PR Goes All Marketing in Reconnecting Employees of IT Giant HP with Human Resources Communications

Company: HP
Agency: Connect Consulting Group
Timeframe: May 2008 - Dec. 2010

In 2008, internal research at **HP,** the world's largest IT company, served to confirm what the HR communications team was experiencing: their messaging wasn't resonating enough among the staff and more than 300,000 employees worldwide. The research, internal interviews conducted by **Connect Consulting Group**, led by managing consultant Liz Guthridge, found the following:

- The team's HR clients viewed it as "not strategic, yet not very good at tactical, either" (all quotes are taken from research).

- Readership of the HR-centric messages was low (as measured by intranet visits and actions taken). Employees wasted time trying to find intranet information and complete self-service HR tasks.
- HR communications staff was working hard, but was not appropriately structured to support HR's priorities.

It was these sobering findings that convinced Guthridge and the internal HP communications team that it was time to go back to basics, and in doing so they would take a rather novel approach.
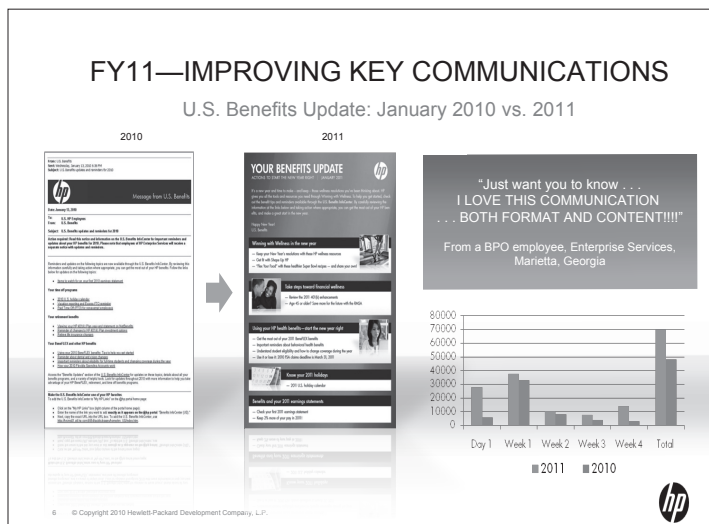
"HP was putting lots of resources towards programs and services, but they weren't connecting the dots with

FY11—IMPROVING KEY COMMUNICATIONS
U.S. Benefits Update: January 2010 vs. 2011

"Just want you to know . . .
I LOVE THIS COMMUNICATION
. . . BOTH FORMAT AND CONTENT!!!!"

From a BPO employee, Enterprise Services, Marietta, Georgia

Image courtesy of HP

The transformation of HP's Human Resources Communications function included a move from static, bland Web pages to ones that displayed energy, visual movement and interactivity.

YOU KNOW YOUR WEB SITE NEEDS A REDESIGN WHEN...

HP's HR Communications group knew it had to overhaul its Web site when the number of pages reached over 10,000—many attracting few visitors. Chris Gee, managing director of **Splendid Communications,** has engineered his share of Web redos for clients. Here's his tell-tale signs that your site needs work.

1. **Your site looks and behaves like a brochure:** Back in the dot-com days, the emphasis was for brands to simple establish a "Web presence." They literally moved their print assets onto the web and created "brochureware" sites. In 2011 that simply does not cut it.

2. **There is no clear call to action:** You have driven your target audience to your site. Now what? It needs to be crystal clear what they should do next or you will lose them. Should they fill out a form to receive an offer? Should they sign up to be the first to try your new product? Your site's information hierarchy should make this clear within 3 seconds of a visit.

3. **Search is the most commonly used feature on your site:** Unless your site is like **Amazon** and you offer hundreds of products and services, most users should be able to find the information they need via your site navigation and without needing to use site search.

4. **Your site is not mobile-optimized:** According to **Gartner**, by the end of 2011, more users will connect to the Web via devices (smartphones, tablets, etc.) than with personal computers. Simply put, if your site is not optimized for mobile, you are *not* servicing your audience of today and it is causing you to miss opportunities.

employees," says Guthridge. "It was important that we took a more customer-centric approach, providing processes and messages to employees that were simple to use."

Being customer-centric sounds like a marketing approach—and that's exactly what it was, says Becky Carter, director of global HR communications at HP, who came to HP in December 2008.

"We needed to look at our audience the same as if we were marketing to them," says Carter. "We also needed to establish a look and feel for employees," she says. In the end, that strategy has served the transformation well, adds Carter.

SETTING OBJECTIVES
Defined in 2008, the overall goals of the HP HR communications included:
- Better serve key audiences with information that was simple and easy to use.
- Align processes and people with the HP business strategy, the HP's employer value proposition "Grow

and Win with HP" and the company's high-performance culture.
- Improve the efficiency of HR communications resources and dollars spent.

Given HP's size and scope, there were three main audiences to be targeted in the initiative, including the team's clients and coworkers—more than 2,000 HR professionals, at the corporate level and in business units worldwide; the HR communications team itself—seven HR communications pros who needed to shift strategies; and the HP workforce.

Guthridge spent six months putting programs into motion that would help drive outcomes within these three groups.

PROGRAM EXECUTION
► **Communications Function Redesign:** Upon being brought on board, Carter set to work on implementing change within the HR comms department. This included staff changes, job description redesigns and the development of a more proactive approach in HR

communications. A big challenge, says Carter, is that the department wasn't correctly aligned for success, particularly from a global standpoint. "We were more aligned toward regions—Asia, Europe and the Americas—when we needed to take a more global view, and then have those regions pick up the communications ball from us," says Carter.

► **Communications Revamp:** To explain and propose the new HR communications approach to HR senior leadership, Carter positioned it as making "HR as simple as 1…2…3…," focusing on the three phases: Web clean-up; revamping the HR communications tone; and developing the more marketing-like approach for key themes. The response from the human resources and brand marketing executives, says Guthridge, was very positive

Much of this revamp involved quality control of employee messaging. Thus, Carter and her team helped set message standards, writing messages from the audience point-of-view, developing themed visual identities for various programs and avoiding "HR speak," which tended to be more complex and told the audience more than they needed or wanted to know.

► **Untangling the Web and Aligning with the Brand:** Carter partnered with HR IT Systems, HR content owners and HP's brand marketing staff to clean up the Web site and align communications with the brand. As part of this process, they conducted external benchmarking research to identify best practices. Key elements of this work included:

- Ridding the Web site of about 5,500 Web pages (about half) and redesigning the top 100 most-used pages and more than 60 regional HR Web pages around the globe.

- The team leveraged the then current HP "Create Amazing" and "Let's Do Amazing" brand positioning, adding energy, visual movement and interactivity wherever possible, to freshen and streamline communications and Web pages.

► **Adding Marketing to the Mix:** In March 2010, the team launched marketing-style campaigns to support key HR initiatives. Earlier research by Guthridge found that employees were unable to connect the dots between key HR functions, which included talent reviews, mid-year goal setting updates and the annual review process. "People never saw this process as a cycle," says Carter.

Thus, each campaign was assigned a consistent color palette and imagery within the new brand guidelines. This helped employees connect those dots across various communications, increasing impact, action and results.

Old-fashioned HR newsletters, which had low readership, were jettisoned in favor of virtual events, podcasts and video clips. In addition, campaigns are now done in flights, just like advertising, says Carter. "We have official launches, and make sure our campaigns are spaced out now," she says.

Given the scope of an execution so large, the biggest challenge for Carter was "flying the plane while building it."

For Guthridge, she learned the value of qualitative interviews in the research process, using her training as an investigative reporter.

RESULTS AGAINST OBJECTIVES
Better serve key audiences with information that is simple and easy to use:

- HR content now consistently ranks among the most read on the @hp employee portal.
- Carter cites participation of direct managers on HP's Focal Point Review training. In 2009, she says, 19% of managers interacted with training content. In 2010, using a virtual training event, that number shot up to 50%.

Align processes and people with the HP business strategy, value proposition and culture:

- A more proactive, consultative approach by HR communications has given the department credibility within the business.
- A more streamlined HR comms is now better aligned to key strategies.

Improve the efficiency of HR communications dollars spent:

- The initiative was delivered on schedule and under budget.
- The easier-to-navigate HR Web site and clearer, action-oriented communications have their own productivity

payback. "Based on HP's size, saving each employee an average of even 5 minutes per week equates to a productivity increase that could be valued at more than $50 million annually," says Carter.
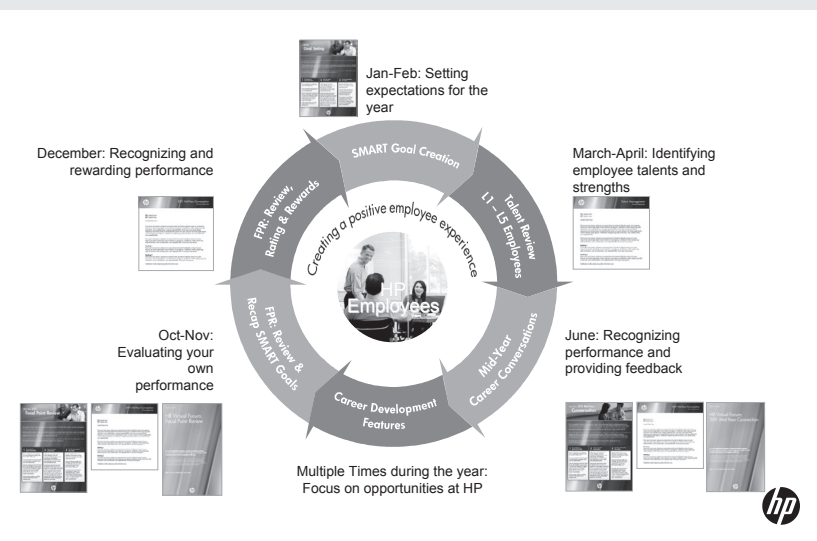
And the work continues for Carter and her team, which is now helping HR clients understand that two-way communication is more effective than the old-style, top-down way. "This is a game changer," says Carter, who adds that a mid-year review was just done virtually, allowing employees to chat about careers, download documents and view videos. "It really creates a sense of conversation," she says.

Her team has created even more of a presence on HP's employee portal, and have planted links on business unit homepages, increasing readership by 300%. PRN

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Process Drives HP's HR Comms Success

- Jan-Feb: Setting expectations for the year
- March-April: Identifying employee talents and strengths
- June: Recognizing performance and providing feedback
- Multiple Times during the year: Focus on opportunities at HP
- Oct-Nov: Evaluating your own performance
- December: Recognizing and rewarding performance

SMART Goal Creation — Talent Review L1 – L5 Employees — Mid-Year Career Conversations — Career Development Features — FPR: Review & Recap SMART Goals — FPR: Review, Rating & Rewards

Creating a positive employee experience

HP Employees

The 2008 to 2010 transformation of HP's Human Resources Communications group was a precursor to processes put into place in 2011 (shown above).

Source: **HP**