

COMMUNICATIONS COUNCIL PEER-TO-PEER BRIEFING: BUILDING A MEMBER-DRIVEN CONTENT STRATEGY

Discussion Notes – November 18, 2014

I. Briefing Participants

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II. Key Takeaways

The takeaways listed below capture Member observations and strategies for building a sustainable member-driven content strategy that supports broader organizational and communications objectives. This list was compiled by Communications Council researchers in attendance; when drafting the summary below, our team sought to accurately capture the ideas and approaches that were generously shared and discussed by all participants. We hope this summary is a helpful review for those who took part in the conversation and a valuable source of insight to others who were unable to participate.

Building “user personas” that represent your target audiences:

- In order to identify and target the correct groups as part of your content strategy, creating custom “user personas” can help you better assess your ideal audience in three important ways...
- **Benefit #1:** User personas allow staff to become more familiar with the unique attributes of their target audiences

- **Benefit #2:** User personas can be established for test audiences and give communications staffs a “straw man” for exploring how to best reach those particular constituencies
- **Benefit #3:** User personas are an effective way to ensure that all members of the organization broadly agree that the right individuals and groups (with the correct attributes) are being strategically targeted
- **Example –** One attendee explained that when she joined her association, they did not have a robust content strategy due to lack of understanding of who their ideal audiences were. She created user personas “with names, profiles and backstories” to illustrate who fell under their target audiences and aligned all staff accordingly. Sample personas included the “vice president of public policy,” the “influential blogger,” and the “grassroots community leader”

Fostering digital environments where members are invited to share their stories:

- Social media or other online platforms can be an effective way to induce member-driven content for several reasons...
- **Reason #1:** Social media encourages a more personalized approach to sharing information, imbuing member content with an authenticity that cannot be easily replicated
- **Reason #2:** Since the barriers to entry are much lower, online platforms can also encourage members to share their perspectives more readily than other forms of member engagement (e.g., polling, surveys)
- **Reason #3:** Branding social media campaigns with an easy-to-use marker (i.e., hashtag) increases the potential for member-driven messages to go viral and extend beyond a given set of channels and audiences
- **Example –** When an attendee’s membership was hit with new regulations that adversely impacted businesses, she encouraged members to voice their concerns on social media. By describing how increased regulation would harm businesses and communities in a variety of ways, the association’s membership could capture Congressional attention and point to these testimonials as part of future regulatory debates

Leveraging unfavorable regulation as an opportunity to promote member perspectives:

- If a policy decision or regulation negatively impacts your association’s base, there are a number of ways to use that outcome to your advantage in crafting a dynamic member-driven content campaign:
- **Tactic #1:** Launch a social media campaign (e.g., Twitter chat, relevant hashtag) that encourages members to speak out on how that regulatory decision impacts them
- **Tactic #2:** Organize an event which amplifies your members’ voice and draws more attention to the cause by directing observers to content produced during the event (e.g., videos, resolutions etc.)
- **Tactic #3:** Funnel expressed member frustration into a white paper that reflects their unique issues for more formal engagement with the Hill and other policy influentials

Aggregating pre-existing member stories when original content is lacking:

- If original content is at a premium, there are a couple of ways to re-purpose existing member content:
- **Tactic #1:** Monitor member websites for material that would be appropriate to publish or adapt as part of your association’s content strategy

- *Example #1* – One attendee leveraged student testimonials found on member websites to create a webpage that highlighted success stories, recognizing that a strategy which promoted the institutional members of the association would not have been as successful
- *Tactic #2*: Consult more engaged members for insight into what campaigns they've undertaken or content they've produced and how these can apply to the work your organization is currently engaged in
- *Example #2* – An attendee understood his association well enough to note the “latent competition” that exists between members. He uses that competitive fire to his advantage when speaking to senior-level members during Board of Directors meetings, as he'll be quick to note to one member that they received helpful member-driven content from other members which encourages less engaged members to provide content and stories that can be elevated and shared by the association

Establishing associations as key promoters of member content in niche subject areas:

- Although some issue sets are bound to garner broad attention, others that are particular to your association's industry and memberships can give you and your members an opportunity to become the definitive subject-matter experts in that space with a few key benefits...
- *Benefit #1*: You gain respect among your members and potential allies as an organization which understands and promotes the key issues faced by organizations under your umbrella
- *Benefit #2*: Traditional media platforms will come to you and your members when a more focused understanding of the issues is required or coveted
- *Benefit #3*: It is more likely that members of Congress and Hill staff will contact you for assistance with hearings if you have established your association or your membership as thought leaders in a particular space – this both increases your audience reach and capacity to shape policy debates
- *Example* – One attendee conducts traditional media outreach regarding issues that have the potential to capture a large audience, but he also produces periodic content packages that selectively address topics that they wish the press would cover but can't either because of time constraints or unfamiliarity. This has broadened their thought leadership position and has provided opportunities to highlight member voices for a more diverse set of issues

Using a hands-on approach to train members so they can carry messages (particularly through social media):

- When your organization is confronted with members who may not have the knowledge or skills necessary to create quality content aligned with the association's needs or to promote messages on behalf of your organization, there are a few methods of training members...
- *Approach #1*: Physically bring members together for training sessions with experts on methods of social media engagement
- *Approach #2*: Develop online training sessions that highlight key best practices for utilizing certain media tools
- *Approach #3*: Incorporate tips and tricks for maximizing social media engagement into standard communications (such as newsletters)
- *Example* – One attendee invited a slew of members and staff to a two-day workshop with Atlantic Media Strategies where they learned how to improve their facility with producing editorial and visual content that can be shared via social media. The workshop was well-received and members felt that the association was invested in their ongoing success and development

not just as it relates to the association's long-term growth, but with respect to their individual businesses

Reallocating (and letting go of) staff resources to build a successful digital content strategy:

- While there may be institutional factors in place that make it difficult to reorient teams for an ever-changing digital media landscape, some of our members have made great strides to hire staff who can adapt to changing technology and content needs along the following key attributes...
- **Attribute #1:** Content generators who are adept at developing and executing an original content strategy
- **Attribute #2:** Data analysts who dig beyond the standard tools of social media monitoring (e.g., Hootsuite) to determine which audiences are being engaged by their organization's content strategy and how to better penetrate audiences that have not yet been successfully reached
- **Attribute #3:** Digital media experts who are fluent in the evolving social media landscape and recognize how to create strong messages with the potential to "go viral"
- **Example** – One attendee noted how much more nimble his team's media strategy became when he hired digital media experts who could develop original apps to expand his association's outreach capacities, read the social media landscape to determine audience behavior and cement a more engaging web presence
- **Caveat** – The same attendee reminded all in attendance that this strategy does not come without costs, as he was forced to let go of team members who were ill-equipped to respond to the "new normal" in media outreach. However, in a world of limited resources, he knew there were trade-offs associated with the need to become more active in the spaces where his target audiences now live, such as online and on social media

III. Additional Examples of Member-Driven Content Campaigns

The examples listed below provide a snapshot of recent successful member-driven content campaigns. We hope that these examples serve as a source of inspiration for future campaign efforts and catalyze further advancements in our Members' content strategies.

- A Twitter Chat hosted by **Independent Community Bankers of America**, allowing members to elevate positions of thought leadership around social media in the community banking industry: <https://twitter.com/ICBA/timelines/527473793627721729>
- Storify recap of the **American Medical Association's** #SaveGME advocacy campaign, featuring user-generated content curated to tell the story: <https://storify.com/AmerMedicalAssn/savegme-week-2014>
- **American Federation of Government Employees'** #IAMAFGE campaign, which features the stories of members: <https://www.afge.org/Index.cfm?Page=IAmAFGE>
- **Association of American Railroads'** "Faces of Freight Rail" campaign, another video campaign which brings member experiences to the fore: <https://www.aar.org/todays-railroads/our-people#faces>