



Airfoil and Microsoft - Empowering Small and Medium-sized Companies to Boost Business Success with Technology

Airfoil Public Relations, Inc. and Microsoft, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Marketing Business-To-Business —Other (Categories Not Elsewhere Defined)

U.S small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are the heart and soul of the American economy and, for Microsoft, a priority focus. The Microsoft U.S. SMB PR team developed and executed a program that shifted the perception around Microsoft's support of SMBs by advancing and increasing key message penetration/resonance in media coverage; driving thought-leadership among SMBs; and broadly educating SMBs by increasing share of voice and coverage volume year-over-year. The team built deeper brand affinity among SMBs for Microsoft as a caring provider of innovative and valuable technologies while communicating the power and potential of cloud computing.

Marketing business to business includes programs designed to introduce new products, or promote existing products or services to a business audience.

Full Text: SITUATION ANALYSIS

There are millions of small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) in the U.S. and they are the heart and soul of the American economy. For Microsoft, whose mission is to help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential, SMBs are a priority focus (Microsoft identifies SMBs as companies with 250 personal computers and below).

SMBs are conservative, time- and resource-strapped and like to keep operations and processes simple. Small businesses are tasked with running a business oftentimes without an IT staff, which means they don't have time to think about technology – their systems just need to work. Consequently, less than one in five SMBs proactively buy or make changes to software; resulting in outdated technology (including browsers) being consistently used, which leads to business issues like data loss and security breaches. And because SMBs seek free solutions to incorporate into their technology infrastructure, SMBs open themselves up to major security and data protection insecurities.

With the advent of cloud computing, SMBs are entering a technology revolution, which opens up a world of new applications and functionalities never accessible to them until now. SMBs generally tend toward traditional technology, like hardware and on-premise software, which presents an awareness opportunity for Microsoft to educate this audience about the power of cloud computing while establishing brand affinity amidst a competitive set of technology providers also actively targeting the SMB sector.

RESEARCH

Two primary research components informed the development of the Microsoft U.S. SMB FY12 PR program:

1. An annual Microsoft-driven research initiative that measures Microsoft Customer and

Partner Experience (CPE) messages was conducted. The research identified resonance of CPE messages from the year prior to establish a benchmark and identify areas of low awareness/dissatisfaction among SMBs in regards to Microsoft. The key messages targeting SMBs identified as areas requiring improvement were Value, Caring and Innovation.

2. An online survey of SMBs was conducted by the PR team to gauge the technology topics that are top of mind for SMBs and understand the business environment SMBs face.

PLANNING

The Microsoft U.S. SMB PR team was tasked with building deeper brand affinity among SMBs for the Microsoft brand as a caring provider of innovative and valuable technologies, while communicating the power and potential of cloud computing for the SMB audience and integrating with the company's overarching SMB marketing efforts.

The objectives of the Microsoft U.S. SMB FY12 PR program were to create a perception shift around Microsoft's support of SMBs by advancing and increasing key message penetration/resonance in media coverage; drive thought-leadership among SMBs via the positioning of Cindy Bates, Microsoft U.S. VP, SMB&D, as an expert; and broadly educate SMBs by increasing share of voice and Microsoft SMB coverage volume year-over-year.

The strategy for the Microsoft SMB FY12 PR program was to position Microsoft as a coach, motivator and partner to show SMBs that the company supports their business. The PR program incorporated a number of activities tied to the strategy while also integrating with Microsoft's marketing vehicles, including campaigns to make the benefits of cloud technologies tangible and relatable. The program's flagship campaign focused on Disaster Preparedness. Campaigns incorporated components that could be leveraged across PR activities and the SMB marketing group.

EXECUTION

Campaign activities included development of a free downloadable eGuide, available at MicrosoftBusinessHub.com for SMBs; customer testimonials; proactive media outreach; content development, including advice-driven tip sheets; a quiz to identify areas of technology misses/opportunities; posts for Cindy Bates' SMB Blog; bylined articles leveraged across media vehicles; bylined articles/blog posts leveraged by strategic alliances who target SMBs (e.g. ASBDC, SCORE, local chambers of commerce); and infographics.

In addition to campaigns, the program included ongoing thought leadership-driven activities to reinforce Microsoft as a coach, motivator and partner for SMBs. These activities included the establishment of Microsoft's Cindy Bates as an SMB thought leader via media relations activities and social media engagement (Twitter); securing a regular contribution opportunity for Cindy Bates on Entrepreneur.com; and driving recurring blog post opportunities on ASBDC, SCORE and PC Mall.

EVALUATION

The success of the Microsoft U.S. SMB PR program directly influenced the increased score of the Microsoft Customer and Partner Experience messages. The increased score equates to a message being positively communicated and received by Microsoft customers. For the Value message, the program drove a 6.6 percent increase; for the Caring message, the program drove a 4.95 percent increase; and for the Innovation message, the program drove a 3.45 percent increase.

Additional program metrics include 256 percent increase year-over-year in total impressions (June 2011 – June 2012); 778 percent increase year-over-year in total number of stories (June 2011 – June 2012); 55 percent increase year-over-year in growth of Cindy Bates' Twitter followers (June 2011 – June 2012); and increased views of Cindy Bates' SMB Blog by 611 percent year-over-year (June 2011 – June 2012). Additionally, Cindy Bates was named a Top

100 Small Business Influencer Champion in 2011 and 2012. The award recognizes the top influencers in the small business market.

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