

In Their Own Words: Promoting Volunteerism Through Internet Blogs

LBG has been researching ways companies can promote volunteerism, particularly in tough times, and we came across two organizations that use public blogs as communication tools for employees, nonprofits, and the general public.

Sabre Holdings, the travel merchandising and distribution company, and Salesforce.com Foundation, the nonprofit arm of the CRM software company, both use public blogs to engage employees in their volunteer program, and show a positive message to the public.

Sabre's "Give *Time* Together" global volunteer week is a company-wide volunteer event program. Started three years ago, the Give *Time* Together program encourages Sabre's far-flung employee base to volunteer in their own communities in 59 countries. Two years ago, a group of volunteer employees who head up the communications and event coordination, created the blog to increase the connectedness and sense of community among the company's employee volunteers. By organizing the volunteer activities in one week, the goal was to create an enormous "virtual volunteer activity" around the world. Sabre needed some way to tell that story – in the employees' words, with photos and commentary about how the events impacted the team members. In some ways, the blog was modeled after one of Sabre's products, IgoUgo.com, where travelers tell about their experiences in their own words.

For Sabre Holdings, the use of the Internet versus the company intranet was at first a necessity. Because of its worldwide network of satellite offices and business units that had been acquired, they hadn't yet found an intranet solution that all 9,000 employees could access. A simple Internet blog site on WordPress solved the access problem. And the employees themselves post the stories of their volunteer projects directly on the site, using a password that is distributed internally. Employees post stories, pictures, even video via YouTube, and other employees can comment—a key factor in building the community they wanted.

In order to wring out the real value of all the posts—to get employees to really read about their colleagues on the other side of the planet—and to virtually bring them together by sharing common interests in the compassion in each of their respective communities, the team created a contest. After the "Give *Time* Together" events are completed, a volunteer committee chooses the top 10 blog posts, and then all employees are encouraged to vote for their favorite. There are three categories: Environment, People, and Animal. The winners in each category receive \$3,000 for the charity they helped in their project.

Employing a best practice, Sabre surveys its employees about their volunteer experiences every year. Barbra Anderson, Social Responsibility Director, reports the results show employees feel more connected and appreciative of the company every year because of their volunteer experience. Some key statistics: 59% of those who volunteer say they met a new fellow employee on the project. This is high, considering most projects are department-driven. And 46% of those say they will use that connection to help them accomplish their work

goals in their job in the future. To demonstrate to leaders the value CSR brings to the company, these statistics prove the program is a great, measurable internal value to the business.

Salesforce.com Foundation – The Power of Us

Over at Salesforce.com Foundation, their mission has always been to spread the word about the benefits of giving back to the community. Their “1%” mantra is deeply engrained in the corporate culture. From their website: “Every salesforce.com employee is encouraged to donate 1% of their working time to the community. This donation of time ends up resulting in approximately six paid service days a year (four hours a month). In this way, employees become powerful change agents; they experience the joy and satisfaction of giving, and pass that enthusiasm to others, spreading a culture of caring.”

Each year, 82% of their 3,000-person workforce volunteers at least once. The blog, created four years ago, is a way for the community relations staff to get the story out there. Julie Trell, Director of All Things Fun, Meaningful & Rewarding! at Salesforce.com Foundation, accepts stories from volunteers and the regional managers all over the world. After posting, she sends the links out to the employee volunteers and their managers for them to share with their family and friends—and the nonprofits they helped. As for Ms. Trell, she believes the blog empowers volunteers to communicate, and notes that it also keeps her connected to what is going on in the field.

It is important for Salesforce.com to spread their social consciousness philosophy far and wide. If you visit their site, you will see links called “Spread the Model,” which take you to an area of the site that is designed to help others build integrated philanthropy programs into their companies. So, having a blog on the Internet, rather than intranet, helps them expose people to their 1% philosophy.

The blog’s web traffic bears out its success. During 2008, 80,000 unique visitors came to the blog site and spent 3.5 minutes there on average. Clearly, more than the employees are visiting and learning about the volunteer program.

The Take-Away

Using an Internet blog to tell your volunteering stories has great potential to build goodwill among your employees, the communities you serve, and the general public. For one, hearing the experiences of the volunteers *in their own voices* is compelling and motivating to other volunteers. These blogs can also be used to inform others about the causes your volunteers support: a simple link to the nonprofit, and allowing the nonprofit to link back to the blog could be mutually beneficial. Human Resources can use the blog in “selling” you as a socially conscious employer that actively helps the community. And with smart use of search engine optimization, your volunteer stories can reach a wider audience and enhance your image around the world.

Let us know if you decide to start your own public volunteer blog.

LINKS:

<http://givetimetgether.Sabre.com/>

<http://www.salesforcefoundation.org/volblogs/all/>