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PRide Awards 2014

Class 3 - Internal Communications Campaign
Arco Conversation Cascade

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communications : people : branding



Arco Conversation Cascade: Brief and Objectives

Arco are leading suppliers of workplace safety equipment, training and consultancy, with 1500 employees and a nationwide network of sales and distribution centres.

Arco Senior managers were surprised and disappointed by the results of the Best Companies Survey 2012. Employees were unclear on company direction, and feeling insecure after a period of downsizing. This was negatively impacting engagement.

The board's strategic review developed a compelling vision for the future. Arco approached H&H to help communicate and connect employees with this vision and strategy.

Our objectives were:

1. Deliver effective, memorable roll-out of vision and strategy
2. Equip line managers to bring vision and strategy to life
3. Encourage employee involvement; establish clear linkage between day-to-day job roles and achievement of strategic goals

Effectiveness was assessed via:

1. Employee evaluation of:

I'm clear on the long-term business strategy

- I'm familiar with Arco's Vision and Values
- I know the role I need to play in achieving success for Arco
- I'm excited about my future with Arco

2. Successful roll-out - every single employee given the opportunity to discuss and feedback their response to the Vision

3. Achieve 'one to watch' status in 'Best Companies' 2014.

Strategy and Tactics

1. Manager Involvement

The key to successful change programmes often lies with Managers. A common reason for programme failure is employees not witnessing their managers modelling or showing support for new behaviours.

There's substantial evidence that an employee's most trusted source of information at work is their line manager^{1,2}. When instigating change, employees respond more emphatically if they believe their line manager desires and supports it.

2. Rapid Dissemination

With 3 months until the 2014 Best Companies survey, we had to be quick without compromising quality and effectiveness.

3. Commitment to Change

Encouraging people to feel inspired and excited about change is one thing; keeping that feeling going when they get back to work is another. We needed a mechanism to inspire employees to make tangible changes supporting the long term vision.

We created a highly participative 'conversation cascade', led by managers, with information flowing down from Senior Management and back up from employees.

¹80% of the extent to which an employee is engaged is driven by the relationship they have with their line manager - Gallup and the Training Foundation cited by Smith 2011

²60% of employees believe creating a climate of open comms is the single most important action for line managers in affecting levels of employee engagement - http://www.dalecarnegie.com/assets/1/12/engaged_employee_infographic_z.jpg

Implementation

The structured 2.5 hour conversation was built around a 'vision map' - an infographic presentation of Arco's strategy. We also developed a conversation facilitation guide for managers. Each map 'destination' had a specific conversational focus.

For many managers, this conversation pushed them outside their comfort zones. They'd never been asked to do anything like this before. So our trainers and coaches developed the guide to ensure even the most inexperienced manager could execute with confidence.

We set the scene with an inspiring video. With budgets extremely tight, we used previously-shot footage and re-edited to a new script - incorporating imagery from the Vision map to integrate the materials.

The cascade began at board level. We facilitated the conversation with board members; later that day, the board members facilitated conversations with groups of senior managers. These managers had conversations with their reports, who had conversations with their reports...until every employee had been involved in a conversation.

Although we knew a conversation by its nature would be more effective than a deck of PowerPoints, we wanted to do more than transfer knowledge. We wanted every Arco employee to appreciate their role in achieving the goals, and make a commitment to change. At the end of the conversation, employees completed their personal commitment card. There are literally hundreds of these cards displayed on walls across the Arco sites.

Evidence of engagement and behavioural change

"The approach and materials were outstanding. The feedback from employees has been amazing. The MD said he learned more during his conversation than he had in the last 5 years. The conversation cascade hasn't just worked, it's transformed the way the employees feel about their future at Arco." - Gillian White, Arco IC Manager

Employee engagement has undergone a sea-change. Before the Cascade, the Employee Survey revealed a workforce that was less connected and certain than they should be. At the next feedback opportunity - the Best Companies Survey - employees shared very different feedback:

"The company's focusing on providing clear direction from the top and is being transparent in how it's arriving at these decisions. This demonstrates trust in employees to both understand and deliver the goals." - Best Companies Survey

Based on employee responses about how engaged and connected they felt, Arco achieved their goal of "One To Watch" status.

Integration with other activities

The cascade was so successful that Arco have commissioned three further cascades. It's become an essential communications tool – a proven, effective way of quickly passing information downwards, and feedback upwards, throughout the organisation.

Research, planning, measurement and evaluation

1. Evaluation of employee understanding and commitment

Evaluation was via employee-completed questionnaires. We asked the same four questions pre and post conversation, and three months post-conversation. We saw significant, sustained improvements on all measures:

	Pre-conversation	Post-conversation	3m post-conversation
I'm very clear on the long-term business strategy for Arco	5.8	8.2	8.3
I'm very familiar with the Arco Vision and Values	6.2	8.3	8.2
I know the role I need to play in achieving the Vision	6.9	8.1	8.3
I'm excited about my future at Arco	6.7	8.3	8.2

2. Timely execution

The cascade was completed within three weeks. Every Arco team member took part in a conversation and shared their thoughts about company strategy.

3. 'One to Watch' status in the Great Companies Survey

Arco have achieved 'One to Watch' category status.

Budgets and effectiveness – why this campaign deserves recognition

The Cascade model provides exceptional value for money. With a budget of £19,500, we created the video, Strategy Map, Conversation Guide and all associated materials, as well as the pre- and post-Conversation research evaluation.

The Cascade was also exceptionally time-efficient. Within three weeks, everyone within Arco participated in a high-quality, in-depth conversation about the company's future – and shared their thoughts on what this meant to them.

And its effectiveness can be clearly seen in the research results and in Arco's achievement of Best Company's "One to Watch" status.