Allstream

How Allstream Grows Its Social Brand as an IT Industry Leader

According to Gartner, thought leadership marketing is one of the most powerful tools in selling IT services. On social media, you can build thought leadership by continuously publishing quality content. Learn how Allstream is using PostBeyond to implement its social advocacy program, boost lead generation and grow its social brand as an industry leader.

Challenge

So, how do you help Allstream, an industry-leading IP services company that provides voice, data and internet services for business, generate more leads and elevate the experts within the company to be seen as thought leaders in the IT industry?

The solution is simple: provide them with an easy, intuitive way of managing their social brand with the foundational infrastructure and tailored strategy they need to scale it to their size of business.

"There was always a reluctance for people to post branded content online," says Mark Glucki, Senior Social Media and Digital Marketing Manager at Allstream. "Employees weren't sure of what they could and could not say on social."

> " PostBeyond™'s platform has helped generate over $10,000 in earned media value vs. paid social—and that's with less than 75 employees onboard. On average, posts are being shared 10 to 12 times with 100 click-throughs for each post. "

Mark Glucki
Senior Social Media and Digital Marketing Manager at Allstream

Mark is a big believer in the customer experience. He is responsible for supporting Allstream's digital marketing strategy and operations, including managing its social brand. His average day consists of not just posting great content, but figuring out what is the best way customers can engage with the brand.

Company Blog Post ... ? ... **Employee Social Media**
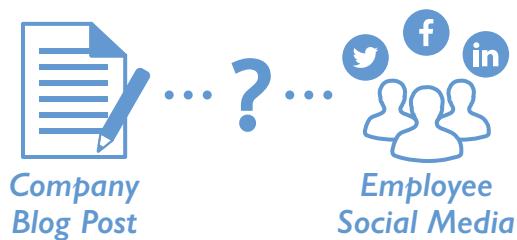
One day, Mark realized that social business was changing the way companies communicate their brands. He saw that social was becoming increasingly integral to the customer experience.

He was keenly aware that Allstream, a long-time industry innovator with a trophy case of firsts in telecommunications over the past century, could not afford to risk its forward-looking brand and be seen as a laggard.

"For some time, we were looking to expand our social networks and build our social share of voice and favourable sentiment in a cost-effective and genuine way," he says. "We wanted to grow our social brand in a meaningful way for our customers and employees."

Mark wanted to help sales, marketing and product teams grow their personal brands and networks, and generate leads. He wanted Allstream employees to be 'top of mind' for prospects seeking advice. This meant more thought leadership content on topics that were not necessarily directly related to their lines of business but still in IT.

> " We were looking to expand our social networks and build our social share of voice and favourable sentiment in a cost-effective and genuine way. "

Mark Glucki
Senior Social Media and Digital Marketing Manager at Allstream

He really wanted to turbocharge the award-winning company blog, too. Allstream needed to be found more easily on the web and rank better for unbranded search. Ultimately, prospects would be guided to downloading case studies and white papers.

Although he was posting five pieces of content per day to the company's social networks and encouraging employees to share it, the process was suboptimal.

Managing all that content and sharing it inside and outside the company was, frankly, a grind. When employees wanted to post the latest cool content to their own personal networks, the approval process was ad-hoc and time consuming, especially for stuff that wasn't Allstream's. And there was no single place to put all that stuff to share it, too.

Mark didn't have the proper infrastructure to support the company's social brand in a scalable, efficient and results-driven way.

For example, he couldn't monitor what and how social content was being shared outside of the company. What content worked? What didn't? Who were the influencers in networks and where were the bottlenecks?

He knew many employees weren't just sharing Allstream's content but also other third-party industry content, which was fine. A cool webinar on DDoS attack prevention here, an insightful SIP Trunking report there—most of it not Allstream's stuff—was being circulated.

But what was the optimal mix of branded vs. unbranded content? How to ensure messaging was consistent? And where was the customer experience in all of this?

"We knew the next step was to engage our employees in growing our social brand," says Mark.
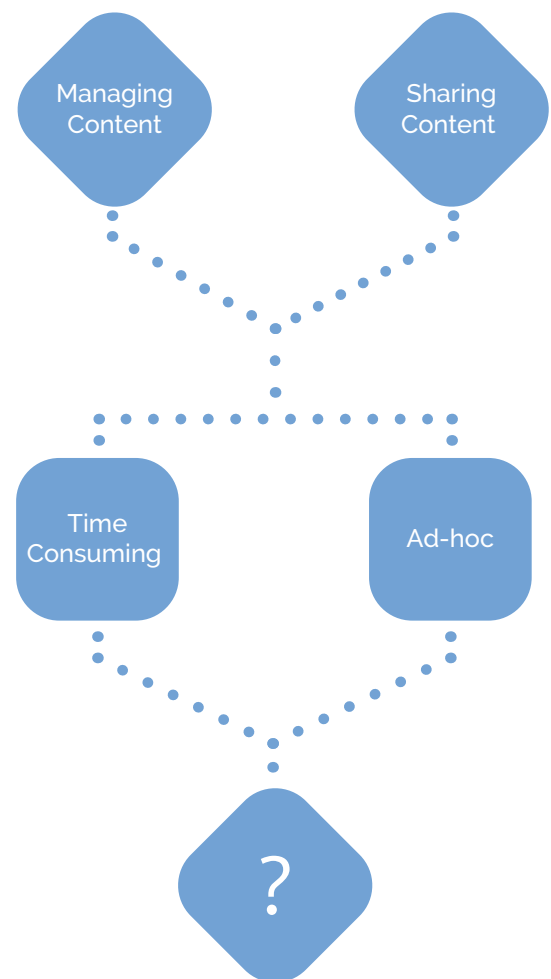
"Essentially, I knew we were in need of a social advocacy program and a platform to implement it so we could manage it effectively."

Solution

In April 2014, Mark launched Allstream's social advocacy program and chose the PostBeyond Enterprise™ platform to implement it after evaluating several solution providers.

PostBeyond provides social business software that enables employees and partners to post approved content to their personal networks in an efficient, consistent and measurable way.

The content portal for the program, called Allstream Social, ties in lots of great content from the company blog and an awesome mix of curated content. Employees love it.

Using the PostBeyond platform, Mark has also created an impressive, searchable content library that contains over 1,300 pieces of content. He first wants employees to be comfortable sharing third-party content with prospects before sharing branded content.

Why did Mark choose PostBeyond? "For other platforms, the functionality was there but not the ease of use," he says, adding that employees like the platform because it's quick to learn. "It's really simple and clean in its functionality."

In the beginning, Mark used PostBeyond's platform as an educational tool to teach employees who were social newbies how to post so they could see the immediate benefits.

"With PostBeyond, it takes 15 minutes for the most novice user to start not just sharing, but comfortably sharing," he says. Some employees didn't know how to actually go about posting. "But, with the platform, it's really 'one-click to sharing' in social, which eliminates that roadblock."

Mark also liked the platform's scalability, which allows him to grow the social advocacy program as he sees fit. Presently, he is growing the platform's usage by strategically building out the foundation using key internal groups.

"Right now, I am building buy-in from product experts, marketing and sales, and showing people what they can do with it, getting them comfortable with using it," he says.

"I generally aim to get them to do three posts per day— only one of those pieces is Allstream content—just to get them accustomed to sharing," he says. "I know I can scale the program for growth when I am ready."

But, above all else, Mark knew that if a social advocacy program was going to work, he needed less a vendor and more a partner. "I liked that PostBeyond was willing to prove that they were there for us," he says. "They helped us build a comprehensive strategy to make sure everyone was comfortable in the early stages."

“
With PostBeyond™, it's really 'one-click to sharing' in social, which eliminates that roadblock. ”

Mark Glucki
Senior Social Media and Digital Marketing Manager at Allstream

After the first couple of meetings with the PostBeyond team, he was sold because not only would PostBeyond help him configure the platform to his needs and help him grow it, but PostBeyond would help him sell it to the rest of the company, he says.

Results

Allstream's company blog, called expertIP, has been a huge hit, and feeds much of the social advocacy program's content portal. As a result, PostBeyond has helped boost traffic to the company blog, especially return traffic, and increased lead generation.

The award-winning blog covers IT industry news, events and issues, and is less a corporate blog and more a 'community lounge' for IT administrators, brimming with fresh, engaging content that, for the most part, is not about Allstream.

Mark says PostBeyond has helped him increase the company's thought leadership role in the IT services industry. "It's been paying off as we have seen much more traffic to the blog," he says.

So far, PostBeyond's platform has helped generate over $10,000 in earned media value vs. paid social—and that's with less than 75 employees onboard. On average, posts are being shared 10 to 12 times with 100 click-throughs for each post.

"We are slowly seeing a steady rise in unbranded search as well as branded key words," says Mark, who will soon invite up to 50 more employees to use the platform.

PostBeyond™

The blog has become a North American best practice for content marketing, continuing to win several medals at the annual Content Marketing Awards from the Content Marketing Institute.

Competing against over 1,000 entries from seven countries, Allstream won in 2014 a silver medal for 'Most Improved Editorial' for the expertIP blog, a silver medal for 'Best Use of Twitter for Content Marketing' for @allstream, and received honourable mention for 'Best Multi-Author Blog.'

"We've seen positive results both internally and externally, especially in boosting social brand awareness," says Mark. He says the PostBeyond platform provides the next level of social metrics for measuring how content is shared outside of the company. Now he can prove the brand has legs in social.

"It has also helped our sales people build their own personal brands," says Mark. In fact, he discovered that 87% of new users created valuable new connections within the first three weeks. Sales reps now suggest branded content development ideas to him in different categories.

"Our sales people are experts in what they do, and PostBeyond helps them better establish themselves as thought leaders," he says.

With the proper infrastructure now in place to support the social brand, including a searchable content library, employees see the immediate benefits. Need to find and post the right piece of killer content tailored to your target market's needs? Done.

"Our sales people are experts in what they do, and PostBeyond™ helps them better establish themselves as thought leaders."

Mark Glucki
Senior Social Media and Digital Marketing Manager at Allstream

One of the platform features users love the most—and Mark, too—is using gamification to engage more employees in the social advocacy program as he prepares to scale up.
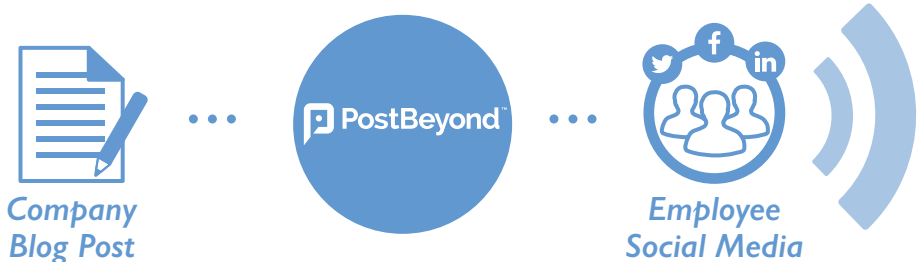
Last Christmas, he created 'The 12 Gifts of Allstream Social' contest using the platform—12 days of employees competing in content sharing for draw prizes such as free company swag and Achievers points. Everybody tried to out do each other's posts.

Mark noticed that engagement rates increase by up to 50% when he uses gamification. He says employees enjoy the contests more for the fun of it and bragging rights than anything else. "I send out a leaders board update every week, but they can also check their position against their peers whenever they want on the board themselves."

Allstream has been chosen as the official supplier of managed IP communications and hosted collaboration solutions to a major sporting event this summer, and Mark is planning on pushing gamification content to new heights using PostBeyond.

He knows that if you're attending a live sporting event, you will likely engage in real time with the event through social networks on your mobile device—that includes Allstream employees working hard behind the scenes, too.

87% of new users created valuable new connections within the first three weeks[1]

Company Blog Post

Employee Social Media

Event organizers are looking at creating 'fan chat' and 'telepresence experiences' to allow spectators to engage with athletes and make the overall experience more interactive.

Mark loves a challenge and is training hard to create the best customer experience for socially engaging the event. He has a few gamification ideas in the works to 'wow' Allstream's employees and the crowds.

With PostBeyond, he can now better manage social engagement of the Allstream brand and scale for growth. "And for this event, we definitely want to spotlight our social brand and be seen as a thought leader across all channels," he says.
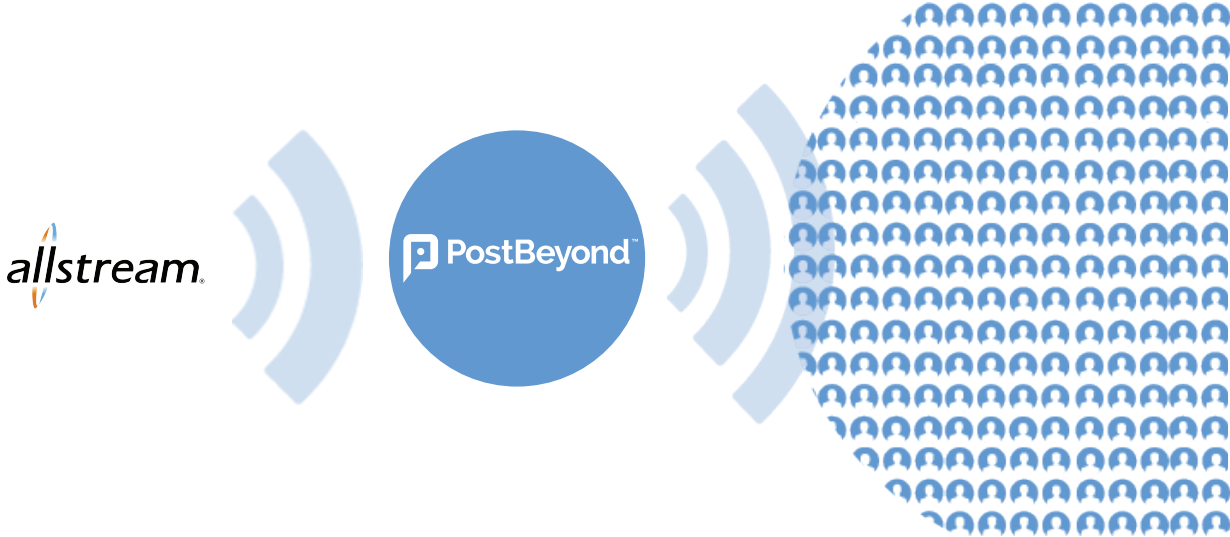
1 Interview with Mark Glucki, Senior Social Media and Digital Marketing Manager, Allstream.

Page 9 of 9