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**Executive Summary**

*Notes from select sessions at the virtual conference.*

11:30-11:55 a.m. ET

PANEL

**Lean into Levity: Scale Culture with Content That Connects**[*Dana DeSarno*](https://www.ragan.com/ragan_speakers/dana-desarno/?id=291517)*, Manager of Employee Communications, Navy Federal Credit Union*[*Emily Russel*](https://www.ragan.com/ragan_speakers/emily-kao-russel/?id=291517)*, Vice President of Talent Brand Marketing and Employee Communications, ServiceNow*

[**Dana DeSarno**](https://www.ragan.com/ragan_speakers/dana-desarno/?id=291517)**’s Comment and Tips**

* Levity is a huge part of NFCU, funny enough being a financial institution. As a result, the organization incorporates humor and levity into videos, campaigns and all their outreach.
* It’s largely employee-empowered and “Culture isn’t a checklist.”
* To provide excellent service, you must take care of employees first.
* Examples of culture content/events include: NFCU’s Summer Fest, Big Day Out and Children’s Holiday Party activities that don’t just focus on getting closer to employees, but their families, too.
* Team, org structure and sample “culture rich content” that inspires:
  + 85% of their workforce deployed to telework.
  + They conduct action plans based on internal surveys.
  + They created a digital newsletter, “In the Loop,” which took a newscaster approach to telling great stories from branches around the globe including Asia, Hawaii, etc. It lives on their Intranet.
  + They kicked photo sharing into high gear this past year to find levity, earning 1500+ photo submissions. They have monthly themes (vacation, pets, etc.)
  + Another example is Dress Days: an opportunity to get out of your work clothes and wear a concert tee, a sports jersey, etc.
  + They also pivoted from a fitness challenge to a wellness challenge with a portal, including digital badges, opportunity to share your progress, etc.
  + NFCU’s DE&I program includes a week-long celebration around hashtag #IAMWHOIAM sharing photos and unique stories around what makes employees “who they are.”
  + Their internal message board is called “social communities” and it sees 2500+ members posting daily. It includes a leadership board, a DE&I board etc.
* Employ recognition should be a big part of your content strategy. NFCU’s includes badging, cash kudos and award ceremonies.
* When NFCU employees take good care of members, they have digital P2P badges that are awarded to employees as a form of recognition from other employees and can be accessed through the Intranet. Quick takeaways re awards:
  + Awards program sells out every year.
  + It’s important to leave comments open on blog posts/Intranet, etc.
* Forums have always played a part in employee comms, along with podcasts. They evolved this year to focus on two-way comms, including a monthly CEO conversation. Sometimes these are repurposed in the podcast. Larger forums are targeted to middle managers.
* Video is big. It’s the bright and shiny object, thanks to Dana’s amazing video team. They must be strategic about the videos they make, to not overextend them.
  + One video example is a levity video addressing parking issue around campus to bring an element of humor to a situation that was frustrating.
  + Another includes “job shadowing” videos.
  + They also use videos for more serious messages that cascade to other channels.
  + Video recaps of everything internal going on that month. Sent via email as employees’ #1 source for updates based on feedback and lets them dig deeper into Intranet for more info.
  + It’s not one channel or event at NFCU—it’s a mix. They stick with what works and over time, employees have learned to look forward to them, planning attire for the week of fun, etc. That preserves their culture

[**Emily Russel**](https://www.ragan.com/ragan_speakers/emily-kao-russel/?id=291517)**’s Comment and Tips**

* Levity and humor, when executed well and authentically, are a powerful way to connect with people. People are who we all serve. Humor is a universal language that binds us together and helps us feel something at the end of the day. We ultimately want to evoke an emotion from those who we speak to.
* What about “fun” and “levity” as a possible miss or third rail? When fun, humor and levity are applied on-brand, purpose-led and brand-led they are great because they help comms test the boundaries of the brand. When infused with the creative brief, it also helps experiment with tonality.
* Some of the pitfalls include off-tone videos that leave employees confused or disconnected with the character of the company. It ultimately ties back to leading with your purpose and values: they don’t create fun and light content just because they like to, it must drive toward a goal and be tested… especially with global audiences.

**Open Discussion**

* Emily: When a culture is healthy and you are engaging them in the moments that matter to their journey/life cycle, it’s not difficult to get them to be active and participate… Engage ERGs and make it easy!
* Dana: We gain excitement around building up to when we do launch things on the intranet. In the newscast video monthly, for example, they’ll tease an ask for submissions like graduation photos.
* Emily: We use a third-party app called Crew. It was seamless and saved us as we pivoted to WFH during Covid, binding us together.
* A lot of internal activations generate amazing content that would be helpful for external employer branding. How are you pushing that out?
  + Dana: We push out videos all the time, they are our #1 source for pushing out content. We share a shortened version of some videos with our social team that they push out on LI… not our levity videos, only the ones that make sense.
  + Emily: All content created for our internal channels should be created for external channels as well. They should all be reflective of our talent brand, an “inside out” view. It’s got to be omnichannel, and ultimately, we’ve got to keep it real.

12:30-12:55 a.m. ET

**Surviving and Thriving in Disruption: Building Cohesion and Culture**

[*Hannah Cho*](https://www.ragan.com/ragan_speakers/hannah-cho/?id=291517)*, Vice President of Marketing and Communications, BMC Software*

* Hannah Cho began with an outline of the transformation at BMC software, the Houston-based enterprise software and services company. The company needed a reset on internal organization, and the comms team built a “One BMC” campaign around the shift.
* The objective was to present BMC as the key strategic partner for customers and empower them to win with a vision that BMC called “Enterprise 2025.” Through it, BMC would help customers reinvent their own businesses as software-powered companies, helping them become Autonomous Digital Enterprises.”
* BMC built an infographic around the definition of the Autonomous Digital Enterprise, making it a key cog in building successful organizations. It also created a short video reinforcing the same points.
* After the video, Cho outlined how BMC operationalized its transformation. It went from:
  + Siloed operations to team alignment.
  + Reactive tactics to strategic efforts.
  + Activity-based KPIs to driving qualitative and quantitative impacts.
  + Individual results to collective success.
  + Customized processes to Standard processes and governance.
* “We put a wrapper around three key pillars,” Cho says: BMC’s evolution, BMC’s innovation, and BMC’s market relevance.
* During an extended Q&A after her presentation, Cho described the comms initiatives and strategies behind the BMC transformation. Asked about which tools and channels she uses, Cho said BMC keeps it simple. The comms team uses the intranet and executive communications. One underlying goal is to make sure employees feel reassured. In addition, she says, FAQs play a role. Email newsletters are a workhorse.
* Measurement, Cho says, come from fairly standard indicators, starting with employee engagement and surveys.
* Return to the workplace is also a major focus right now, Cho says, complicated by the fact that the communications efforts must factor in public health and legal considerations, not to mention employee opinions.

1:15-1:40 p.m. ET  
PANEL

**The Hybrid Workplace Toolkit: Build Trust and Boost Dispersed Engagement**[*Becky Graebe*](https://www.ragan.com/ragan_speakers/becky-graebe/?id=291517)*, Senior Director, Communication Strategy. Dynamic Signal*[*Kimberly Tate-Nuwar*](https://www.ragan.com/ragan_speakers/kimberly-tate-nuwar/?id=291517)*, Senior Director of Communications, LexisNexis Risk Solutions Group*

* LexisNexis got its highest ever net promoter score and recorded soaring customer satisfaction during the pandemic. How?
* It started with an employee-first focus that put their needs first. It was sustained by consistent, transparent communication, as well as empathetic listening to employee concerns, suggestions and feedback.
* LexisNexis has been using live, virtual town halls where employees can pre-submit questions to execs, as well as coaching employees on how to work from home successfully.
* The company also frequently surveys workers to gauge how well (or not) new comms tools are working.
* Employee feedback fuels strategy and helps shape change.
* All this listening—and acting on feedback—builds trust.
* LexisNexis has experienced major growth in ERGs since the pandemic took hold. They now have 10-15 ERG events per week.
* Teams Live and MS Streams are great for town halls.
* Streams offers built-in closed captioning and transcripts. (However, be sure to review the transcripts, as it’s AI-based and may misspell names, etc.
* [Sparrow](https://www.sparrowconnected.com/) is a tool to try; it integrates conversations across the enterprise. [Viva](https://www.ragan.com/improving-employee-experience-and-culture-through-microsoft-viva/) also worth a look.
* Communicating transparently creates trust, which fuels engagement, loyalty, retention and productivity.
* Listening is just the beginning. You must also act on employee feedback.
* Ask yourself (and workers): What makes for a great day at work?
* For comms tools and tech: 1. Ask what’s available. 2. What’re the rollout plans? 3. Research what it does. 4. Does it match your needs? 5. If not, find an external vendor.
* Graebe says that it’s not crazy to try new tech; it’s crazy NOT to try new things during this new era of work.
* Use this unprecedented time to push for change. (And maybe increase your staff and/or budget.)
* Last year was about survival. Now, it’s all about helping employees thrive wherever they are.
* Own the facts. Admit when you’re not connecting well with frontline workers, for instance. Identify those who are difficult to reach, and devise strategies to reach them in meaningful ways.
* Establish clear KPIs to clarify expectations and to gauge messaging progress.
* Employee surveys should be more frequent nowadays to gather employee ideas, preferences and suggestions. One survey per year doesn’t cut it anymore.
* Email Open is a tool to track email metrics.
* When trying to push email to intranet, tread cautiously. Pick the right tool for the right task. Use things for what they’re designed for—and strive to make your tech stack complementary rather than compulsory.

3:15-3:45 p.m. ET

**Turn Employees into Advocates: Spark Culture with Rituals, Recognition and Social Media**[*Jennifer E. Heyman*](https://www.ragan.com/ragan_speakers/jennifer-e-heyman/?id=291517)*, Head of Social Media Intelligence and Engagement, Wells Fargo*

[*Alex Masters-Goessling*](https://www.ragan.com/ragan_speakers/alex-masters-goessling/?id=291517)*, Senior Director, CX Communications and Employee Enablement, Electronic Arts*

**Alex Masters-Goessling’s Comment and Tips**

* **Get clear on why you care about culture**. At EA, we exist to help the world play. We believe a great employee experience drives a great customer/player experience.
* What do you measure? Pay attention to what people say and why people leave. Use culture surveys and tactical tools like a “happy-or-not” bots. Start with a broad listening tour.
* Get beyond the tactical things people ask for and figure out why they are asking for them
* Recommends reading: “Great Mondays” by Josh Levine.
* **Be intentional.** Pizza Parties are a great example. They can be parties, or they can be rituals that people look forward to. Be really intentional about how you design, execute programs. Are you trying to inspire, energize, restore or inspire people?
* **If something doesn’t map into your goals, it’s OK to ignore it.** At EA, someone asked for nap pods. After analysis, we were able to move on form the suggestion because it didn’t fit into our stated goals for culture. When you do a mapping exercise, you will find a lot of things that don’t ladder up to overall goals.
* **Use Maslov’s hierarchy of needs:** If we invest in the bottom layers, we free our team to be creative and reach higher potential.
* **Make culture everyone’s job**. We talk about owning your experience at EA. If culture is just my job, it’s going to be weak. Make sure everyone is bringing their unique contribution to the table.
* **Tool:** Bonusly and its platform Cheers—At EA, everyone is empowered with “bucks” to reward colleagues for living our values. Recognize birthdays and anniversaries this way and bucks can be redeemed for items.
* What’s unique about EA’s program? Everyone has bucks to give, not just managers. And it is all tied to values and is visible to everyone.
* **Aesthetics matter.** This is a lesson learned from the book, “Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness.” Every internal comms manager should read it. There’s a belief that happiness only comes from within. Not true. Happiness can really be influenced by external environment.

**Jennifer Heyman’s Comment and Tips**

* Social today tends to sit in marketing or corporate comms/public affairs channel. Social is really an extension of storytelling, with unique power for two-way connection.
* We’ve seen a pivot to showing your employees living out their unique experience on social media.
* What are the themes people are talking about when it comes to your brand?
  + Are you set up to respond?
  + Do you have an escalation plan?
* Think about how you will discern the signal from the noise on posts from your community.
* Sentiment matters, but don’t be scared by sentiment that isn’t positive. Most sentiment on social media these days is neutral.
* Many brands are struggling with entry point for senior leaders on social. Leaders can help you reach a larger audience and an authentic audience where ensuing discussion can be helpful for your brand.
* **Three tips to empower employees to share on social media:**
  + It’s on the social media team to coalesce around setting standards on participation.
  + Invest in a software or advocacy structure.
  + Your brand has to have a storytelling platform that is visible to external audiences
* **AMAs are a powerful tool.** We Slack to offer transparent discussion with top leaders:
  + We use Slack to communicate, and we turn the AMA channel on and off for specific times.
  + In a fully remote state, we are doing AMAs for topically on Slack. We open them up and let people know it is coming. The leadership team was on a Zoom together to take questions and check with each other before answering.
  + A Slack bot is used to open and close the channel. The chat is archives and people can go back and look at it. Comms team has permissions set up to go back but the goal is to answer everything in the hour for the AMA.

**Alex Masters-Goessling’s Closing Tips on Communicating “Return to Work”**

* People are looking for certainty and I can’t give you that. A lot of people had very specific questions… clearly state what our guiding principles are. Ours is taking care of our people and health and safety and respecting people’s preferences.
* We reiterate these guiding principles every time. Letting people know: “Here’s when we will know more is hard because it keeps changing.
* Recognitions is the number one thing we heard from people in interviews. People still want more of it. Knowing what motivates people requires one on one. There’s always that one on one personal connection that managers need to be able to address.

**Jennifer Heyman’s Closing Comment “Return to Work”**

* People want to hear from leaders and feel like we have a safe place with which we can ask a question. Knowing there is a safe place makes a huge difference.