



Empowering Employees as Thought Leaders on Social Media

By Maribel Castillo, T.Y. Lin International

Positioning employees as brand ambassadors is not new; however, an ongoing challenge for A/E/C marketers is facilitating that process. Social media expands our ability to build brand awareness, and most firms use a variety of platforms to promote their people and projects. The new frontier involves shifting the mindset that a firm's social media strategy is limited to marketing functions. How do you get employees on all levels of the organization to share company-related content with their professional networks?

To answer this question, we decided to test a formal employee advocacy program in 2016 using LinkedIn Elevate. Our objective: empower more employees, especially engineers in project leadership positions, to use social media to share both T.Y. Lin International-branded and relevant third-party content. The results of our pilot program revealed both unique challenges and measurable benefits.

Program Leadership: Our program is led by corporate marketing, working with human resources to maintain alignment with our talent brand. Our job is to

consistently enlist, train, and support new users. What we have learned is that there is no "build it and they will come." It's more like "invite them in and they will stay." Once employees start using Elevate, they tend to continue using it.

That is why we communicate regular email updates to share success stories and remind targeted staff to try Elevate. While the program's interface is welcoming and easy-to-use, it is clear that consistent outreach is needed to get new users to adopt the program.

People: An early benefit was that Elevate enabled us to focus our initial efforts on a prequalified group: social employees already active on LinkedIn. By targeting these active users, we were able to reach 50 percent of our target number of users in just three months.

Not surprising, our regional marketing teams quickly became some of our most vocal program advocates. Where Elevate has made a significant difference is with our most desirable target group—social engineers who thrive on sharing project information and innovative technical solutions. Why does this matter? These

are the people who give the firm a truly authentic brand voice.

As engineers share more regularly through Elevate, they come to recognize the benefits for themselves and the firm. They get to share valuable content, build deeper connections with their networks (which include clients and decision-makers), and increase their visibility as thought leaders.

Content: The hard truth is that a social media strategy will usually fall short, or even fail, if employees feel obligated to promote branded content. As the program leaders, we produce content that provides value for our employees and audiences on social media.

Using Elevate, we are able to broadcast a quality mix of both branded and third-party content on a daily basis, with an opt-in system where employees can select which broadcasts they want to share with their networks. As an added benefit, Elevate curates trending content, saving considerable time and effort.

Measurement: A monthly performance report from LinkedIn allows us to measure our key performance indicators (KPIs) and



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see how results stack up against goals. Data includes which employees are sharing content, the amount of engagement per post, the type of content generating the most interaction, and who engaged with our content. Using this analysis, we can then adjust our efforts and the type of content curated. We also use our monthly metrics to provide an Employee ROI, spotlighting and encouraging our most effective Elevate users.

Results: While there are a number of employee advocacy programs available, we selected Elevate based on our firm's

success with LinkedIn's recruitment and advertising tools. Is the program a worthwhile investment? All indications point to yes. Content shared by employees in the pilot program has generated an impressive 3.79 percent engagement rate (clicks, likes, comments, shares) versus the industry standard of just 0.4–0.6 percent. Users are also sharing content 10.8 times more than before, and reaping 7.5 times more views of their profile. For T.Y. Lin International company page results, we have seen almost double the number of page views and four times more acquired followers.

These analytics point to an enthusiastic adoption of Elevate and an increase in brand awareness to date. Moving forward, we will continue to consistently facilitate the process and enlist new recruits, including leadership staff and employees who are less familiar with social media. Bottom line: We remain confident that Elevate is a valuable marketing tool that will receive even greater engagement over time and throughout the firm. ■