THECR NETWORK

Building the Business Case to Defend and Grow Your Program

SNAPSHOT

SPEAKER
Rachel Happe, Principal and Co-Founder, The Community Roundtable

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COMPETENCIES
Strategy, Metrics & Measurement

MATURITY PHASES
CMM1, CMM2, CMM3, CMM4

HIGHLIGHTS

Are you struggling to tell your community story in a way that secures the executive commitment and investment required to succeed? It's all about sales and sales is not comfortable for non-sales people. This presentation helped to provide valuable insights for building the business case in a way that will help defend and grow community programs – all from the perspective of someone who does not consider herself a salesperson.

➢ Rachel continually referred back to one highly successful best practice throughout this presentation, one that will open doors for you and make the sales process much easier. Read on to discover her secret.

➢ There is a great deal of psychology behind sales. Rachel identified several best practices that will persuade people to your point of view.

➢ Rachel offered 5 benefits of community that will help to build your business case – benefits that will get an executive's attention!

OVERVIEW

➢ **You May be Thinking About This All Wrong:** Rachel asked for a show of hands for how many people had to defend their programs on a yearly, monthly, weekly or daily basis. There was a strong show of hands. The point is that those people who are continually defending their programs – particularly on a daily basis – are the people most experienced and best able to provide sales insights.

➢ **Recognize That You Can't Tell People What to Do:** Rachel believes that control is for amateurs. We are in denial if we think we can control people as a way to get them to do what we want/need them to do. We might be able to coerce them because we have something that they want/need (salary, information, etc.), but no one wants to be told what to do. You'll never get complete buy-in if you come from a position of coercion.

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BEST PRACTICES

- **Get Comfortable with Sales:** If you want to be successful as an individual and/or a successful program owner, you have to get comfortable selling your point of view. It will limit you if you don't figure out a means to do this in a way that's comfortable for you. To help with this, Rachel shared 3 sales truths:
  - *Recognize Hierarchical Anxiety:* We're all people. Part of what holds us back is our unwillingness to subvert the hierarchy in our own heads. Getting over this is the first step.
  - *Change the Sales Mindset:* Change the image in your head about what it means to sell. Recognize that it's not impossible to sway someone's beliefs. It can actually be very beneficial to everyone involved.
  - *Evangelize:* If we maintain that sales is a contentious process, it won't be productive. It will only lead to more contentious conversations. Change your thinking to "promote and evangelize" vs. sales.

- **Use the "Work Out Loud" Process to Help Change People's Beliefs:** Rachel likes the approach in which tiny, microbe behavior changes are triggered that orchestrate a person's "AHA" moment.
  - At TheCR, they have found a process that works well. It's called "Work Out Loud". Initially, they asked people in their weekly meetings to share 3 things that they were working on – not how they were doing it. The direct objective was a productivity exercise. It helped people to be self-aware and it helped to keep them track. However, the underlying intent was to orchestrate serendipity.
    - For example, someone shared that they just created a training exercise. Someone else in the room was tasked with that, but didn't know how to get started. Now they had someone to talk to that could help them out, saving a week's worth of time or more.
    - This is the kind of value that we can orchestrate through a community. While someone's belief is changing about what is possible, the community reinforces that belief. It is a sustainable way to change a habit.

- **Break it Down:** People learn complex things incrementally. Their beliefs change as they learn.
  - Recognize that sales is not a one-time fix. One presentation alone will not get everyone on board.

- **One Person at a Time:** Rachel is analytical. In the beginning, she thought it would be easiest to talk about the logic behind what she was trying to "sell" and to do it as a group would be much more efficient. That's not the case. Sales is a very individual process. You need to really understand a person before you can present to them. Only then can you bring everyone into a room and have a conversation about it.

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BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

➢ **Start with the Emotion:** The mistake most people make is that they don't start with the emotion. Instead, they start with the logic. If you think about it, giving an executive a large report that logically explains what you are trying to do won't go over well. If he/she doesn't care, they won't read it. You need to get at the emotion first to show them why they should care. Use your engagement skills to draw people into your point of view.

➢ **Ask for Advice:** Rachel showed a slide with the following saying: "*If you ask for money, you'll receive advice. If you ask for advice, you'll receive money."*
  • Most people think of problem solving as attacking the problem directly (asking for the money). However, when you directly ask for money, the usual response is a list of reasons why you can't get the money. Case in point: don't lead with the reasons why you need to hire a community manager. Organizations will always labor under the delusion that they can change their culture without investing any money into it. Or they'll hire a community manager and expect that one person to transform their organization.
  • If, however, you change your tactic and ask your senior leadership for advice on an engagement problem, they will rhyme off a number of solutions. Hopefully, you can steer them in the direction of a community manager and help them to think that it was their idea. Now you've got buy-in for hiring a community manager. It won't always work, but is a much better tactic.

➢ **Try the Sales 'Jedi' Mind Trick:** The main focus here is your audience.
  • *ABC:* It's as simple as ABC – *A*lways *B*e *C*onnecting. Note that it does not stand for "always be closing." Most people make the mistake of working towards the close before they even connect or understand their audience.
    o The mind trick is to interview people. People love to talk about themselves. They love to be asked for their insights. When presented this way, very rarely will you get turned down. Plus, this tactic helps you to find out so much about a person and how you can make what you want to "sell" resonate with them.

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BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- **_Identify Your Audience:_** Who cares or is impacted by the community program? Who influences the community program the most and who influences them?
    * Your primary targets are the obvious suspects: the budget holders, your boss, the people in your work group or a VP who has some ownership over the community.
    * Your second target is the people who influence your first target group. They will have a much more trustworthy voice than you will at this point. It is very effective to convince secondary influencers to work on your primary influencers.
- **_Connect and Empathize:_** Interview all of these people in order to build relationships with them. Ask them what their responsibilities are, how they approach their role, what they care about the most, who they pay attention to, what they perceive as problems and what excites them.
    * The interview process helps you to really get inside their heads and be able to understand and empathize with them. This is the secret tactic.
- **_Analyze:_** Note the words used by your interviewee, their emphasis and their priorities. Listen for triggers – events, people or news – that matter to each individual. Read between the lines. There may be an underlying tension when you speak to each executive. The tension may not be spoken, but you can pick up on the thread that is worrisome to each of them.

➢ **Try this Simple Narrative:** Past, present and future. The reason it works well is because it is intuitive and very ingrained in people's heads. It's memorable and it's simple enough that it can be repeated. If you can get your positioning down in this format, you'll start off in a good place.
- **_Past:_** The past is the 'why'. Why is there a problem? Why did the problem develop?
- **_Present:_** This is the 'how'. How are we going to solve the problem? What are the details for solving the problem?
- **_Future:_** This is the 'what'. What does success look like? What will be achieved? The more specific you can be about this, the more you will help others envision what they want out of this initiative. As well, you'll have better metrics because you'll be very specific in your measurements – and you'll be aligned with their vision.

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BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

➢ **Try the Following Tactical Mechanisms:** Rachel offered these tactics to help with the sales process:

- **Develop the Narrative:** This involves defining the problem, introducing the solution and painting the picture of success. This step is crucial. You have to help define the narrative for your executives so that they can talk about it in places within the organization that you can't reach.
    - An important point here is not to start with community. Executives don't know about community because it isn't their problem. Engagement, retention and conversion are their types of problems. Fortunately, community is the answer to those problems.
    - Never lead with the answer. If you do, you'll lose them before you even start because you haven't taken the time to align your solution to their problem.
- **Define the Problem:** When you take the time to speak to people individually, you can understand where they are on the Social Executive Framework[1] (Traditional, Piqued, Experimental, Social, Networked). Tailor your conversation level to the experience level of the person. The goal is to get them to the point of value generation.
- **Start from an Emotional Perspective:** Talk about emotions neutrally. Be self-aware of your own emotions. Then when you talk to someone, say: "I feel really frustrated," as an example. People can't argue when it is presented this way. They may not agree with you, but they can't deny what you're saying. Acknowledge your emotions, but never let them overtake you.
- **Be an Analyst:** Research the workflows by documenting the behaviors that create strategic problems. What is the trigger? How do people get an answer to what they're looking for? What is that process? How long does it take? How many people are involved? What is the cost of unanswered emails? The answers to these questions are a fixed cost of the workflow.
    - The value is a little more subjective, but you can ask people to zero in on it.
    - Be very specific. You will probably need to do this for a number of use cases or workflows, particularly if you have a complex community problem.
- **Present the Problem:** 1) Start with an emotional hook. Articulate the situation that triggers anxiety, fear, curiosity, etc. and hook into that emotion. 2) Next, do your research. Don't let people's imagination's cause them anxiety. Articulate the problem in simple, concise terms. Research the document workflows, their cycle times and impacts. 3) Test. If you've done your interviews well, you'll have identified tones for how people talk about the problem. Continually iterate until you get an expressed urgency to solve the problem. Now you can offer the solution.

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[1] See the following link for further information: https://communityroundtable.com/what-we-do/research/the-social-executive/

Building the Business Case to Defend and Grow Your Program

BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- ➢ **Recognize These 5 Community Benefits When Building the Business Case:** In general, communities offer these 5 benefits to the business:
  - *Transparency:* Communities offer speedy access to Information. This is the primary value. It's not the most interesting benefit, but it's the most scalable.
  - *Engagement:* Engagement fosters shared ownership, which is an interesting benefit. When people start asking questions, they are pursuing an answer to the problem. That's a leading indicator that they have taken ownership of the problem and they are open to collaborating on a solution.
  - *Normalize Acceptable Behaviors:* This is a hidden value. If you highlight and reward people for asking questions, more people will follow that behavior.
  - *Remove Bottlenecks:* This transforms linear value growth into compounding value growth. For instance, SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) are a bottleneck in any organization. They answer the same questions over and over. With a community, the SMEs can participate, but they don't have to be involved in every conversation. Furthermore, that knowledge is captured so that the SMEs can refer questions to a document, again saving time. The difference is not the channel, but instead the approach to managing the problem.
  - *Networked Value:* Once content is captured, it is searchable. It can help someone save time because they didn't have to reinvent the wheel. Communities make work transparent and available to an entire network. Show executives what that looks like in the community. Show them the community conversations before and after an SME gets involved to help solve the problem. That is an incredible value that helps the executive to see community worth viscerally.
    - Engagement rates are how we track progress and behavior change. When something like the above takes place, use your engagement dashboard to show executives what is happening by pointing out the history and progress of the community from a more tactical level.

- ➢ **Demonstrate How a Community Impacts a Core Workflow:** Using research, compare how a community solution could impact a core workflow. Compare the workflows with and without community. Keep in mind that it will never be a perfect workflow. Just ensure that the people involved agree that the process is believable and that the comparison is believable.

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BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

- Define and introduce the solution. Tell people why community solved the problem and then explain the mechanics of the solution at a conceptual level. Demonstrate how the solution would integrate into workflows or behaviors. Give them a real-life example.
    - Point out the time saved.
    - Highlight the opportunity cost. Show how the reduced time involved in the workflow helped you to get a positive business output. For example, an increase in event registrations because the event was posted quicker. Or an increase in sales because an RFP (Request for Proposal) was completed more quickly.

- **Define Success Using ROI Metrics:** Community value continues to compound and produce positive ROI.
    - Executives and finance want to see dollar figures because that is how they translate value. If you can't translate the value of your community into a dollar figure, the value will always be unclear to your stakeholders.
    - TheCR's ROI model helps to project future value. It's a geometric curve. Plus, it shows the importance of compounded behavior change.
    - A successful tactic to use with executives is to encourage them to collaborate with you on the results. TheCR does their ROI analysis with their clients and then refines the assumptions. Afterwards, they give them the model to take back to their stakeholders and collaborate with them on the assumptions. If your executives are comfortable with the assumptions, they will be comfortable with the results. Consequently, they will be much more likely to buy-in to the results. It's much more effective to iterate with them than to try and give them a perfect answer.
    - Share data about how the community delivers financial value *using stakeholder language.* Always speak to your audience in the language and terms that are identifiable to them.
    - Demonstrate with real examples what has changed to generate value using quotes, screen shots and research. Show stakeholders how potential risks are handled or elevated with your approach. This way they don't think of community as a place where people waste their time, which is a common misconception among those who don't understand community.

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BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

➢ **Execute on the Requirements:** Rachel shared what she believes are critical requirements:
- *Caterpillar Chart:* Rachel likes using caterpillar charts. It allows her to show a solid line demonstrating what happened in the past and then a dotted line for the future roadmap. For example, these could be all the community management initiatives that you've hit and some of the milestones achieved along the way. What this actually allows you to do is consolidate the history of what's happened in the community. It's an education tool, as well as a maturity check. For instance, with some of the clients Rachel works with, this exercise reveals that they might have all their milestones in technology. That is important to recognize because it isn't a sustainable strategy. Adjustments need to be made.
- *Historical Growth:* ROI shows you where you've been, which can then be projected out. Rachel also uses a confidence projection model. For instance, if you have a roadmap with investments in certain projects, you believe it will have a positive impact on your ROI. Or you could even be aggressive and invest more heavily in certain areas. By collaborating with your executives using historical growth, you have put these projections in their control. You're not saying: "This is the path we should take." Instead, you're saying "We could take either of these paths. What do you think?" Some executives will always be conservative and others will always be ambitious.
- *Roadmap:* Once the projections are in place, you can back it up with a roadmap. For example, if the goal is to support growth, the following resources are needed.
    - Historical growth and roadmaps are great education tools for executives. Always show them what they want to hear. For example, don't ask for an advocacy program. To do that puts you in a defensive position. However, if you show them what will happen if they don't invest in an advocacy program (they'll need to hire more community managers), they'll be more open-minded.
- *Define Specific Goals for the Year:* Rachel thinks of these as inputs and outputs. The inputs are the investment, your time, and the initiatives that you're going to achieve. The outputs are the measureable and supporting goals, i.e. engagement growth. Be very specific about the inputs and outputs.
- *Wrap Up:* Concisely package and deliver all this data in a maximum of 10 slides. It's the only way to get people to listen. It's like the strong narrative. Help people to know what you're doing in a concise, simple and repeatable narrative.

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LESSONS LEARNED

- ➢ From a basic sales perspective, Rachel's message is that community managers already know how to sell. If you have engagement skills, you can sell. Executives are not all that different.

- ➢ Rachel challenges her clients to interview someone once or twice a week. She can't stress this enough. Yes, there are conflicting priorities and this will never outweigh a high priority that requires your attention. However, it is absolutely critical to developing your support network inside the organization. Therefore, Rachel's advice is to make a point of doing this as often as you can manage.
    - Again, never talk about the community program in your interview. Ask them about themselves. What you'll hear is what they perceive to be the problem. That will allow you to align how you pitch the community and, in the meantime, you will be building a relationship with them. Furthermore, when you have these types of contacts with stakeholders, they perceive you in a positive light; the interaction is positive. It's not a contentious interaction, as can be the case when you are asking for something.

- ➢ For anyone working on innovation goals (agility, speed, profitability, etc.) for their organization, it requires effective knowledge management. Community managers are experienced on the content and document management side, but communities are the tacit knowledge. That's the knowledge that's evolving. If you don't capture it, you can't see it. You can't refine it to become stock knowledge, like content. So, communities play an important role in the evolution of knowledge within the enterprise.

- ➢ Social Network Analysis is a great tool for helping find patterns in workflow charts. It will help you to understand who is communicating with whom within the organization.

- ➢ When it comes to finding the insights within a large community, Rachel advises trying to trigger the "AHA" moments so that people can see things more quickly on their own.

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Q&A's

➢ Rachel was asked for her advice on how to help customers document their use case workflow processes, especially since most people don't have them documented. Rachel maintains that interviewing people is the secret tool. Go to the stakeholders and ask: "What happens when you have this problem? What do you do about it? Then what happens? Why?" Take an inquisitive, curious approach. People don't self-actualize why they do things, which means you need to pull it out of them by asking lots of questions.

➢ Rachel was asked if she felt there were any fundamental differences to pitching an external community vs. an internal community.
- Rachel feels that the anxiety level is higher with customers in an external community. That said, the emotional component is something to be aware of on both sides.
- There is a big trend today to personalize content. For Rachel, the end state of personalization is actually talking to people. You can personalize content and channels to the micro segment, but eventually the next step is going to be to talk to people. Short circuit that cost structure and just talk to them. That happens even more on the external side. It happens internally, as well, usually with the communication or marketing teams.
- The workflows are different. When you look at the costs and rewards of workflows, it's more obvious and tied to revenue with external communities, which makes them more compelling.
- Claire Flanagan added that some of the patterns are the same. In both cases, you need to know the identities of the internal and external stakeholders.
  - The metrics for selling on the external community are easier because they are better known. Internal communities usually involve selling knowledge management processes, for example. People don't have a comfort level with those metrics.
  - Rachel brought to light a little-known fact. The cost of answering a question in a call center is not that different from the cost of answering an employee question. The caveat is that the cost of answering a question is not the same as the value of the answer to the individual. Be sure to make that distinction.