

Employers can use social media to connect with customers and employees worldwide.



PART of the CONVERSATION

Using and Embracing Social Media **By Charlee Beasor**

It can be a lot to handle: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube.

But social media is increasingly enticing for companies looking to leverage the exposure and the ability to control their message.

We talk with representatives of four companies (Bloomerang, Greenlight Guru, Formstack and Onebridge) on the 2018 Best Places to Work in Indiana list that are utilizing social media to reach their customers, connect their employees and contribute to the business conversation.

Part of the package

You can spot Bloomerang Chief Engagement Officer Steven Shattuck in photos on the company's Instagram account. In one, he's holding a surfboard looking less than thrilled. In another, he's in the

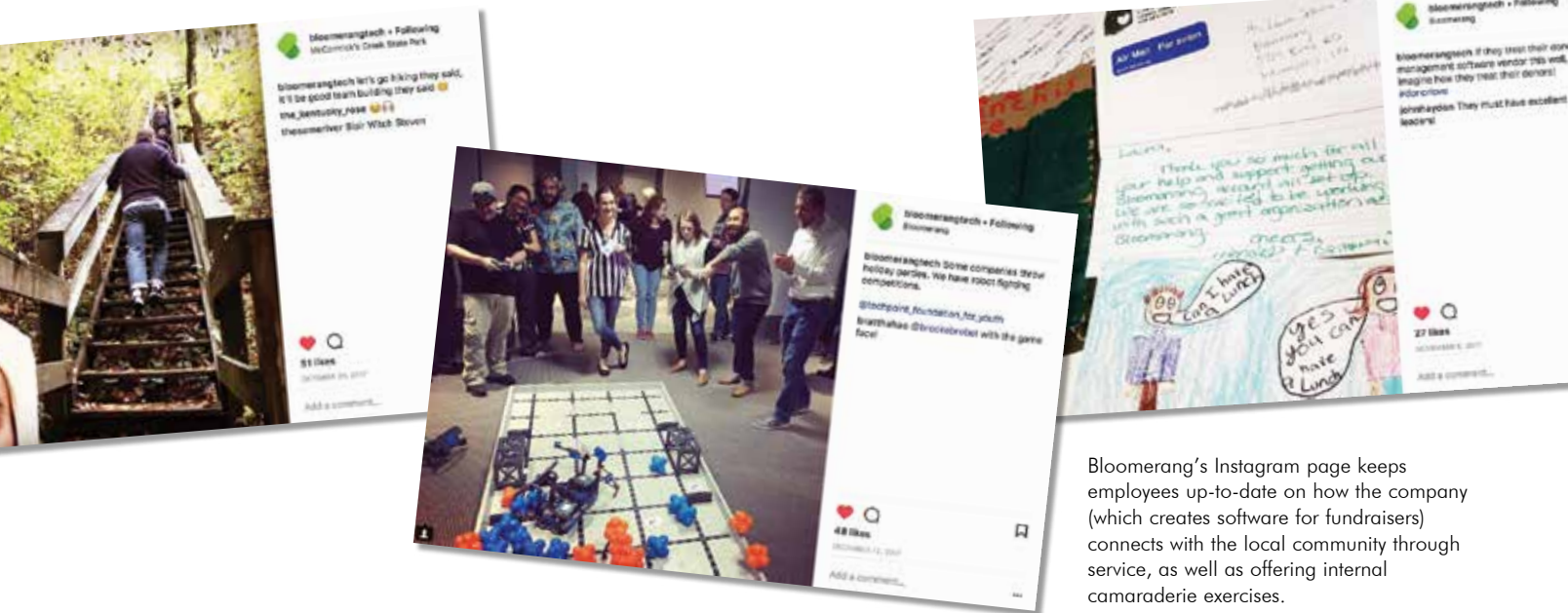
company's kitchen wearing the same shirt as Bloomerang's CEO.

The Indianapolis-based nonprofit's social media strategy includes showing off company culture and community service with a personal touch. But it goes deeper. Social media is built into Bloomerang's software, which allows organizations to monitor fundraising campaign hashtags, events, donor engagement and more.

"If a person is tweeting at you, you can put them into the database and it can be added to their profile," Shattuck explains. "Every donor or volunteer in your database has a thermometer, basically, that shows how engaged they are in your organization. . . . You can really see at a glance who your most engaged people are."

Greenlight Guru CEO and co-founder David DeRam points to the medical device industry's complexity as something that can be addressed via social media. The Indianapolis company creates quality management software for businesses in the field.

"We've really embraced the idea of doing everything we can for the industry and this is one of the channels we can use to help," he shares. "Everything about this industry is complicated. The regulations



Bloomerang’s Instagram page keeps employees up-to-date on how the company (which creates software for fundraisers) connects with the local community through service, as well as offering internal camaraderie exercises.

are really complicated.”

One of the content avenues the company uses to tackle those complexities is a popular industry forum, the Global Medical Device Podcast.

“We look at that podcast as just content in a different form, instead of an eBook or white paper. And one of the channels we use (to promote it) is social media,” DeRam offers. “But I would say, just like any other channel, if you do (social media) right, it can have a big impact on your business. You can’t do it halfway.”

Listen up!

The concept of “social listening” is monitoring social media to see what people are saying about a specific industry, brand, company, etc. and plugging into those conversations or tailoring advertisements to reach certain audiences.

Shattuck encourages employees to share and engage for the company through their own personal social media profiles, often referred to as employee advocacy.

Many Bloomerang employees are former fundraisers and are naturally inclined to jump in and answer questions from their personal accounts if there are posts inquiring about Bloomerang or donor management software, he says.

“I also say, ‘If you see us post something, share it, retweet it,’” he discloses. “We don’t require it or anything, but I encourage it and most of the managers do it too.”

Online form building software company Formstack also utilizes employees in advocating on behalf of the company. Vice president of marketing Ashley Walsh explains the company even offers tips for employees to improve their personal LinkedIn pages and allows new employees to connect via personal social media accounts.

“When we onboard a new employee, we do a welcome email letting people know that employee is starting. It has some fun facts about them. We ask if they have a social media profile to include. A lot of them opt to share their social media profile there, so everyone can get to know them, particularly for the remote aspect,” she says. “If you want to follow them on social and see cute pictures of their kids, this is their Twitter handle or Facebook account.”

DeRam adds that capturing the enthusiasm around a company’s products or mission is a natural fit for employees.

“When people are really amped about the company ... people naturally want to talk about it; it’s a normal part of our everyday lives.

They’re engaged through pure enthusiasm,” he notes.

Employee connection

Formstack and Indianapolis-based Onebridge are in the similar position of having employees spread across the country or beyond. Helping connect distant employee bases is one way those companies make the most of social media.

About 40% of Formstack’s 130-person workforce is in Indianapolis, according to Walsh. The company has opened an office in Colorado and recently acquired a business in Toronto, Canada.

In addition to the public-facing social media, Formstack utilizes an internal instant messaging system, which offers the chance for employees around the world to connect.

“That in itself is its own social media hub. People are posting pictures and connecting there. We have a room called the Water Cooler for social chitchat and non-business things.”

Onebridge has about 400 employees nationwide, with the bulk of



Greenlight Guru utilizes social media to reach and inform customers and others in the typically complicated medical device industry.



The comfort and accessibility afforded by social media makes those outlets natural communication tools for companies looking to engage with employees.



them in Indianapolis, according to Kymberli Findley, director of employee engagement and experience.

The company utilized social media when it launched a rebranding and new company name at the beginning of 2018 (previously, it was SmartIT).

“People are very comfortable on social media. It offers ways to connect and interact in their lives, and as a first method of communication it’s become a natural component for a lot of people. If you apply that to your team and your workforce, it is absolutely an opportunity to engage with employees, particularly those who are spread out. ... It’s fairly easy for them to access, it doesn’t feel tedious or strenuous. They are engaged (on mobile devices) all day long.”

Social media is also a natural recruitment tool.

“We hear very often in the interview process, ‘I saw your Instagram, saw your Twitter profile, it seems like you have so much fun and have a great culture,’ ” adds Formstack’s Walsh. “We work really hard on our Glassdoor profile and monitoring those reviews and taking those really seriously. Reviews are social media.”

Findley says she’s even been on the phone with potential job candidates in a recruiting capacity and they’ve gone onto Facebook and found the Onebridge page.

“It’s a frame of reference for legitimacy,” she says. “People look for things in different places (online) and different ways, and we’re mindful of that, especially as the workforce

spans generations right now.”

Avoiding trouble?

Today’s reality also reveals people making bad decisions with regard to social media usage and either getting a company into hot water or possibly getting themselves fired.

Company policies and a common-sense approach, however, can cut down on the worry.

Bloomerang has a basic policy in the company handbook about solving problems with fellow employees or with customers offline first, which often mitigates any potential problems online, Shattuck notes.

“It seems like if you hire good people, it shouldn’t really be an issue. But that might be impossible with a 50,000-person organization,” he contemplates. “We’ve got 100 employees. We can say, ‘Hey, we’re in growth mode and no one is resting on their laurels; don’t muck it up if you can help it.’ ”

Findley believes that trying to avoid the issue by ignoring the idea that employees are active social media users isn’t the way to go.

“I think that trying to limit it or keep people away from it in the way it’s being consumed right now is not impactful and it’s not the type of culture we want to have. It’s natural they would want to interact with the company in a way that’s meaningful to them. And we want our employees to feel empowered to do that,” she asserts.

No ostriches here

Like an ostrich with its head in the sand, avoiding the online conversation is impractical.

“People are going to be talking about you regardless. You can be part of that conversation – or not be,” Shattuck offers.

“You can mitigate or engage positive conversation or just act like it’s not happening. You better be part of the conversation or you’re going to miss something.”

Walsh recommends those nervous about wading into the world of social media test the waters by simply starting a profile to see how it benefits the company.

“It’s important to have (a presence) mainly because it just provides really almost a validity of your brand anymore. If people can’t find a web site or a social profile or something for your business, they’re often just going to move on to the next one where they can do a little bit of research,” she surmises.

Findley adds, “We have found that if we can continue to understand (social media) and embrace it, we will continue to find success.

“It’s not going away.”

RESOURCES: David DeRam, Greenlight Guru, at www.greenlight.guru | Kymberli Findley, Onebridge, at www.onebridge.tech | Steven Shattuck, Bloomerang, at www.bloomerang.co | Ashley Walsh, Formstack, at www.formstack.com