

Social Media: How Innovative Organizations are Using Video to Engage Employees

By Steve Mack

“This is the greatest morale building thing the firm has ever done.
You have no idea how much buzz this has created.”

As an HR manager, wouldn't you love to hear that comment from someone in your organization?

One of the biggest challenges facing organizations is how to engage employees most effectively. A growing number of progressive companies and non-profits are using more informal and personal video productions, in the spirit of social media, to strengthen the bond between employees and the organization. Let's look at the techniques and strategies these companies are using and how can you leverage what they've learned.

It starts with one of the biggest recent internet trends called social media. Social media specifically refers to the technologies that allow individuals increased social interaction online. And social media web sites have been at the forefront of recent internet growth. These are sites that use social interaction technologies such as blogs, message boards, podcasts, pictures and video to allow people to communicate with each other more frequently and intensely. The trend started with basic text communication and has added lots of graphic elements. Sites like YouTube, MySpace, Flickr, and Second Life allow people to use media to express their opinions and ideas more easily.

Savvy companies have been following consumers online, getting on the “social media bandwagon”. While much of this activity has been focused externally on marketing to deepen relationships with key customer audiences, a growing number of companies have been using social media technologies to communicate internally with their employees. It's no secret that “Happy Employees make Successful Companies” and that those companies who can connect best with their employees have a competitive advantage. Specifically, many are finding success using video to communicate and connect with employees and to let employees express themselves.

COMPANIES EMBRACING SOCIAL MEDIA

While surveys show that over half of US companies are blocking employee access to social media web sites, others are trying to find innovative ways to use these new technologies to tap into the spirit and creativity of their employees. Who is right? Social media is like fire; It can be very useful but must be handled with care. There are companies that are using social media with positive effect. Here are some recent examples.

Deloitte Employee Film Festival

Last year Deloitte, one of the largest professional services firms in the world launched a campaign for an employee film festival. Employees were asked to create short films that expressed the corporation's culture and values. Sounds like a box office sleeper, huh? But more than 400 film entries were submitted and the Film Festival voting website had over 400,000 hits during the voting

period. The finalists were posted on YouTube and a company buzz was created.

How exciting can a corporation's culture and values be? See for yourself. Go to YouTube.com and see how the employees embraced the challenge.

http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=deloitte+film+festival

And the Festival wasn't just a one time example of Deloitte trying out new media to communicate with employees. The company regularly produces podcasts on its website, titled "Deloitte Insights". One recent podcast addressed the need for the company to be authentic and real in the way it communicates with employees. <http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/article/0,1002,sid%253D2255%2526cid%253D169088,00.html>



Scene from one of Deloitte's Employee Film Festival entries.

Accountants on YouTube

The Maryland Association of Certified CPAs has posted several videos on YouTube, including a Townhall Welcome Message from its Chairman and video of the organization's recent swearing in ceremony. The Hong Kong Institute of CPAs have posted on YouTube as well. Their posting is a rap video touting the benefits of belonging to the CPA profession.

Ok, we all knew that CPAs and Accountants were hip. It's no fair to just provide examples from number crunchers. It is common knowledge that they have an unfair advantage in filmmaking. How about example from non-accountant professions?

Vanderbilt Employee Film Festival

The Vanderbilt University Medical Center Informatics organization used their employee film festival to have entrants show their work teams in action and address team functionality issues across their 13,000 employees. The Communications Officer for the Center organized the festival and worked with several dozen teams to provide guidelines for the program. The entries were then judged in several categories, including: most informative, most creative, most hilarious, best actor and best actress. The films were shown on the campus, highlights were posted on the intranet, and the videos have been used in training programs. Deborah Keim-Trewyn, the Communications Officer for Informatics, credits the festival for building spirit across the organization's work teams.

HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE THESE BEEN?

Just because a company uses video or other social media, does that make it effective? The Deloitte Film Festival and videos posted on YouTube have gotten very positive responses, as did the MACPA videos. The Hong Kong CPA video wasn't as well received, getting comments such as "so bad.. it's funny" and "it looks ridiculous". So you can't just post a video and expect a great response. It has to be real and from the heart. That is a pretty basic concept but one that GenY especially takes seriously – the younger generation has grown up with reality TV and advertising product placements. They can see through fake messaging pretty well and will disregard what they see that isn't real. So messaging to GenY isn't always easy to do. But there can be big payoff for doing it right.

And Deloitte seems to be doing something right. In September 2007 *Business Week* named Deloitte as “The Best Place to Launch a Career” and cited the film festival as “presenting a real picture of working life to potential recruits”. The company has gotten rave reviews across the news media for its efforts, which has strengthened its image.

Deloitte did use an outside video production firm to develop and market its film festival. However, you don’t need a big budget to get results. Vanderbilt University managed its employee film festival on its own and MACCPA simply posted footage from a consumer camcorder on YouTube. So low budget alternatives can produce positive results.

Coordinating these programs and leading the messaging correctly does take effort on the part of the Human Resource and Corporate Communication departments, but the payoff can be rich. And these efforts are best done as part of a larger communication strategy rather than one-off events.

COMPANY IN THE MIRROR

There is one more thing to keep in mind in dealing with social media and employee communication. It acts as a mirror to show the reality of the organization. Deloitte already had a reputation as a highly effective company. If there are significant internal issues, these will likely be displayed in the messaging that comes back to management. It may not make for a great employee film festival if all the short films are about how much people don’t like working at your company. Thus, organizations with internal problems are best advised to address those issues first. Otherwise the messaging in the social media may not be very desirable and it will be there for all the world to see.

So is using social media a gamble? Yes, sort of. But is it a gamble that organizations can afford not to take in the ever competitive marketplace? That is for you and your management to decide but the marketplace may be making the decision for you if you can’t attract and retain good talent.

FINAL COMMENTS

Expect the internal corporate use of video and other social media to continue. First, companies are getting positive results from the initial use of video. Second, social media is incorporating more onto websites, indicating a growing comfort that the population is having with these technologies. And finally, development of new social media tools is moving at a fast pace.

About the author:

Steve Mack is a Senior Producer and Media Consultant with Impact! Video Production. Steve specializes in helping organizations engage their employees using the power of video. He can be reached at Steve@ImpactVideoProduction.com.

Impact! Video Production
1390 Forest Edge Rd
Woodland Park, CO 80863
703-869-9353