

Company/ Organization: Merritt Group

Date: Jan 2020 – Jan 2021

Communication category: Internal communications

Case study: MG Validation Program

Background/ Situational analysis

Boutique or smaller PR agencies do not have the luxury of broader brand awareness for things like business development, employee recruitment and general industry credibility. Merritt Group found itself competing against similar-sized agencies in addition to larger, more well-known agencies for new clients, impressive talent and thought leadership. This became especially challenging as the technology industry boomed and more large organizations wanted to break into the hot new sector for which Merritt Group's expertise had once made them unique. To make traction in each of these business segments, the agency decided it was time for a more formal internal communications program that could improve performance in each of these key areas: The Merritt Group "MG" Validation program.

Challenges

As the team established and built out the program there were growing pains and push back that required additional internal messaging and initial setting of expectations. Like with many internal communications programs, especially within smaller organizations, this was an additional item on top of client priorities and provided challenges to get already busy individuals involved and committed to the success of the program. Internal communications requires a commitment from top to bottom – the CEO needs to be open and willing to be involved in interviews, make themselves free for speaking engagements, and accessible to messaging changes/ updates to the company on an ongoing basis, the finance team needs to be ready and able to provide insight on budget for submitting awards and the day-to-day PR teams need to be constantly monitoring for the right opportunities. To show the value of the program, this meant continually reminding the agency of the wins the team had secured to ensure all parties' consistent engagement.

Strategy

Build a multi-faceted internal communications program to drive brand awareness among prospective clients, talent, as well as industry peers. This was done through external efforts such as email marketing, media relations, social media, content development, speaking events, launching a podcast, a new website and awards, as well as revamped internal messaging with a monthly employee newsletter, the launch of new programs such as a DE&I team, book club, and more in order to enhance key business operations and improve agency growth.

Communication approach

This formal program would be led and executed by existing employees who had a solid understanding of Merritt Group's value proposition leveraging skills similar to those highlighted during client work. In order to disperse the work and utilize the team's skillset, the program was built into 6 primary areas of operation: email marketing, media relations, social media, content development, speaking events, and awards.

Results

As a result of the internal program, the team established thought leadership profiles for 1-2 executives across each practice group, securing speaking engagements for individuals like the VP of Digital Marketing to build awareness of Merritt Group as an integrated agency – a key goal of the project since the agency was more traditionally known for public relations capabilities. Conducting media outreach around key tradeshows and narratives for the industry, including COVID-related impacts, survey data developed in tandem with partners and annual predictions, the MG Validation team secured bylines, placed written commentary and led interviews leading to coverage in vertical outlets such as *TechTarget* and *CSO*, as well as local and PR-industry publications *PRWeek*, *PRovoke Media*, *POLITICO Pro*, *Washington Business Journal* and *Washington Post*. Additionally, the MG Validation team led efforts to boost awareness about their culture and community giving, resulting in coverage discussing leading a volunteer program in a virtual setting in *PR Daily* and *Thrive Global*.

Within this same time Merritt Group launched their first Instagram account, growing followers to 228, in tandem with significant growth on Twitter and LinkedIn which led to client engagements and discovering intern candidates. The team worked hand-in-hand with the larger agency to develop new case studies and messaging for an updated website to better host new content including an increased cadence and renewed focus on a blog in addition to a new podcast. The new website also included an area to highlight recent awards, as the team had successfully submitted 8 general agency and client-work focused awards within a year, including Top Firm awards by Clutch.