

GIBBS & SOELL

Insight

FOR MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS PROFESSIONALS

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Channeling Your Inner Reality Stars

Whether you love it or hate it, the majority of communicators could learn a thing or two from the popular MTV series "Jersey Shore."

It's a simple formula, really. TV networks pump out shows like "Jersey Shore," "Keeping up with the Kardashians," "Swamp People" and "The Voice" because they use regular people and b-list celebrities in everyday situations or contests to deliver two critical things: compelling content and low cost programming. On this playing field, smaller outlets like E!, History Channel and Food Network can be just as successful – if not more – than giants like CBS, NBC and Fox. Big or small, all are cashing in big-time on the reality TV phenomenon.

Whether you lead communications for an organization that is a smaller player or a behemoth, isn't addictive content that keeps your audience talking and coming back for more the name of the game? With today's continued economic challenges, we know communications that deliver more but cost less are certainly more popular than, say, "Dancing with the Stars."

Yet very few communicators – especially in B2B – are really tapping into the power, simplicity and excitement of the reality-style programming concept. Are your company's versions of reality stars working quietly in their cubicles, laboratories or sites just waiting for you to discover them – ready for their chance to be the next big thing that captures your audience's imagination? And how much easier would your life be if, instead of diligently working every day to uncover the "hidden gem" stories in your organization, you had a constant stream of fresh, captivating and usable content flooding your in-box?

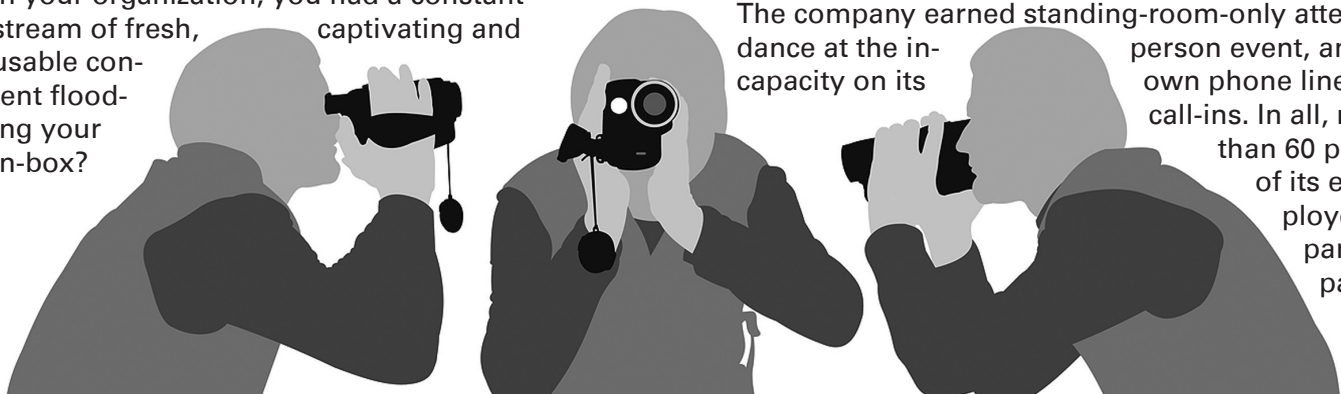
Still think you can't learn anything from Snooki and The Situation?

Alternative Reality

As professional communicators it is our job, of course, to provide guidelines and forums to ensure our efforts are less "Jersey Shore" and "Celebrity Rehab" and more "The Voice" or "Deadliest Catch" – content that taps into the compelling nature of reality programming without being "cheesy," exploitive or over the top. We also have to remember that communicators are not the only professionals who are overwhelmed with too much information and workload. We must also make being a business-reality star fun and – most importantly – easy.

This is a concept well understood by the communicators at telecommunications technology provider Neustar, which wanted to better equip its employees to tell the company story to external audiences. Yet its own research showed many employees didn't really understand all the services the company offered. Rather than simply delivering standard messaging documents or boring online training sessions, the communicators at Neustar engaged the internal audience with an "American Idol" style contest – asking its 1,000+ employees to submit video recordings of their best 60-second Neustar pitches and offering the winning entrant a free trip to the Caribbean. Submissions were posted on the Neustar intranet where employees voted on their favorites. The company hosted presentations by the five finalists at its regular "all hands" meeting, complete with a Ryan Seacrest-like emcee.

The company earned standing-room-only attendance at the in-person event, and hit capacity on its own phone lines for call-ins. In all, more than 60 percent of its employees participated



in the meeting – easily a company record. In a post-event survey, 87 percent agreed or strongly agreed the Idol contest increased their understanding of what Neustar does; 84 percent agreed or strongly agreed the campaign was engaging. What the survey won't tell you is that Neustar most likely got the added benefit of much higher employee morale and productivity because they created an environment that was both informative and fun.

Lest you think your company's employees are too conservative, too nerdy or too technical to create compelling content, we submit an example from accounting giant Deloitte. Its "What's Your Deloitte" video contest generated more than 400 submissions – many of which are now on its Deloitte Film Fest YouTube channel. Think you are going to find a bunch of stodgy, dry or boring content? It'll take only a few seconds into a video – when you hear an accountant exclaim "It's the food!" as he eats a typical Friday bagel – to get a sense of the personality, wit and fun-loving nature these videos convey. The episodes are hilarious to almost any professional. Certainly they appeal to Deloitte's primary audience – top college recruits weighing offers from multiple firms. The reality stars at Deloitte certainly give the firm an edge over the competition in that regard.

Citizen Business Media

Tapping into your organization's reality stars need not be a point-in-time campaign. You can also do it every day for a much more sustained effort by making employees the stars, the producers and even the broadcasters of your content.

In fact, empowering all employees to share your message is perhaps the most obvious missed opportunity by many communica-


tors. Most organizations have a corporate or brand presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media forums. They typically gather a relatively limited number of direct friends, followers and connections and do their best to spark dialogue with those audiences. Meanwhile, hundreds or thousands of their own employees are using those very same forums to share updates and stories each day with their own personal and professional contacts – many of whom are the very same people the company or brand is trying to reach!

So why not empower the employees to better spread the word on your behalf? This can be as simple as providing them with copy and links they can cut-and-paste into their own status updates, news feeds and Tweets. In five minutes a week you could more effectively spread your social media messaging far beyond what can be accomplished from the main corporate sites. And you can do so at almost no cost or perceived risk to the organization.

Those organizations that are willing to be a little more aggressive can even empower, train and guide key employees to get more involved in spreading the word via social media. Getting key employees actively – and appropriately – engaged in LinkedIn groups, for example, can be a powerful way for B2B organizations to showcase their thought leadership and expertise in a way that also builds strong connections with partners and prospective customers.

The possibilities of business citizen media go well beyond social media. Today's audiences demand fresh, dynamic online content that gives them an inside look at what's really happening inside an organization. What they seek sounds a lot like reality TV, doesn't

it? Delivering it can be as easy and cost-effective as shipping a few inexpensive handheld video cameras and telling your best employees to have fun – within reason, of course.

What you get just might make your show the next big thing. It could make you a hero from a financial perspective. And it just might give you enough content that you can stop digging for it and head home in time to catch an episode of "The Bachelor" once in a while. 

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