

CHIEF LEARNING OFFICER

Solutions for Enterprise Productivity (1)

Getting Executives on Social Media Boosts Leadership Development

Ladan Nikravan - 3/21/12

Click to print this page Return to: <http://clomedia.com/views/articles/getting-executives-on-social-media-boosts-leadership-development/> ([/views/articles/getting-executives-on-social-media-boosts-leadership-development/](http://clomedia.com/views/articles/getting-executives-on-social-media-boosts-leadership-development/))

New research shows that leaders who use social media help raise their brand's profile, instill confidence in the company's leadership team and build greater trust, brand loyalty and purchase intent among customers.

A study titled "The BRANDfog 2012 CEO, Social Media and Leadership Survey" by social media branding firm BRANDfog surveyed several hundred employees. More than 80 percent believed CEOs who engage on social media are better equipped than their peers to lead companies in today's technology-laden world. Additionally, 93 percent said they believe executive engagement on social media helps communicate company values and grow and evolve corporate leadership in times of crisis.

"It's important for every CEO to understand that the world is talking about your business," said Suzanne Bates, author of *Discover Your CEO Brand*. "Your customers are in cyberspace; your employees are in cyberspace; the future high-potential leaders you want are in cyberspace. The only question is whether you want to be in that conversation."

Bates urges top leaders to ask themselves what their end game is — what they consider their most important business objective. They should then ask themselves how social media can help drive the strategy forward and help position the company and leader as a thought leader. "Once you answer these questions, you have a reason to get engaged and use social media," she said.

Most leaders only communicate with their workforce when they have to, often when there is bad news. When employees get used to hearing from leaders regularly with good news, they feel as though they're learning something, look forward to that communication and feel much more connected to the leader.

For example, The Virgin Group website hosts a blog written with CEO Richard Branson's first-person flair. Many read like diary entries. Branson's Twitter, Facebook and Google+ profiles are all equally personal and active. Much of what he posts is related to his philanthropic efforts. But other times, he's just tweeting his thoughts or writing about his active globe-trotting lifestyle.

"Examples like this help employees understand who their leaders are and what they stand for," Bates said. "Through social media, people inside and outside of the company understand what prominent leaders' values are

and this attracts the best candidates and helps top leaders drive business forward.”

According to Nancy Flynn, author of *The Social Media Handbook: Rules, Policies, and Best Practices to Successfully Manage Your Organization's Social Media Presence, Posts, and Potential*, when executives brand themselves through social media, it puts a human face on the organization and can be a saving grace.

“As part of the organization's reputation management program, it's a good idea to have executives out there communicating and collaborating with key stakeholders,” she said. “If the organization does suffer an attack to its reputation online, you've already got leaders, personalities out there in the front lines with social media sites set up with a strong following, that can do damage control.”

Flynn urges executives using social media to strive to stay current while acknowledging that when it comes to electronic business communication, the tools, technology and devices continue to evolve. “It's equally important for organizations to evolve along with the technology,” she said. “Employers that try to ignore social media can end up in a lot of legal trouble.”

Flynn believes employers' exposure to potentially costly and protracted risks on social media is greater today than ever before. “The business community's ever-growing social media use dramatically increases [an] organization's exposure to potential lawsuits, regulatory violations, security breaches, mismanaged business records, productivity drains, public relations disasters and other electronic risks,” she said.

While this is the case, managed properly, leaders' personal social media use can enhance workers' satisfaction and their employees' perceptions toward them. The most effective way to accomplish both goals is to implement social media policies supported by comprehensive employee training enforced by best-in-class technology tools.

Ladan Nikravan is an associate editor of Chief Learning Officer magazine. She can be reached at lnikravan@CLOmedia.com.



Chief Learning Officer magazine is a trademark of Mediatec Publishing Inc. All clomedia.com and Chief Learning Officer magazine content Copyright 2012 MediaTec Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved. It is illegal to copy, reproduce or publish any information contained on clomedia.com or in Chief Learning Officer magazine without express written permission from MediaTec Publishing Inc.