Using Employee Generated Content to Boost Engagement

The relationship between employee engagement and productivity is correlational and causal (as we’ll discuss in subsequent sections), but the bridge between the two can be difficult to traverse, complicated by reorganizations, multi-sourced teams, and time-zone differences. How do you keep employees in the loop when the home office is in Kansas, but a huge segment of the team is in Bangalore? Corporate video has been used to connect employees, clients and stakeholders, for some time, but to employ a 20th-century format, in which static content is generated and produced at the executive level, would be to miss out on the enormous benefits and potential for higher engagement to be found in Employee Generated Content or EGC.

What is EGC?

Employee Generated Content (EGC) refers to content produced by a company’s employees for strictly internal purposes, which is usually accessed through a company’s intranet. EGC is created, edited and published directly by the employees themselves, and usually requires adherence to established submission protocols or may be pre-screened by communications staff. Typically EGC is not intended to be authoritative, but rather an expression of personal thoughts and opinions within a professional context. EGC can take the form of video content, newsletters, presentations or blogs.

Why Employee Engagement Matters

In organizational development circles, the playbook for increasing a company’s strength and competitiveness invariably includes a chapter on the dynamic between an engaged workforce and greater efficiency and profitability. 62% of organizations surveyed in the “State of HR survey 2013: recovery in sight?”, which polled more than 300 HR professionals across 13 industry sectors, say employee engagement is their top HR priority in 2013, according to research by law firm Speechly Bircham and King’s College London.

Benefits of EGC

When video EGC is created and distributed in real-time, town hall meetings and other events, become vehicles for knowledge sharing, expertise building, and are effectively transformed into an immersive virtual culture which builds teams across borders. Insiders continuously report that employees are more engaged through peer and manager EGC than executive produced content. The intangible benefits of video EGC include a deeper consideration of the nature and value of the individual employee’s work, an increased sense of the value of their work, and a clearer understanding of how their work can benefit others and enable them to be more productive, effective, and derive more satisfaction from their work, thereby creating a sense of shared community and common goals across divisions, branches, and teams. The result is a more engaged corps of employees.
Engageonomics: The Engaged Employee vs. the Non-Engaged Employee

Employee engagement is “a measurable degree of an employee’s positive or negative emotional attachment to their job, colleagues and organization that profoundly influences their willingness to learn and perform at work.”

Engaged employees are distinguished by an enhanced concern for the future of the company, principally demonstrated by the employee’s willingness to expend discretionary effort. They characteristically have a strong emotional attachment to the company that employs them, which translates into tangible positive business outcomes, such as higher retention rates, productivity and reduced absenteeism. Engagement can be broken down into four categories: Emotional Attachment, Involvement, Commitment, and Productivity.

Emotional Attachment

88% of highly engaged employees believe they can “positively impact the quality of their organization’s products”, versus 38% of disengaged employees. 68% of highly engaged employees believe they can “positively impact costs in their job or unit” versus 19% of the disengaged. And there is ample empirical data to support a correlation between an employee’s belief about their ability to positively contribute to a company and their subsequent performance.

Involvement

In a 2000 study of 15 steel mills, 17 apparel manufacturers, and 10 electronic instrument and imaging equipment producers, researchers found that plants utilizing high-involvement practices showed superior performance and inspired greater trust, organizational commitment and intrinsic enjoyment of the work. In a 2005 study of sales teams, “low-engagement” teams produced a difference in “performance-related costs of low- versus high-engagement teams totaling $2,104,823.3.”

During two studies of employees in the life insurance industry (3,570 employees in 49 organizations and 4,828 employees in 92 organizations), researchers found that when employees felt they had the power to make decisions, sufficient knowledge and information to
work effectively, and rewards for high performance, high-involvement management practices were positively associated with employee morale, employee retention, and firm financial performance.\textsuperscript{vi}

**Commitment**

Employees with the highest level of commitment perform 20% better and are 87% less likely to leave the organization.\textsuperscript{vi}

At the beverage company Molson Coors, engaged employees were five times less likely than non-engaged employees to have a safety incident and seven times less likely to have a lost-time safety incident. The net cost for safety incidents was $63 for an engaged employee versus $392 for a non-engaged employee. Strengthened employee engagement at Molson Coors resulted in a savings of $1,721,760 in safety costs in 2002. And in two studies (2000 and 2002), The global consulting firm Watson Wyatt Worldwide found that high-commitment organizations (ones with loyal and dedicated employees) out-performed those with low commitment by 47% and by 200%, respectively.\textsuperscript{vii}

**Productivity**

In addition to the studies cited in the previous section, in the management consulting firm Hay Group’s study of professional service firms, they found that offices with engaged employees were up to 43% more productive.

**Creating Buzz: Generating Engagement**

In real terms, employee engagement corresponds to higher retention, improved customer service, individual performance, unit productivity, and enterprise-level financial performance, as these case studies amply demonstrate, yet currently only 31% of employees are actively engaged in their jobs, according to Blessing White’s Employee Engagement Report (2011)\textsuperscript{viii}. To create engagement means creating situations in which employees choose to work in the best interests of the company, because

\textbf{“How To” Videos}

In a recent survey of 240 managers and executives across a variety of industries conducted by a streaming media group, it was found that while most EGC were created by executives, the most attention-grabbing were those produced by front-line employees. Of those employees surveyed, 73% believe it increased their productivity, which is not surprising given that the majority of the videos were “How To” videos created by their colleagues to share their knowledge, expertise and insights.
of an innate desire to do so. And there are specific drivers that can enable a company to encourage those conditions:

- Effective internal employee communications
- Clarity of job expectations
- Regular feedback and dialogue with superiors
- Quality of working relationships with peers, superiors, and subordinates
- Perception of the ethos and values of the organization
- Perception of job importance
- Career advancement/improvement opportunities

Each of the outlined drivers can be built into a company's culture in extremely cost-effective ways, the most exciting being that of employee generated content (EGC).

**Engaging the Masses**

The modern workforce is a scattered one, with more employees than ever working in the field or teleworking both domestically and internationally\(^x\). Numbers for those who telework vary from 4 million to 44.4 million, depending on the definition, which itself varies\(^x\). But for that X million that work some or all of their work week remotely, the traditional approach to ensuring employee engagement and productivity - proximity and oversight - is non-applicable.

As noted earlier, one of the principal drivers of an engaged workforce is effective internal communications. Effective internal communications are most keenly lacking in global organizations where the home office is in one country and a major contingent of its annexed workforce is in another\(^x\).

For this segment of the workforce, a more innovative process is required, one that enables remote employees to connect with corporate goals and inspires them to do their best, without the use of face-to-face strong-arming. Video EGC is providing this crucial link for the perpetually out-of-the-office worker, by allowing them to connect with their peers online and through mobile applications, wherever they are.

Capitalizing on the emergence of a hyper-mobilized workforce (1.2 billion workers worldwide now carry mobile devices\(^x\))\(^ii\), MediaPlatform has become the first online video platform to enable video upload from mobile devices (specifically iPhones®, iPads® and Android phones), fostering greater employee engagement, connectivity and collaboration.
Given that in 2012, 33% of business intelligence functionality was accessed by smartphones and tablets\textsuperscript{xiii}, the mobile video solution MediaPlatform offers has substantial benefits for near-sourced staff as well.

**Creating and Sustaining Engagement in a Time of Transition: Pfizer’s EGC Story**

70 percent of business transformation efforts fail due to lack of engagement\textsuperscript{xiv}. Perhaps it was for this reason that when Pfizer, the world’s largest pharmaceutical company (59 billion in revenues\textsuperscript{xv} and over 91,000 employees\textsuperscript{xvi}) began to develop a strategy for building and sustaining employee engagement through its 2006 – 2007 global transformation, it looked for something outside of the traditional corporate messaging platforms. The reorganization would be pretty dramatic, involving a radical overhaul of the business, reorganization of the structure (staff reductions of roughly 20%), and a host of new responsibilities, especially for the field-based workforce (which meant 70% of the staff). The changes would bring into question every aspect of a worker’s daily life: Who would they be reporting to? What were their new responsibilities? How would they manage those responsibilities? Lesser conditions would inspire dread and, consequently, a drop in engagement with far-reaching ripple effects. Pfizer was looking at the real possibility of widespread panic.

To engage staff organically, a solution as drastically different from Old World corporate directives as the organization hoped to emerge from the transition, was sought. The goal of the reorganization was to become leaner and more competitive, of course, but it was also to spur a metamorphosis in culture, shedding its highly conservative and “risk averse” nature, and becoming a “communication culture” that was open and dynamic. “In the lead up, by necessity, you have lots of top-down, legal-based communication,” explains Nigel Edwards, Pfizer’s UK Internal Communication Manager. “When that goes on for a period of time, it does color what people are feeling about the organization.” To minimize employee distrust and disengagement the *medium* had to be the same as the *message* in tone and character, or fall prey to appearing disingenuous.

Edwards’ team selected 10 employees (from all levels of the organization), armed them with cameras and tripods and empowered them to create EGC in the form of video diaries of their experience with the transformation – a sort of Pfizer “Real World”. The diarists were given the freedom to be brutally honest: “Every time you go to an internal meeting or have a conversation or see a change – something that makes you think about how you do your job, how you fit in and what this transformation will mean to you – just go in front of the camcorder and say what it felt like and what you learned.” The EGC diaries were distributed in stages throughout the crucial three-month gap between the announcement of the change and the conference in which staff could share feedback on it.

The results were “extraordinary”, according to Edwards. The frankness and relatable of seeing people “who look like” them, doing their jobs, and encountering similar challenges, often
recorded at the employees' homes (with cats and children in the background), created a wave of good feeling. Pulse surveys tracked an upswing on the critical terms of study, field employees reported: knowing how the new organization worked, feeling engaged in it, and feeling confident about the future - all harbingers of a more engaged workforce. The most crucial positive outcome was that employing EGC had enabled Pfizer to build and sustain trust through the change process, which is often the hardest hit and the hardest to reestablish after a restructuring.

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i  http://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/benefits/staff-motivation/engagement-biggest-priority-for-hr/101364.article
iii  http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employee_engagement
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