

Free white paper available for download from
Interactive Springboard:
www.interactivingspringboard.com/downloads/IS-White-Paper.pdf



For Immediate Release
Sept. 16, 2010

For more information contact:
Amy Schwinge, 865/982-6626 or amy@marybethwest.com
Tyra Haag, 865/982-6626 or tyra@marybethwest.com

Survey: Tennessee Communicators Agree on Social Media Importance for Employee Culture and Training *But Also Think Organizations Underperform with Social Media or Underutilize*

Knoxville, Tenn. – Interactive Springboard – a joint venture between Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC and Blue Media Boutique, LLC – released data this week from a survey of Tennessee communications professionals about social media.

According to survey results, social media has solidified its place as an important communications tool for Tennessee businesses and organizations. However, at the same time, significant gaps exist between social media’s potential and how well Tennessee companies actually are utilizing it to achieve results now – including in the areas of employee training and building a strong internal culture.

The survey showed that the vast majority of Tennessee communications professionals surveyed (83 percent) believe social media is here to stay, and 90 percent of respondents agree that social media is an important part of any communications plan, with 57 percent expressing a very strong level of agreement.

In addition, 79 percent said it is changing how organizations communicate with their employees – with 35 percent expressing strongest agreement.

The survey data also produced a “gap analysis” measuring the difference between what respondents said social media’s importance is toward accomplishing specific results and, in comparison, how well the respondents’ own organizations are using social media to achieve those results themselves.

The gap analysis reflected a negative gap score for every item queried – meaning that Tennessee communications professionals reported that their own organizations are underutilizing or underperforming with social media compared to the importance of using social media for particular needs.

For example, respondents were asked to rank their opinion on a scale of 1 to 7, “How important is using social media for building a strong internal culture?” with 1 meaning “not at all important” and 7 meaning “very important.”

“Respondents rated social media’s importance for employee culture a 5.1 on the 1 to 7 scale – meaning it’s relatively important,” said Rebecca Bryant of Bryant Research, LLC, which managed the study’s implementation. “But, when we asked them, ‘How well is your organization using social media for building a strong internal culture?’ with 1 meaning “not well at all” and 7 meaning “very well,” their ratings averaged 3.3.”

-more / reverse-

“The difference between these two rounded metrics – 5.1 and then 3.3 – resulted in a negative 1.9 gap between the two scores when the decimals were rounded off – clearly showing there is significant room for improvement for organizations statewide to use social media well for a strong internal culture,” Bryant said.

According to the survey’s gap scores on other query points, significant performance gaps also exist for incorporating social media into employee training initiatives, as well as crisis communications.

“Across the board, this study reflects that a significant portion of Tennessee’s professional communicators believe social media holds employee-related potential for their organizations, but hurdles may need to be overcome with the actual mechanics of managing it,” said Mary Beth West of public relations firm Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC.

West said it is important for a variety of leaders in an organization – from the human resources department to the communications, legal and marketing departments – to work in partnership to develop social media strategies and tools for the benefit of employee relations.

“CEO buy-in as well as support from managers throughout the organization is also necessary,” she said.

“While many companies view social media simply as a conduit for customer-building, there are many other applications of social media to be explored, like employee team-building and relationship management,” said Tori Rose of Blue Media Boutique.

Rose said that a variety of companies such as IBM, Best Buy, PepsiCo and ING are already utilizing social media – or social media-like functionality on their own proprietary Intranets or private communications platforms – to engage employees in supporting the culture and objectives of the company.

“It’s critical to be authentic,” said Rose. “That means companies can’t take a paternalistic approach and simply push their own viewpoints out to the masses, with an assumption that it’s embraced and accepted. You have to listen, encourage two-way dialogue, and be transparent with your employee base. The resulting appreciation and trust from employees can pay big dividends to how the organization performs long-term.”

#

About the Survey Methodology

This census survey of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members from across the state of Tennessee was conducted online from June 16 to Aug. 6, 2010. Members from the following chapters participated in the study: Nashville, Knoxville/Volunteer, Chattanooga/Lookout, Memphis and the Tri-Cities. In addition to the core questions highlighted in this release, each chapter had the option of appending proprietary questions of specific interest to the local membership. The survey achieved an overall response rate of 24 percent and provides unique insight into the opinions of those whose day-to-day responsibilities include managing all manner of media, including social media.

About Interactive Springboard

Interactive Springboard is a joint venture between women-owned firms Blue Media Boutique, LLC and Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC, providing an integrated, research-based approach to social media, supporting client communications and business objectives. www.interactivespringboard.com

About Blue Media Boutique, LLC

Based in Knoxville, Tenn., Blue Media Boutique provides creative, technology and marketing services, including design, development, animation, video, illustration, branding, print, e-commerce, database, CMS, search optimization, copywriting, promotions, events and campaigns. www.bluemediaboutique.com

About Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC

Based in Maryville, Tenn., Mary Beth West Consulting, LLC advances clients’ communications, relationships and reputations to meet business and organizational objectives. The firm’s services include research strategy, integrated marketing communications campaigns; media, community and employee relations programs; interactive media strategy and program management; crisis preparedness; and special events. www.marybethwest.com

About Bryant Research, LLC

Based in Knoxville, Tenn., Bryant Research provides custom, proprietary research to clients across a number of industries. Bryant Research has produced award-winning market research counsel, employing a custom blend of quantitative and qualitative methods to inform clients’ marketing communications programs and to facilitate the best business decisions. www.bryant-research.com