THECR NETWORK

BUILDING AN EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY PROGRAM

SNAPSHOT

SPEAKERS
Liz Bullock (SASI)
Leila Dunning (Autodesk)
Nick Popio (BCBS of NC)

COMPETENCY

Leadership

MATURITY PHASES

CMM2, CMM3

THREE TAKEAWAYS

TheCR noticed many members were working on employee advocacy programs and they invited three experienced practitioners to share their best practices and lessons learned.

1. Liz Bullock offered her one-sentence definition of an employee advocacy program as: "Employee advocacy is empowering your employees to support the goals of the brand".

2. Leila Dunning shared that a huge lesson learned for her in this process of creating an employee advocacy program is to engage with key stakeholders at the beginning of the process and ensure that they are well educated about the course of action. For Autodesk, these key stakeholders were HR, IT and legal. They were critically important given their knowledge of the various global employment laws, FTC regulations, etc. Leila's advice is not to underestimate the need to educate those important stakeholders.

3. In addition to executive support, it is also very important to have middle management support. Provide training for middle managers who might not otherwise see the business value in an employee advocacy program. Without that business value, he/she will not be supportive of any employee participation thus stifling engagement and impeding the success of the program.

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OVERVIEW

Highlights of the discussion are noted below:

- **Definition of an Employee Advocacy Program:**

  Liz provided a definition of an employee advocacy program in order to level-set the discussion for those on the call:

  - Liz's one-sentence definition is the following: "Employee advocacy is empowering your employees to support the goals of the brand". There are a wide variety of definitions for how employee advocates are activated or empowered, usually with respect to content sharing. While that is a powerful piece, it is only one piece.

  - Looking across an organization, employee advocacy has very different benefits. For instance, communications/PR might be more about reputation building. Marketing may be more about demand and HR may be centered on recruiting. It is a matter of empowering those employees to support the organization's larger goals.

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BEST PRACTICES

The following is a summary of the various best practices that emerged from the discussion with members:

- **Build the Program by Collaborating with the Right Areas within the Organization**: The three panel experts shared how they built their advocacy programs through organizational collaboration:

    - **Leila Dunning – Autodesk**: Leila shared that for Autodesk, she started off by interviewing a handful of employees. Some of these employees were natural advocates who were passionate about Autodesk and others were either well-established bloggers or already active on social media. These employees were asked why they felt that the development of a formal employee advocacy would be important. In response, they stated that they felt it was necessary to clear a path to engagement and contribution because they wanted to have more meaning and purpose to their work and to play an active part in the company's future. They wanted Autodesk to make it easier for them to create this type of engagement and contribution.

        - After these interviews, Leila explained that they conducted some external research regarding brand advocacy to validate that they were on the right track. After all the information was gathered, they put together a formal recommendation and presented it to the executive sponsor of their organization for approval and support.

        - After they were granted the executive sponsor's support, Leila developed an employee advocacy core team to help her with the overall strategy, budget and program management. They recruited someone who was considered a social media guru and champion, someone from HR and a couple of people from the sustainability and philanthropy team. The reason these people were chosen for the team was for their input on the content architecture, a long-term launch plan and the creation of a reward and recognition aspect to the program.

        - After all this was in place, they started with a small pilot. Leila shared that she utilizes this core team as a source of information to help connect the dots.

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BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- **Nick Popio, BCBS of NC:**

  Nick shared that he had a similar experience. They began by looking at who was active and engaged in the company. Since they have internal discussion boards, they looked at those discussions, as well as those people who were engaged on Twitter and Facebook.

  For the pilot program, they reached out to those individuals to get a better gauge of their skills and competencies. Each of those individuals were asked to complete a short questionnaire that would provide Nick and his team with some insight as to which platforms they used, which platforms they were most comfortable with and which platforms they would be most willing to consider leveraging for an ambassador program.

  These individuals were also asked about what authenticity meant to them. In doing so, they were asked to take a few corporate messages and rephrase them in their own words.

  - Nick explained that these exercises were meant to level-set experiences and reinforce the idea that this program would not be about just re-tweeting or sharing a post. They enforced the concept of the program being about spreading the corporate message in an authentic way using their own voice and not just the master voice of the company.

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BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- **Liz Bullock – Dell and SASI:** Liz is now with SASI, but shared her experiences working with Dell. At SASI, Liz also shared her experiences working with Adobe.

    - Dell also used a core team. For Liz, executive sponsorship is a key component of the program. Fortunately, Dell had executive sponsorship and leadership within the marketing and PR teams with a goal of expanding into sales and other areas within the organization.

    - Liz explained that when they started, they definitely went after those who were most active. Interestingly, however, they conducted a study with a company called: "Socialook.net." This company was able to examine all Dell employees who had Dell in their Twitter bio and/or personal Twitter handles. Socialook analyzed that employee data to compare the employee's personal Twitter handles to Dell's corporate handles, i.e. how often they were they talking about Dell, the reach, audience make-up, etc. It was a fascinating study that helped propel the program. What they discovered was that there was only an 8% overlap. This meant that employees were basically getting a message out to an audience that Dell was not reaching on its own. They also saw that employees were sharing Dell content at a much higher cadence than the corporate Facebook or Twitter account. Employees can be enthusiastic sharers of content much more credibly than the brand.

    - Another important step to consider is employee activation. Not every employee is social savvy and not every employee wants to go online and tweet about Dell or any brand for that matter. Accordingly, Dell had certain projects that turned out to be of interest to employees, much to Dell's surprise.

        - For example, Dell has a listening command center that pulls in huge amounts of online conversations. One project involved manually digging through the data. Employees came out of the woodwork to do it. All in all, starting off with socially active employees is great, but there are also folks along the journey that can contribute to other, less obvious projects that still offer a great deal of support to the team.

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BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- **Cultivate Ambassadors:** Now that all the footwork is complete for the program, the next step is to identify the key ambassadors:

    - Nick Popio, BCBS of NC: Nick shared that they searched for specific people and, in doing so, found others who they were not aware of and not expecting to find as potential ambassadors. Part of the reason behind this was that in their quest to ensure representation across the company, they wanted to find people who were not necessarily involved in communications or a forward-facing role, such as HR. Therefore, Nick recommends looking outside of the typical parts of the organization.

    - As for cultivation, Nick's key points are to ensure that check-ins and opportunities for feedback are built into the program from the beginning. This should include events such as a monthly meeting (at least monthly), either in person, by phone or via chat. The point is to ensure regular communication. Let these ambassadors know that they have support.

    - Liz Bullock – Dell and SASI: Liz shared that at Dell, even though the CMO was well aware of who the advocates were, they did experience challenges recognizing the international advocates. Therefore, whenever the CMO travelled to these countries, Liz and her team set up an hour-long meeting for her with the brand advocates at the various international locations to discuss news about the company, products, etc. The CMO wanted to hear from the brand advocates, but they also wanted to hear from her. This helped to spread the excitement and build momentum. It was a real coup that this CMO made such an effort.

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BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

• **Consider a "High-Touch" Approach to the Employee Advocacy Program:** One participant shared in her introduction that her ambassador program was very high-touch. Hillary asked this participant to share what she did to stay in close communication with her ambassadors:

- After this initial identification of potential ambassadors, this participant sent personalized communication stating that they had been "hand selected" for the ambassador program pilot because of their passion for the brand.

- They had the opportunity to ask questions about what was expected of them and what they would be doing before they even had access to the platform.

- After those open house calls, the ambassadors were sent an invitation to the platform. From there, the company has been able to have conversations with them. Recognition is used, such as personally handwritten cards from this participant thanking them for being a part of the program. This participant spends a lot of time moderating both with the brand channel and their social media accounts to respond to these key members as they post. This participant will "like" and/or comment on their Instagram photos, etc. This participant has even gone to the stores to meet them in person in order to get to know them and offer support.

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LESSONS LEARNED

The following is a summary of lessons learned as shared by participants within the discussion:

• Hillary asked Leila if there were any people within the organization that adopted the program more readily. Conversely, Hillary also wanted to know which parts of the organization had a harder time accepting the concept. Leila replied that the biggest challenge was working with HR, IT and legal.

- A lesson learned in this regard was to engage with these groups earlier in the process. It requires a great deal of education for the internal stakeholders about this notion of employee advocacy and social selling. In hindsight, these groups are critically important due to their knowledge of the various employment laws that need to be navigated country-by-country or different FTC regulations, etc. Leila's advice is not to underestimate the need to educate these key stakeholders.

- In terms of an executive sponsor, Leila shared that she is lucky to sit in a group called: "RCE", which stands for Reputation, Consumer and Education. Their mission is to expand the understanding of Autodesk and its role in helping people design and create while deepening the engagement with the company's various stakeholders across PR, social and brand engagement. All in all, it was an easy sell for them to get that executive sponsorship since it aligned with key business objectives.

• Hillary asked for the percentage of employees who are part of the ambassador program compared to the overall employee pool.

- Nick replied that for his organization, the percentage was intentionally small, perhaps 2-5% of their overall population. They tried to ensure that they built a strong foundation first by enlisting people who they were confident they could work with to solicit honest feedback in order to build the program. This year, they plan to ramp that up significantly.

- Liz shared that for Adobe, approximately 20% of their workforce is active, which is impressive. They created a hashtag called "#Adobelife", which is a place for employees to share what it is like to work at Adobe. Liz feels that Adobe has done an excellent job of creating a strong culture for its employees.

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LESSONS LEARNED, CONT.

• From a Dell perspective, the percentage of employee advocates was 1% of the total employee population. Liz stated that they, too, wanted to start small because the successful implementation of a program like this requires a change in behavior. As such, it is much easier to start with a small group. As you expand, the behavior expands with it.

• One participant asked how high up the executive ladder it would be necessary to go to still have the required support to build an employee advocacy program. This employee's company has been through a merger and they are still trying to build their employee culture let alone an employee advocacy program.

- Liz replied that Michael Dell has been a huge advocate for the social media space and has been active in it for quite some time. However, as positive as his support is and was in this regard, adoption throughout the organization was not a guarantee. This was because not all the middle managers endorsed social since they did not see the business value. There were many misconceptions about employees utilizing social.

- Consequently, without the support of middle managers, employees were not using social because their managers were not on board with the concept. Therefore, it became necessary to implement middle management training in order to help support employees.

• Liz recommended a pilot program to begin with, which does need executive support. However, once it comes time to scale it, the middle management layer needs to also be on board or employees will not engage.

- Nick added that it is key to ensure that the ambassador's managers are aware of the various activities required of an ambassador and that they sign off on it. Many problems can be averted if this is in place. Secondly, Nick believes that the level of support does depend on the organization. It is wonderful to have the CEOs support as that does carry a lot of weight. However, as long as the VP level – at the very least – is on board, it should be sufficient to allow cultivation through marketing and those types of functions.

- That said, the CEO and others in the C-suite should be aware of what is happening with respect to the ambassadors and the overall employee advocacy program.

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LESSONS LEARNED, CONT.

• One member asked the panel to highlight their lessons learned and what they would do differently in retrospect, i.e. a 'do' and 'don't do' list.

Leila Dunning – Autodesk: Leila listed the following:

1. Do make it very easy for employees to be advocates.
2. Do provide advocates with interesting content that they would want to share.
3. Do collaborate with internal stakeholders, especially across different countries if the organization is global.
4. Do work with IT, HR, procurement and legal as early on in the process as possible.
5. Do not be prescriptive. Allow advocates to use their own voice. They know their audience best, so give them the flexibility to construct the right messages that are appropriate for their audiences.

Nick Popio, BCBS of NC: Nick listed the following:

1. Do work with your management stream and your ambassador's management stream to ensure that their direct managers are on board with having their employees participate in the program.
2. Do provide training to not just employee ambassadors, but all employees in order to raise the general education level and perhaps find new ambassadors that otherwise might not have come forward. Training and clear calls to action are imperative.

Liz Bullock – Dell and SASI: Liz listed the following:

1. Do put thought and consideration into the content. It cannot be just corporate content. Employees may be passionate about different things that may not be in the corporate handle.
2. Do supply content that is outside of the company – even the industry – so that they can be thought leaders, too, if that interests them.
3. Do find a good technology partner. Liz shared that at Dell, they tried to build an in-house platform before there were several vendors in the marketplace. It was time-consuming and not nearly as effective.
4. Do capitalize on existing corporate programs. Think through where the advocacy program can be integrated into existing programs. An example is on-boarding. This is a perfect opportunity to capitalize on the excitement of new employees who have just joined the company. Other examples are performance plans, reward plans, etc.

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LESSONS LEARNED, CONT.

• Hillary asked the panel how they measure success. Although time ran out on the call, Nick and Liz provided the following responses post-call:

- Nick replied that they measure success using reach, shares and CPM saved via ambassadors through GaggleAmp.
- Liz provided a slide deck (see Resources Section) and directed participants to Slide 9:

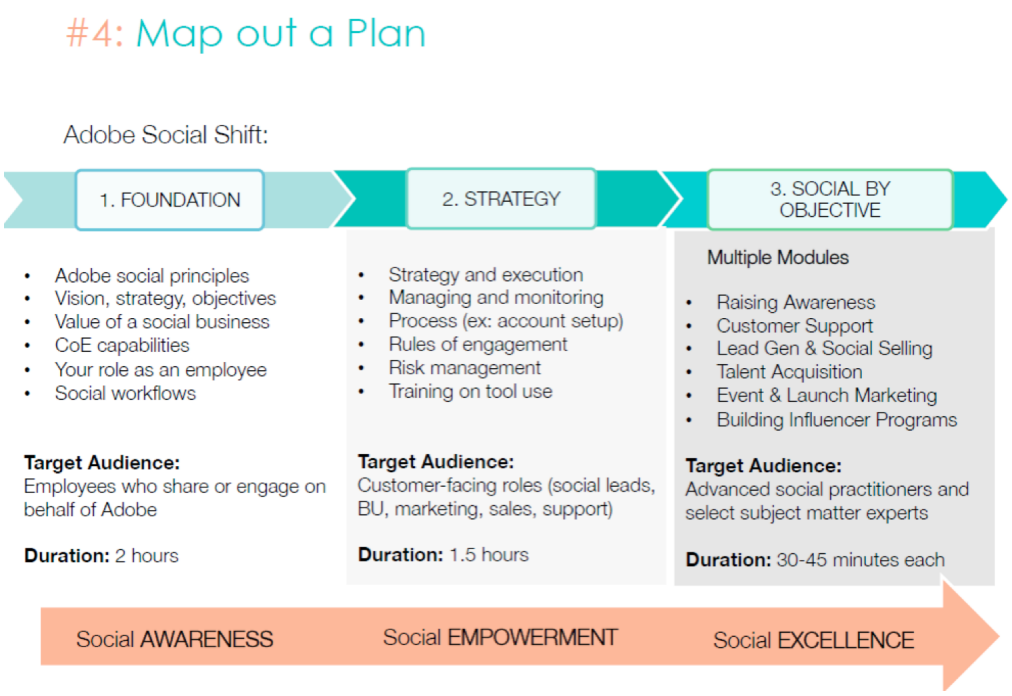

Figure 1 - Map out a Plan (Measurement Response) - Slide 9

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ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Hillary asked participants to share their challenges and questions on this topic. Participants shared the following:

- One participant is working this year to convert his company's Intranet into a Social Intranet. As part of that they want to pull together a group of advocates or champions to help spread the word and get people engaged right from the beginning. In other words, this member is looking for a group to champion the program, as well as govern it.
- Another participant is looking to integrate an advocacy program with his company's marketing program. This participant is looking for best practices to help with this initiative.
- Another member is about to launch an employee advocacy program and was on the call to listen and learn from others prior to launch to ensure that all bases are covered and, if need be, change direction where/if needed.
- Yet another member has launched a pilot advocacy program complete with enterprise-wide social media training. This participant is about to launch Phase II of the program and was on the call to learn what makes a successful program and the types of people and/or departments that contribute to the success of this type of program.
- Others were on the call to learn best practices and develop resources.

RESOURCES

- As mentioned in the discussion: http://www.socialook.net/
- As mentioned in the discussion: http://info.socialchorus.com/rs/socialchorus/images/Community%20Standards%20-%20TM.pdf
- As mentioned in the chat: https://communities.ca.com/docs/DOC-1051
- As mentioned in the chat: mailto:Leila.Dunning@autodesk.com
- As mentioned in the chat: http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/1976797/SOCM2015

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