



Engaging Executives: The Power of Content

 **SNAPSHOT**

SPEAKERS

Roanne Neuwirth (Bates Communications) & Hillary Boucher (TheCR)

COMPETENCIES

Leadership, Strategy

MATURITY PHASES

CMM1, CMM2, CMM3, CMM4

TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

Roanne’s expertise focuses specifically on executive engagement.

1. **Want to understand what makes an executive audience different?** Roanne discussed 6 elements of an executive persona that will help you to recognize what they value. Knowing what they value will help you to engage them in your community.
2. **Top engagement tactic.** Learn the engagement tactic that will not only create quality content for your community, but will come straight from the executive.
3. **Connect with your executive team.** Interested in connecting with your executive team? Understand the 3 pillars of executive engagement. The point of overlap with these pillars is the connection you’re looking for.

4.

OVERVIEW

1. **Background – Roanne Neuwirth:**

Hillary introduced Roanne:

- a. Roanne helps clients to engage their executives through strong content.
- b. Executives are a different audience. Engagement requires a different skill set.

BEST PRACTICES

1. **Understand Why the Executive Audience is Different:** By understanding the executive persona, community professionals can cater to what they value:

<i>Executive Persona</i> ⇨	<i>What Executives Value Based on Their Persona</i>
Unrelenting schedule demands.	Expect a return on the time they invest.
Spend most of their time in meetings.	Look for outcomes-based content & conversation.
Don't like to be pitched.	Expect discussions to have meaningful content.
Need to sell decisions internally.	Prescriptive value and case-based discussions.
Trust their peers and inner circle above all else.	Use community for peer input and relationship building.
Very quick studies.	Connection to experts and higher value thinking.

2. **Understand these Guiding Principles of Executive Engagement:** Use this checklist to build agendas, write a blog post, plan an event or create community content:
 - a. **Convene with Peers and Experts:** As explained above.
 - b. **Get Actionable and Timely Information on Issues that Matter:** Refers to tangible and relevant information on the issues that matter to them right now.
 - c. **See the Proof of Hard Facts and the Credibility Behind the Information:** Data and peer insights add credibility.
 - d. **Hear More Than the Common Wisdom of Top-Of-Mind Trends:** Executives are less interested if they are unable to apply content to a current challenge.
 - e. **Participate In Strategic Discussions, Not Tactical Conversations:** The McKinsey Report is an executive favorite because it looks beyond the hype.

BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

3. **Know How to Connect with Executives:** Roanne shared a Venn diagram. Where the three pillars overlap is the connection to executive engagement:
 - a. **Relevance:** Know your audience. Tell them what they want to hear vs. what you want to tell them. This is important from a community perspective.
 - b. **Credibility:** Don't try to talk about topics or ideas that are too far removed from your core strength or you lose credibility.
 - c. **Innovative Value:** Help the executive to think in new ways.

4. **Consider These Engagement Tactics:** Participants shared tactics that have worked for them:
 - a. **Blogging:** An executive blog that pushes to the main newsfeed.
 - b. **Executive Templates:** Executives fill-in a template with their thoughts.
 - c. **Short Weekly Meetings:** The executive is asked what he/she read this week and then the community manager transcribes his/her thoughts for the community.
 - d. **Audio and/or Video Interviews:** Executives are much more comfortable speaking than writing. Asking specific questions about the business gets the executive chatting. Posting the interview in the community sparks member engagement.



LESSONS LEARNED

- Executives are only interested in higher level, strategic ideas.
- The more credible you are in speaking with your audience, the more they will share with you and others. A relationship must be developed first in order for this to happen.
- Recognizing that this is a different audience, Georgina from TheCR looks at it as programming. The same way she would run content or an engagement program is the way she looks at the effort needed for executive engagement.
- Other than having their name attached to thought leadership, executives also benefit from learning, networking and content.
- Participants debated the effectiveness of ghost writing. For some, it is easily detected as corporate speak and, therefore, ineffective. Others felt that it was better than nothing at all and helped the executive learn through baby steps.
 - Blog posting for the executive is an alternative vs. ghost writing.
 - Roanne looks at ghost writing as being the conduit for a story that the executive tells.
 - Some executives are terrified to post live. It's not time or willingness that stops them.
 - Be transparent with the audience and let them know it's not forever.
- Executives must also be ready to acknowledge responses. That may be even scarier than the actual post. Don't let them become unnerved because they didn't know about replying.
- Hillary asked if there needed to be an in-person aspect of community with executives. The short answer is yes, backed by the IBM case study below.

CASE STUDY

Roanne shared her lessons learned from an IBM case study with approximately 2500 CIOs:

- **Background:**
 - Members had to apply to join.
 - It was a thought leadership type of program. Executives are more likely to engage online if there is an in-person component and some hand-holding.
- **Conduct a Survey (Relevance):**
 - This looked specifically at what it takes to become better business leaders. Analysis of the survey served as the model and the basis of a white paper.
 - The themes that came out of the survey became the pillars of the content and conversation agenda for the year. This speaks to the relevance pillar because these were the issues that were most important to the executives.
- **In-Person Engagement:** Note that this does not have to be in-person meetings.
 - This type of engagement was vital. It consisted of virtual roundtable conference calls. CIOs discussed their particular challenges, etc.
 - From this, content was created, published and shared with those unable to attend (very important given the global demographic of IBM).
 - What worked were small evening salons or panels where members shared their ideas and/or expertise.
 - A virtual expert panel on business issues was also created.
 - From this they published 3-page insight papers to help with credibility.
 - Blog ghost writing is done for those CIO members to post on the site. Ghost writing helped to encourage executive engagement.
- **One-on-One On-Boarding Calls:** This identified early on those members who might have the willingness to engage and set the expectations for participation.
- **Associate their Name with Thought Leadership:** This is very appealing to executives because it elevates their expertise and point of view with their peers.

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

Hillary asked participants to share their interest in this topic:

- In general, participants were interested in learning how to apply these principles across the entire community, as well as to help executives understand how community touches other parts of the organization.
- Ted added that TheCR Research continues to show that connecting with executives is a powerful way to move the community forward regardless of use case.