

Yammer opens doors to sales opportunities with storytelling

Yammer customer success managers trade in the currency of stories.

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— Nick Matthews, Director of Customer Success for EMEA, Yammer

Ursula Llabres had just 10 minutes to communicate her message to 200 Microsoft sales reps.

In 2012, Microsoft acquired the enterprise social network, Yammer, where Llabres works as a customer success manager. Her objective: help Microsoft Office365 ‘Black Belts’ understand the value and impact of Yammer.

At the event, Llabres shared two customer stories. During a day packed with back-to-back sessions, her presentation stood out from the rest.

“It was the only talk all day where people closed their laptops and listened,” said Steve Hopkins, Director of Customer Success for Yammer’s Australia region and a colleague of Llabres’.

When Llabres finished, hands shot up with questions and Microsoft requested a follow-on impromptu Yammer 101 session for later that day. Reps approached Llabres with more questions and requests to connect on Yammer. The approach Llabres and her Yammer colleagues took to preparing and delivering their messages varied significantly from other speakers that day.

“We had just done training with Anecdote and I used storytelling techniques to show the audience what we do and how we impact customers,” said Llabres, Senior Customer Success Manager.

The ‘currency’ of stories

Yammer is an enterprise social network used by more than 200,000 organisations worldwide — including 85 percent of the Fortune 500. The tool fosters team collaboration, empowers employees, drives business agility and promotes organisational connectedness.

Yammer

Company: Yammer, Inc., a Microsoft company.

Goal: Empower Yammer’s global customer success managers (CSM) to tell and elicit stories that demonstrate the impact of Yammer in organisations.

Solution: Anecdote’s Storytelling for Leaders Program gave global CSMs hands-on practice in storytelling, story listening and story triggering that they could immediately apply in their conversations with customers.

Results:

- Yammer CSMs now share more stories in conversations and presentations
- New story skills enhance the quality of discussions with prospects and customers
- CSMs use story listening to draw out more stories and richer details from customers to gain insight on new opportunities
- Yammer guides customers in compelling ways to share their stories internally to increase corporate adoption
- Storytelling has contributed to sales opportunities.

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Llabres is one of approximately 50 global customer success managers (CSM) who work closely with Yammer customers to help them use the social network more strategically, from early talks before a company deploys Yammer to ongoing use of the social media tool.

While it's not in their job titles, storytelling is intrinsic to what CSMs do. They listen to customers' goals and challenges, elicit stories from successful customers and then share those anecdotes with other customers. Those examples, in turn, educate customers about the successes and best practices of other organisations.

"We trade in the currency of stories," said Steve Somers, Senior Customer Success Manager. "In any given customer meeting, I tell from three to 10 customer stories in an hour. If you put it in that context, it's vitally important for my job."

Anecdote: hands-on, practical story skills

Before engaging in formalised storytelling training, every one of Yammer's CSMs shared customer examples in conversations with customers. But few truly told stories. Nor did they always notice and respond effectively when clients were trying to share stories with them.

"We were missing something by not sharing more of our customer stories in a better way," Hopkins said. "We recognised that we needed a single, consistent, holistic framework to help us get on the same page about how we tell stories."

Yammer looked into storytelling training for the global Customer Success team. Anecdote stood out for its experience – working with companies such as Gartner, KPMG and Shell – and for its practical, hands-on approach.

"A lot of providers focused on 'big' storytelling techniques more in line with marketing or films," Hopkins said. "Anecdote's framework was suitably focused on business storytelling and telling the types of small stories we need to tell."

Anecdote's Storytelling for Leaders program also offered a unique breadth of story skills – all valuable for Yammer CSMs:

- **Storytelling** – recounting something that happened to make a business point
- **Story listening** – getting someone else to tell a story
- **Story triggering** – inspiring others to recount a compelling story.

About 45 CSMs participated in Anecdote's six-month Storytelling for Leaders programs. The program started with one-day workshops held in four locations: London, Melbourne, New York and San Francisco. Anecdote's story specialists guided CSMs through a number of interactive exercises to learn and practice new techniques.

To help integrate those new skills into their work, the team participated in a six-month Deliberate Practice Program and group coaching from Anecdote. The Deliberate Practice Program took place online – using Yammer – and became a very active place to share experiences and help each other find and improve stories.

YAMMER USES YAMMER TO PERFECT STORIES

Yammer CSMs heavily rely on their own private Yammer network to share customer stories and help each other refine them. They post videos of themselves telling stories and colleagues around the world weigh in with comments and suggestions. It's just the type of group collaboration that makes Yammer so popular.

"Using our own tool to help continue the training was incredibly innovative," Matthews said.

"It means we're able to contribute feedback around the world whenever we can, on any device."

The entire team has come to embrace the first draft as an opportunity to help each other get something "that really sings," Hopkins added.



<http://www.anecdote.com/2013/12/yammers-steve-hopkins-storytelling-leaders/>

Storytelling ‘creates connections’

After the one-day workshops, CSMs were immediately telling and gathering more stories in their conversations with customers – and doing so in a consistent manner across regions. Even skeptics had a new appreciation for the practice.

“I thought storytelling was a soft skill that wasn’t really needed,” Somers said. “After the Anecdote workshop, I understood the value of not just coming up with my own prescribed way of telling stories but having a consistent formula for success stories.”

“Anecdote training really changed our view of how we should be eliciting and structuring stories,” said Mike Grafham, Worldwide Head of Yammer Customer Success. “I’m noticing that people are actively thinking about including the right elements in the story to inspire others.”

Now CSMs bring these skills into every customer conversation. With a new bank of stories crafted and perfected in their minds, and shared in their own Yammer network, CSMs pull out the most appropriate ones based on a customer’s needs.

Several CSMs joined Yammer after using the social network at previous employers, and have polished their own ‘connection’ stories of using Yammer.

“I will share a story of how I used Yammer to solve a problem and it puts me in a different light,” Somers said. “Most importantly, it creates connections. It makes me more relatable and more of a trusted advisor.”

CSMs find story listening skills just as essential as they help new Yammer customers find, formulate and tell their success stories internally to show the value of the social network early on – well before any measurable results.

“The training has turned me into a coach for storytelling with customers, who can use these techniques to get buy-in within their organisations,” Somers said.

The payoff: richer conversations, more sales opportunities

Yammer CSMs are now gathering and telling more stories, and noticing that customers respond favourably – whether one-on-one or in major presentations.

When Nick Matthews, Director of Customer Success for EMEA, launched Yammer in Russia, he used new story skills to develop his presentation for an event for prospective customers.

“Anecdote training gave me the confidence and skills to deliver the keynote at a launch in Russia,” Matthews said. “We had fantastic feedback from the audience and it was recognised internally as one of the best events of its kind among worldwide offices.”

“In thought leadership situations, we are far more impactful and persuasive, particularly with senior executives,” Matthews added.

For Llabres, Anecdote training and “practice, practice, practice” eased the anxiety of delivering such a high-profile presentation at Microsoft and exceeded expectations in terms of impact. Post-event conversations with some Black Belts have led to Yammer discussions with multiple Microsoft customers.

“Other presentations were dry and heavy, but the Yammer presentations really stood out because we were telling stories versus merely sharing data,” Llabres said.

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Anecdote is a management consulting firm that uses its expertise in story to inspire enduring organisational change. Its clients include IBM, Shell, KPMG, the Australian Treasury, Fuji Xerox, NAB, Cadbury, Schweppes and Rio Tinto.

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