries are consumer products, transportation and logistics, industrial products, computers and food manufacturing.

Source: Reputation Institute

► **Green Products Reign in a Poor Economy:** In this turbulent economic climate, environmentally friendly products may have the best prospects for success. The 2009 Cone Consumer Environmental Study indicates that despite the recession, only 8% of Americans consider themselves any less likely to invest in environmentally responsible products, while 34% say they are more likely to buy such products and 44% report that they are no more or less inclined to do so.

The study, conducted by **Cone Inc.**, also found that:

- 35% of Americans have more interest in the environment today than they did one year ago;
- 35% of Americans have higher expectations of companies to make and sell environmentally responsible products and services during the economic downturn;
- 70% of Americans claim that they are paying attention to

what companies are doing with regard to the environment, even if they cannot currently invest in their products;

- 63% of Americans trust companies to tell them the truth in their environmental messaging; and,
- 85% believe companies should communicate their environmental commitments year-round.

Source: Cone Inc.

► **Online on the Incline, Still:** A new report released by **The Nielsen Co. Online** indicates that video and social networking sites are driving Web content to new heights. In turn, Internet advertising continues to become more important for traditionally heavy ad-spending industries such as healthcare, telecommunications and consumer products. The report also showed:

- The number of American users frequenting online video destinations has climbed 339% since 2003;
- In the past year, unique viewers of online video grew 10%, the number of streams were up 41%, streams viewed per user grew 27% and total minutes engaged with online video increased 71%;
- Led by social media, search

and video, the Internet's share of total ad spending will continue its steady upward trend as global economies emerge from the current recession;

- In the age of **Twitter**, feedback barriers have all but disappeared, creating a near friction-free environment for playing back brand experience, campaign reactions or brand events; and,
- 30% of U.S. mobile subscribers recalled seeing some form of advertising while using their mobile phones, up from 18% one year prior.

Source: The Nielsen Company Online

► **Trust in Media a Mixed Bag:** Good news for Internet content producers: A recent TNS study reveals that people trust information they get from online news sources roughly to the same degree as information from friends. Among the findings:

- 42% of global respondents said they trust word-of-mouth recommendations;
- 40% trust online news; and,
- Blogs were rated as the least trusted source in almost every country. **PRN**

Source: TNS

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Game On: Web Analytics Take the SEGA Brand's Robust Community-Building Campaign to the Next Level

Company: SEGA

Timeframe: October 2008-ongoing

The video-gaming community has always been characterized by its members' enthusiasm for technology, and by their desire to connect and interact with fellow fans. The proliferation of social media platforms has only enhanced these traits, as it facilitates interactivity via the very medium in which this audience "plays" every day.

For video game developers like SEGA, the emergence of social media presents a variety of challenges and opportunities. On the plus side, online communities are ideal for finding brand evangelists, generating buzz and engaging with fans. The flip side: There is an unlimited universe of content. Plus, individuals can host their own fan sites and, in turn, represent the brand without ever establishing an official relationship with the company itself.

This is the environment SEGA executives faced when they initiated a campaign to develop a cohesive online community that would leverage multiple social media platforms

and, in turn, help the team:

- Promote the SEGA brand and its games;
- Create buzz around SEGA;
- Communicate with fans;
- Find and create brand evangelists and influencers; and,
- Develop relationships with fan-run gaming sites for hosting contests, posting reviews, giving away merchandise and running other promotions.

Beyond just building the brand and engaging with fans, the SEGA team wanted to establish metrics to measure each component of the overall social media initiative—no small task by any means, and just one more to-do on an ever-growing list of tasks.

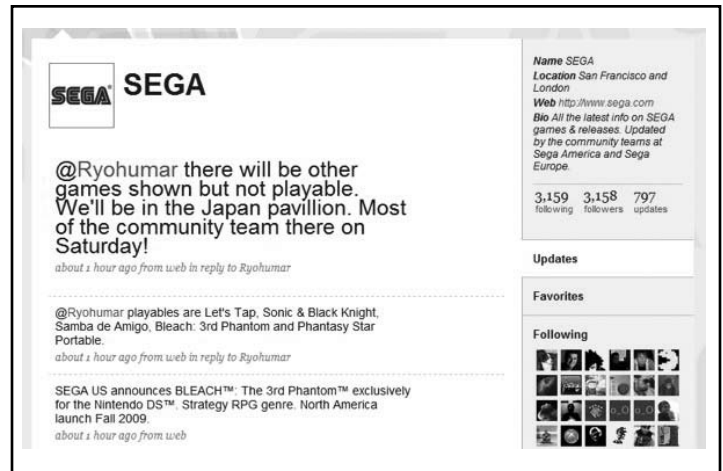
Having spelled out the campaign's objectives, the execs had to follow up with a list of the social media tools they would integrate into the overall program, which would ultimately include blogs, forums, **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Flickr**, **YouTube**, **GameTrailers** and fan sites.

Some of these tools/platforms were preexisting digital properties owned and operated

DIVIDE & CONQUER

The nature of SEGA's community-building initiative, coupled with the major measurement elements, required Kellie Parker, community manager of Sega of America, to divide up the various social media properties with the PR department. This made the behemoth project more manageable on all fronts.

"We divide up the sites generally by their size and corporate ownership. All of the gaming magazines, television shows and large Web sites are firmly on the PR side of things," Parker says. "My team generally works with independent sites that don't have corporate owners. They may be smaller, but these sites reach a lot of people and are generally perceived to be more real to users because they are not trying to turn huge profits. We reach out to develop relationships with them."



SEGA's Twitter account actively engages the brand's fan base and drives users to its diverse network of social media platforms.

by SEGA, while others were public forums populated by user-generated content. The team had to develop strategies for leveraging each platform individually, and then for bringing everything back to the overall SEGA brand.

Then, they had to put tracking systems in place to generate the metrics that would be required to measure and evaluate success. The tools in their arsenal would include: **Omniture** (for blogs, forums and fan site referrals); **Brandwatch** (for social media/Web sentiment); Facebook, Flickr and YouTube stats; Twitter followers and referrers; and **StreamStats** (for GameTrailers).

"Each [platform] has its own tracking system, so our approach to metrics is consequently a little scattered," says Kellie Parker, community manager of Sega of America. "Some [tools] are traditional, such as Omniture and Facebook stats. Some are less traditional, like social media monitoring. And some are industry-specific, like StreamStats. We aggregate data from all of these places manually, as we've not found any one

service that can meet all of our metric needs."

Given the absence of a single umbrella service or platform, analyzing the strategies and subsequent outcomes of the campaign's many components is best done one channel at a time.

BLOG, MEASURE, REPEAT SEGA has four corporate blogs (U.S., Europe, Sonic and Total War), but this particular effort focused solely on the U.S. site.

"SEGA U.S. has had a blog for some time, but has not really leveraged it to its [fullest] advantage," Parker says. "Prior to my arrival in November 2008, the blog was posted to only a few times per month and generally was parroting what PR was doing. There was almost no original content."

Corporate Blogging 101 dictates that infrequent updates and PR-heavy content are kryptonite for blogs, so Parker's team set out to reinvent the platform with dynamic information that would generate buzz among fans.

"We cover trade shows and conferences, we hold contests, we post fan art that people send

us and we post links to external reviews of our games,” Parker says. “But while we’ve done a lot with the content, we still need to attack some problems with our metrics.”

To measure and evaluate blog traffic, SEGA execs use Omniture, a Web analytics and online business optimization platform. Though in an early phase of implementation, the analytics have granted the execs insight into the areas with the most room for improvement.

“Almost 100% of our referrals come from bookmarks or [visitors typing in the URL directly]. We’re getting no referrals from search engines, other blogs or social media,” Parker says. “We need to do a better job of promoting our blogs to others and getting them to link back to us. We also need to do better SEO so we’re listed on the first page of search results. We are starting to do some of this—for example, our blog auto-feeds post to our Twitter feed. But, clearly, we have a ways to go.”

Parker’s honesty is indicative of the team’s focus on improving results and engaging more actively with online influencers. In March 2009, she says, the SEGA U.S. blog had 29,332 page views, and traffic was higher on days that new content was posted.

“We look at this to gauge our overall improvement as well as to look for patterns to know when the best time to post items is,” Parker says. “We monitor [individual pages and features] regularly to know what we should do more of and also what didn’t do well.”

This information continues to shape the team’s blogging strategy, especially in the context of two key focuses:

- Increasing referrals from search engines, social media platforms and fan sites; and,
- Posting content that draws in readers, including conference

coverage, announcements and fan art.

SOCIALIZING WITH FACEBOOK’S FAN BASE

The SEGA brand has about a dozen Facebook pages, but Parker’s team most recently focused on four: Sonic the Hedgehog, Empire: Total War, SEGA and Football Manager 2009.

In terms of tracking user activity, Parker says Facebook’s built-in metrics effectively measure page views, unique visitors, fans and more. But, in terms gauging the level of engagement, “Wall posts are something that we track very carefully,” Parker says. “We also look closely at the acquisition of new fans to our page.”

Another online platform that generates significant activity for SEGA is the collection of forums hosted on Sega.com, which account for eight of the top 10 pages across the whole site. However, due to the original system of tagging content in these pages, the company’s current measurement system can’t provide metrics for total forum traffic. The team is in the process of transitioning to a new forum platform, which will be equipped with advanced tracking capabilities.

“I will be able to see overall numbers, and to drill down to the category and forum level to get those statistics as well,” Parker says. “Eventually, we’ll have a clear understanding of the hot spots in our forums and will be able to provide more detailed reporting to brand managers and executives on how their particular titles are performing within the SEGA-internal community.”

TWEET IF YOU LIKE SEGA

Twitter’s surge in popularity has been advantageous for SEGA executives, who have used this channel to integrate brand-building efforts, and to drive users to other branded platforms. With 30 to 50 new

followers every day, the account is very busy.

“Twitter has been a great tool for reaching out to fans on a personal level, but also to help us form better relationships with the fan sites we work with. We can get news and information from them quickly, and we can help them promote their links about our products,” Parker says.

In terms of monitoring Twitter activity, Parker uses the site’s search function to keep a running tab of all mentions of SEGA. “I can occasionally find people talking about trouble with our products, and reach out to them,” she says. “They are impressed that I have done that and this generally yields a follow-up positive response. The search also helps me keep on top of breaking trends, both positive and negative, so we can respond quickly.”

WEB VIDEO PLAYS TO WIN

Video-sharing platforms are natural conduits for branding a company like SEGA, as they are perfect for building buzz around games via trailers. Plus, YouTube has its own built-in metrics that identify viewer behaviors, which can then be used to shape future messaging or to revise the storylines of new games.

“YouTube has some interesting stats associated with it. Available to everyone are statistics about sites linking to the video, which makes it easy to see who is best promoting our videos,” Parker says. “One of the coolest things YouTube metrics offer is a real-time attention meter. The video plays next to the meter, with a moving timeline. This allows you to see the most popular parts of the video, including the “sticky spots.”

These features make YouTube a valuable piece of SEGA’s online community initiative, but there are inherent disadvantages to contend with. “One of the major hurdles

we face in the gaming industry is restrictions from the **Entertainment Software Ratings Board**, which rates video games like the **MPEG** rates movies,” Parker says. “If a title is rated M for Mature, all content related to that game must be behind an age gate and not accessible to anyone under 17 years of age. Some social media has caught up with this—Facebook allows us to age gate our pages. However, YouTube doesn’t. We can’t put trailers for M-rated games on YouTube at all.”

For M-rated games, then, the team uses GameTrailers, a site specifically for the gaming industry that has age gates for sensitive content.

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Clearly, there is no shortage of social media platforms SEGA execs can use to build relationships with current and potential fans. But, without an overarching plan for integrating platform-specific efforts and metrics, each strategy would be executed in a vacuum. To make the initiative cohesive, Parker says, the community and PR departments divvy up responsibility for various Web properties, and then execs create monthly reports to keep everyone up-to-date on progress (for more on the collaboration with PR, see sidebar).

“My team and I pull together monthly reports using all of these stats for SEGA and any games we are currently tracking,” Parker says. “We also pull together on-demand reporting as needed. For example, managers and executives are often eager to know how a particular trailer is performing. In this instance, we will include a manual sentiment analysis of comments from users.” **PRN**

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Enterprise Communities

► Page 1

of pain go away.”

While a number of enterprise communities already exist, communications executives can start their own virtual forum for collaborating with like-minded professionals to share ideas, discuss challenges, find solutions and establish thought leadership. Here’s how.

► **Identify the audience you will serve (and who will serve you).** There are two components of a successful enterprise community: a specific business need and a community of experts that can effectively address it.

“Start with the end in mind,” DiMauro says. “Understanding who you want to serve, and in what ways, provides the business rationale for an enterprise community program.”

► **Establish clear membership guidelines and a strategic invitation process.** “One of the best practices found in b2b communities is a well-crafted invitational experience where an audience is identified and then reached out to by the

sponsoring organization in a personalized way,” DiMauro says. “Viral marketing also plays a large role in member acquisition strategies because trust is a driving factor in user adoption.”

The viral growth of enterprise communities also differentiates them from consumer networks, which tend to open their proverbial doors to everyone. The success of a closed community is not measured by the quantity of members, but by the quality.

Getting that quality starts with a clear vision of your target audience. Make a wish list of the members that would bring the best ideas and solutions to the table and then make a compelling offer for them to join.

► **Design the site around navigability and simplicity, not pomp and circumstance.** Decorating your enterprise community with more features than the iPhone App Store won’t impress members—quite the opposite. The point of the forum is to create value and

offer information that can’t be found elsewhere. If executives wanted to share photos from last week’s post-trade show bar crawl, they would have joined Facebook.

“The reason for visiting the community is to interact and learn, not to browse and explore,” DiMauro says. “Therefore, the design needs to make it easy for the member to find what or who they are looking for. If a professional can’t use the community while [answering] the phone or conducting a conversation in his office, then it is too difficult.”

► **Make the content count.** “Enterprise communities connect information with a purpose. The content must support a business process,” DiMauro says. “Effective b2b communities need to serve as the concierge of interactions and information for the members. Each piece of content or interaction needs to be present for a reason.”

In the same vein, the content needs to be clear, concise and topical. Editorial calendars and a framework for editing member contributions help keep everything and everyone in check.

► **Make interaction and engagement requirements for success.** “The most important thing to get right is picking an interactive model to support the community,” DiMauro says. “Create a value proposition that is so compelling that members must engage to survive professionally.”

Your enterprise community should have features and functions that support users’ needs and the business’ goals. Failure to align business goals and community features will guarantee failure, period.

► **Evaluate the community’s effectiveness and integrate the intelligence it generates into your organization’s business model.** DiMauro emphasizes the importance of using metrics to measure the value the site contributes to your business, and to mining data for trend analyses (for a list of the specific metrics she recommends for measuring the effectiveness of enterprise communities, see sidebar).

In terms of specific best practices for measuring the effectiveness of b2b communities, Connie Bensen, chief community officer of **Techrigy**, points to the following:

1. Identify objectives;
2. Prioritize;
3. Choose what to measure, and which tools you will use;
4. Benchmark; and,
5. Identify trends and report on them.

Then, DiMauro says, “Integrate the community into your broader organizational operations, and leverage what you learn across sales, marketing and product development.”

But remember: While enterprise communities are places to gather intelligence about an industry or business sector, they are *not* marketing platforms.

“Community members provide valuable information, content and feedback,” DiMauro says. “Then, marketing provides value-added services and products to members in exchange for their interaction.”

PRX

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SAMPLE ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY METRICS

Financial Metrics: Revenue generated (direct and indirect, i.e. client retention or pass-through revenue gained through bundled services) minus operational costs.

Operational Metrics: Fully burdened costs of community operations including technology, development, content acquisition and staffing.

Business Metrics: Click-throughs/logins, industries serviced, number of members who are clients, title portfolio of membership.

Marketing Metrics: New member acquisition costs, cost per member (CPM) relative to revenue per member (RPM), event or campaign outcomes.

Editorial Metrics: Cost of content creation, percentage of user-generated content, content ratings/rank.

Member Metrics: Number of members, percentage of profiles complete, return rate, premium conversion rate, revenue generated per member, number of posts per member, average page views per member or group, engagement metrics.

Employee Engagement

► Page 1

employees can either post a gain or a loss for your company based on how well they understand and communicate your corporate messaging. Train employees to voluntarily become “secret agents,” and your winning percentage goes way up.

MISSION STATEMENT IMPOSSIBLE

One reason companies don't recruit rank-and-file employees as communications “deputies” may be because they typically do a poor job of informing employees about corporate business objectives and strategies. Take the ubiquitous mission statement as an example.

Regardless of whether mission statements serve any purpose beyond corporate narcissism, employees should be aware of their company's credo. That's because branding strategy and overall market positioning need to reflect a company's core vision.

Chris Young, founder of **The Rainmaker Group**, reported on the findings of a recent research study on employee recall of their organization's mission statement. The survey was conducted by the **Institute for Corporate Productivity (I4CP)** in conjunction with **HR.com**.

Young finds the results show an astonishingly low prevalence of employees who are familiar enough with their organization's mission statement to recall it if asked. He cites these numbers as examples:

- 84% of organizations have a mission statement;
- 62% of these organizations reported that less than half of their employees would be able to recall their mission statement if asked; and,

- 20% of organizations with a mission statement said that only 10% of their employees could recall their mission statement if asked.

Young deduces that only 20% of organizations with mission statements have a majority of their workforce that is able to recall this critical manifestation of why an organization is in business.

He believes that if awareness of an organization's mission statement is low and team members lack a common sense of purpose and direction, there are ways to improve the situation:

- Making sure that departmental and organizational goals are aligned and reinforce the mission;
- Helping team members see how their work contributes value to the organization's mission; and,
- Reminding everyone of the mission statement to improve comprehension and understanding. Incorporating the mission statement into e-mail signatures, memos, flyers and other company collateral serves this purpose.

FROM MISSIONARIES TO SECRET WEAPONS

Young's recommendations can also help employees master the nuances of corporate branding messages so they can become secret agents. Following are some initiatives to achieve this objective.

Executive management, along with the corporate communications team and HR, own this process since collectively they are responsible for developing brand management and marketing strategies in the first place.

- **Select the right message.** Rather than select a message for a specific product or service, focus on your corporate branding message, which may also be your tagline.

Taglines are short and easy to remember, but the best ones are an evocative, inspiring call to action, which allows employees to become truly passionate about promoting the brand. Here are some great taglines: “Just Do It” (**Nike**), “Think Different” (**Apple**), “Reach Out and Touch Someone” (**AT&T**) and “Put a Tiger in Your Tank” (**Exxon**).

Getting any ideas for your own organization?

- **Walk before you run.** With the tagline as gospel, you need disciples who will become your secret agents. Start with a test group first, such as the finance/administration staff at the corporate level or in a specific in business unit. These employees tend to be well educated (finance) and comfortable working within an organized system (administrators). Plus, both groups typically have above-average communications skills.

- **Explain the objectives.** Sit down with top management in these groups, explain the secret agent concept and review all the attributes of the tagline and its connection to the mission statement. You do not expect their people to be an extension of the sales team.

Rather, you want them to recognize opportunities to gently share the positive elements of the tagline/mission statement when appropriate in their normal interactions with the outside world. Use some role-playing to illustrate how this can become part of familiar, everyday scenarios.

- **Monitor results.** The plan is working if employees are enthusiastic secret agents, can recall the tagline and connection to the mission statement and, most importantly, if a random survey of those with whom they've communicated exhibits a greater understanding of the company's tagline and mission statement. If this is the case, measurable increases in revenue and profits are likely to result soon.

- **Roll it out to the company at large.** If the test phase is successful, why not give everyone the chance to get involved? Come up with a name for the program so it becomes a tangible and recognizable part of the corporate culture. Replicate the test approach with other groups and then have a company-wide meeting to launch the program.

Employees are like sports fans. They want their team to be successful. But especially in tough economic times, they have further motivation to get involved to help avert layoffs or even bankruptcy. If presented and managed properly, the secret agent concept can be a lot of fun for employees and have a significant impact on your organization's bottom line.

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This article was written by Bill Bradley, principal of Bottom Line Communications, and appears in the recently released *PR News Employee Communications Guidebook*. Bradley can be reached at bill@bottomlinecomm.biz. For more information or to order the *Employee Communications Guidebook*, visit www.prnewsonline.com/store.

The Click Factor: New Media Landscape Gives Spokespeople More Control Over Messaging



When was the last time you read an article online without at least one URL to click on for more information about the topic? For that matter, doesn't almost every TV or radio news program remind the listener or viewer "go to our Web site for the full interview with...?"

In essence, the news outlets are telling us that not all details of the story will be found in the official report, but that most of the supporting facts are only a click or two away. This means that the reporter is more interested in capturing the gist of the story and then supplying the consumer with a means of finding out more information online.

This "click factor" is generally good news for the spokesperson; if you are in an interview or prepping someone, this change in how news is presented creates an opportunity to focus on the bigger picture messages and fewer details.

But first, don't be mistaken: Facts are critical for any story and are a necessary part of the process. A certain number of facts are table stakes. But the point is that you don't have to spend all the time in the actual interview answering basic questions that amount to just filling in facts. To maximize your "on-air" time, then, consider these tips:

- **Give the reporter some content in the right context.** Send the reporter a fact sheet before the interview or direct the reporter to a specific Web site to do his/her homework beforehand.

- **Direct the interviewer and listener/reader/viewer to additional resources.** Before, during and/or after the interview, having already established your credibility by naming a few facts, direct the reporter to a place where more information can be found; ask him/her to include the URL to the information in the coverage. If possible, include the URL in your commentary so listeners can go directly to the source.

- **Focus on the meat of the story.** If you've provided the reporter with the background information needed to shape the story ahead of time, then you can spend the bulk of the interview talking about your messages, framing statements and giving perspective, all of which tell more of your story.

Here is another fact to consider: With shrinking publications and fewer reporters covering more beats, media is relying on spokespersons to shape the story for them. So, if

too much of your interview is spent on answering basic questions and confirming details, you may be not taking advantage of the click factor. With that in mind, here are a couple of strategies for framing the actual interview.

- ▶ **Take control up front.** The most aggressive way to start an interview goes something like this: "I know you have plenty of questions for me. However, I just came back from a customer presentation and we spent about 45 minutes on just two critical slides. How about if I walk you through those slides and you can ask me questions as we go? At the end, if you have additional questions, I'll take those."

That's an example of taking control and framing the interview. One expert who uses this approach claims that eight out of 10 reporters are happy to have him explain a complicated technical subject in this manner—definitely a good batting average.

- ▶ **Be subtle, but direct.** A slightly less assertive approach is for the spokesperson to ask what the reporter wants to cover. The spokesperson then responds: "Thanks. I think I can answer most or all of those questions. If there is an area

where I am not the expert, I'll refer you back to media relations for the right contact. However, in addition to what you want to know, there are a couple of topics that I want to make sure we explore. And, of course, there is plenty of background at our Web site: www.goodfacts.com."

Regardless of the approach you take, the trend of reporters pointing their readers/viewers to a Web site for more information—the click factor—can be used to your advantage. To maximize this click factor:

- Have fact sheets to e-mail or fax to the reporter;
- Know the URL that you want the reporter to click on/refer to;
- Develop companion video and audio materials;
- Frame the discussion at the start of the interview; and,
- Take advantage of the last question and summarize or put the interview in context.

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15190