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The Most Powerful Name in Corporate News

Research and Consulting for Social Business Strategies



Vanessa DiMauro - CEO

About Leader Networks

Leader Networks is a strategic research and consulting firm that helps clients develop social business strategies, create B2B online communities and lead social media marketing programs. Leveraging our extensive research agenda, applied domain expertise and hands-on experience, we work with our clients to share best practices, create social strategies, develop sustainable business models, and shape user engagement in ways that will extend their operating model.

Leader Networks was established in 2006 by Vanessa DiMauro, CEO and Chief Digital Officer. She is a recognized authority on B2B social business strategy, social selling and a pioneering researcher of online communities. Leader Networks team members bring extensive strategic consulting, business operations, content management and technology expertise to bear on each client's unique needs and concerns.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Ms. DiMauro, what is the basic concept behind Leader Networks?

Ms. DiMauro: We are a research and strategy firm that is dedicated to helping organizations get closer to their customers. We specialize in working with companies of all sizes to help them create and refine their digital strategies and operations.

CEOCFO: How does this work day to day?

Ms. DiMauro: We examine the corporate or marketing strategy and identify ways that in social engagement can help solve the problem or advance their strategic agenda. For example, with one large firm we worked with, they were in the process of losing subscribers to the key service and they did not have a digital presence. They needed to learn more about their customers, create opportunities to sell relevant products and services and inspire greater customer satisfaction overall. We studied the gaps in their customer experiences and discovered that their customers were not feeling very connected to the organization. The firm only showed up at time of renewal and did not maintain relationships throughout the year. We created a suite of digital programs that met the customer needs and provided information back to the organization so they could innovate in the future.

CEOCFO: When you are working with a company and you are doing the research, what might be something you would look at that other firms do not understand are important?

Ms. DiMauro: The customer experience is centermost to all that we do. Because we come from a business background, we are able to help firms develop meaningful digital programs and focus on determining and tracking business metrics. Operational alignment is the other area where we are well known. Many organizations have not gotten to the point where they know how to use the data shared on the social channels to change product development or future innovations or even R&D. We create the processes and best practices to make the social data and insights actionable.

CEOCFO: When a prospective client is coming to you, are they coming because they already know the depth and breadth of what you do or is there an aha moment when they understand the value?

Ms. DiMauro: Organizations usually show up at our door when they have a problem that they have a hunch digital will solve. They usually do not know the answer and quite honestly neither do we at the beginning. That is where our research background is instrumental. Because we are able to do the research, understand the customer and the business needs, we can then look across our portfolio of offerings and assemble the right remedy. We are about solving problems.

CEOCFO: How do you keep up with regulations you may need to know about as well as ever changing technology?

Ms. DiMauro: We participate and contribute to a number of standard bodies so we are able to get a bird's eye view on many of the trends and we work internationally.

CEOCFO: As you develop a plan, how do you work on the implementation side with a client?

Ms. DiMauro: We are a definitely a "teach a man to fish" kind of organization. We share and teach program best practices and build centers of excellence in partnership with originations, which means creating adaptable frameworks, scalable

tools and approaches that can be applied across the organization. We empower firms by doing and teaching them how so they can sustain the momentum.

CEOCFO: Do you reach out to the people in an organization who will actually interact with the customers to gauge their level of comfort or see how your plan should be structured so it works for them as well as for the management?

Ms. DiMauro: They are critical to the success, so even in our strategy workshop, we work with leaders across the different lines of business such as sales, marketing, and R&D. When we focus on operational alignment, it is through the lens of not just the management but the true experience of the customer. For example, we've sat in on numerous call center calls to understand the nature of the transactions and the customer needs so we can identify the self service opportunities within a digital support community. We need to understand what people want and need from the organizations that we can design the right digital support mechanism.

CEOCFO: Are companies often surprised at what your findings?

Ms. DiMauro: We hope so. In some cases we serve as the change agent catalyst in the validation of what people already knew and in other cases, our strength is in coming up with innovative approaches. Our approach is to solve a single or a small set of important problems deeply and well. The surprises usually come in the implementation part of how to do it well.

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CEOCFO: What have you learned since you founded the company that has cause a change in your approach?

Ms. DiMauro: We started out only doing online communities, focusing on creating online communities from strategy to deep operation. Over the course of the past eight or nine years, the industry is moving so quickly and digital is becoming so integrated into the fabric of the organization that we have taken a much more holistic approach to online and we are working much more with social media marketing, listening, as well as online community and customer interactions. We bespoke many inputs and opportunities in order to create solutions.

CEOCFO: Why choose Leader Networks?

Ms. DiMauro: Three reasons. We know social, we understand B2B very deeply and though our research approach, we are able to listen, understand, respond and design solutions that are appropriate for both the organization and those they are trying to impact.

CEOCFO: Final thoughts?

Ms. DiMauro: You mentioned the pace of change and everything from regulations to the speed of which tools are changing, and this has created a lot of paralysis in organizations. Everyone has a little digital insecurity and fear about what is going to happen and risk and exposure. Successful digital is about taking calculated risks, controlled experiments, learning and measuring from what you do. We are strong advocates of the crawl, walk, run approach, and advice companies either with us or without us to really take a “slow and steady wins the race” approach to whatever they do online.

BIO: Vanessa DiMauro is the founder and CEO of Leader Networks, a research and strategy consulting company that helps organizations succeed in social business and B2B online community building. DiMauro is a popular speaker, researcher and executive advisor. With over 15 years experience in social business leadership positions, she has founded and run numerous online communities, and has developed award winning social business strategies for some of the largest and most influential companies in the world. Many of her clients have won industry awards such as Forrester's Groundswell and SNCR's Excellence in Communications.

Her work has been covered by leading publications such as the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and Forbes. DiMauro was recently named a one of 40 top social marketing masters worldwide by Forbes. Vanessa DiMauro sits on several boards including The Society of New Communications Research (SNCR) and Social Media Today. She is former Executive-In-Residence at Babson College's Olin School of Management, holds both a B.A. and M.A. from Boston College and blogs at <http://www.leadernetworks.com/blog/>.

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