

case in point by dianne culhane

Blog logs a culture change

Coca-Cola's short-term Blog Blast takes the pulse of employees on key company values

By 2005, The Coca-Cola Co. recognized that it had been experiencing decreasing market share and slowed growth, the result of declining sales of carbonated soft drinks, health and wellness trends, a series of corporate leadership changes, and increasing competition in the beverage industry. To address these and other concerns, the company created a plan to reinvent itself—the Manifesto for Growth.

For the plan to work, however, Coca-Cola would need to make fundamental changes to its corporate culture and work environment to focus on long-term sustainable growth. A global campaign was designed to accelerate the transformation to a high-performance culture by inviting all employees to participate in a dialogue about the company's stated values: passion, leadership, integrity, accountability, collaboration, quality and innovation. This dialogue would allow the company to better define what the values mean, how employees get things done, and the specific behaviors and actions that would drive better business results.

The initiative, called Walking the Talk to Sustainable Growth, was directed to more than 20,000 employees worldwide. By engaging in an open dialogue about Coca-Cola's values at all levels, the company aimed to work with groups within the organization that were cynical or apprehensive of change. Given the global nature of the business, a blog seemed the natural solution because it allowed employees from all over the world to meet in a virtual space and encouraged open, candid dialogue in a nonhierarchical setting.

Goals and objectives

Senior leadership wanted to better define Coca-Cola's values, how things got done

and how those actions drove business results. The seven-day Blog Blast was just the beginning of a larger initiative that ran throughout 2006 and sought to define, communicate, embed and measure the company's values.

The goals of the first phase of the initiative were to:

- **Accelerate the transformation** of Coca-

Cola's culture and work environment by inspiring employees' passion and commitment to the company's values.

- **Engage employees** in a collaborative manner to define what it means to live the values, and to describe what it takes to make the company unique, competitive and engaging, and how those actions and behaviors drive business results.



WALKING THE TALK TO SUSTAINABLE GROWTH >> TODAY'S BLOG:

INNOVATION

Seek, imagine, create, delight

The Coca-Cola Company



Coca-Cola rolled out its Blog Blast to 20,000 employees worldwide with a promotional campaign that included T-shirts and posters.

Solution and implementation

One objective for the first phase of the initiative was to ask employees to define what makes The Coca-Cola Co. unique, competitive and engaging. The key tactics to accomplish this were:

- **Engage executive committee members** in the Walking the Talk initiative through meetings, a high-profile three-week promotional campaign and a Manifesto for Growth strategic planning meeting. They were also asked to co-host a value discussion on the blog, actively participating throughout the day.
- **Coordinate the three-week promotional campaign** with the support of employee communication and human resources colleagues worldwide.
- **Engage the top 150 global leaders** in the initiative at the Manifesto for Growth strategic planning meeting. Vehicles included a presentation about the business case for change, data on the bottom-line benefits of engaging employees in company values and a custom blog simulation.
- **Launch Blog Blast '06.** Using discussion threads, Blog Blast asked employees to tell a story about how they personally experienced the company's values in action.
- **Share final recommendations** for review and approval by the executive committee.

The team had only four months to fully develop, execute and measure the goals described for Phase 1. A more serious challenge was that blogs were a new concept to the organization; the company culture favored face-to-face interaction. In addition, some local cultures were not used to offering

constructive feedback, especially to members of senior management.

The solutions to these challenges included:

- **A video from the chairman** that acknowledged the cultural differences about providing feedback, but reinforced the need for all employees to participate in the initiative to achieve the company vision of long-term sustainable growth.

- **Organized local teams** posting group comments to the blog, allowing individuals who were uncomfortable submitting their ideas directly to share them within a small group that reported as a single voice.
- **A video blog tutorial** that demonstrated how easy it was to post and view comments.
- **A global activation team** and comprehensive toolkit that built excitement about the initiative in the business units around the world. Promotional items could be translated into local languages.
- **Kicking off blog events** at 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time to allow field employees in Asia to be the first to participate (7 a.m. local time in Hong Kong). This addressed a common perception that corporate was insensitive to employees in different time zones.

Measurement and evaluation

The 2,409 employee posts from more than 45 countries and the 136,862 employee page views over the entire campaign demonstrated that Phase 1 goals were successfully met. In fact, more than 30,000 page views were captured on the first day alone. An in-depth, qualitative analysis was conducted on all Blog Blast entries, revealing 29 distinct themes and 41 types

of workplace behaviors. Further analysis revealed insights into what employees say each value should and should not look like at the company.

One of the key measures for this initiative was to inspire employees' passion and commitment to company values. An employee insight survey conducted in July 2006 indicated significant improvements in key categories:

- Engagement rose to 79 percent (previously 74 percent).
- Diversity and fairness increased to 77 percent (previously 69 percent).
- Communication and awareness increased to 76 percent (previously 65 percent).
- Performance management increased to 76 percent (previously 68 percent).
- Leadership rose to 64 percent (previously 54 percent).

Walking the Talk contributed significantly to the vision of driving long-term sustainable growth by accelerating the transformation of the company culture. Ultimately, the company is measured by its stock value, which saw steady increases through the rest of 2006. •

about the author

Dianne Culhane is group director of global internal communication at The Coca-Cola Co. She is a member of the top 150 executives of The Coca-Cola Co., and co-led the development of the vision and mission goals for the company's 10-year sustainable growth plan.