

Case study

An introduction to the company

Some background information. The Barilla Group history is rooted in the last thirty years of the 1800's, when the Barilla family launched a small family-run bread and pasta shop. The Barilla family has managed the company for over 130 years and this entrepreneurial experience is still being run by the fourth generation of siblings, which affects current organizational decisions and behaviours. The dualism between ownership and management represents a point of strength for the company. As mentioned by the Barilla CCO, the company is characterized by "continuous crossbreeding between the managerial abilities of the top management and the strong entrepreneurial sensitivity of the Barilla family" (Barilla CCO). Especially within the decision-making process, mutual listening between managers and entrepreneurs occurs in affecting strategic decisions concerning products, initiatives and communication. In 2020 the company has decided to enhance listening competences by activating a listening process towards external environment. For this reason, the organization has carried out an international survey in order to investigate adult and young stakeholders' perceptions and opinions towards the brand. According to the data collected in US, it emerged that the company is perceived as a profit-oriented and conservative organization especially by young consumers. Young consumers negatively evaluated how Barilla manage the real dialogue within social media and how the organization seems totally detached and not really interested in understanding young stakeholders' needs and expectations. Additionally, respondents declared that they expected more engaging activities and initiatives especially on channels they use, that are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Based on these results, Barilla CEO asked to the CCO to launch a new digital communication campaign "Good for you, Good for the planet, #BarillaforUS", oriented to better understand the position of young stakeholders in US and to change their attitude towards the company.

Communication aims.

For the new season, Barilla US intends to improve its corporate reputation, by being perceived more as a sustainable company and by stimulating the interest and the participation of its young stakeholders in sharing needs, expectations, dreams, projects to improve the quality of their life. CCO has been in charge to define a social media communication campaign oriented to achieve the following digital communication objectives:

- To improve Barilla US's online reputation and to stimulate its online young stakeholders to associate it to a sustainable company
- To increase digital engagement of Barilla American young stakeholders on Instagram in sharing and actively participating to an online dialogue with the company.
- To increase digital engagement of Barilla American young stakeholders on Twitter

Strategy and tactics.

In order to achieve the digital aims, Barilla has decided to implement a digital communication strategy based on four main pillars:

- the conversion of the website in a corporate blog, for sharing information about the company
- the use of imagery and visual communication only on Instagram, in order to align the visual identity of the company.
- the implementation of a hashtag campaign #BarillaforUS on Twitter
- the collection and management of Big Data information related to young stakeholders

From the website to the corporate blog

At the beginning of 2021, Barilla has decided to convert the current website in a corporate blog. More specifically, the CCO decided not to change the type of content shared online, but the editing style of presenting each news and section. For instance, he wanted to present each news and each content already published on the official website, by using a catchy title and by making visible the name of the author. In order to better explain his view to the social media team, the CCO shared the following two examples.



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Steve Buttry, Dearly Departed Husband, Father and Grandfather.
 Former Director of Student Media, LSU's Manship School of Mass Communication

Memorial Update
 April 4, 2017 by Steve Buttry

We're really looking forward to having you all in Minnesota this weekend for Steve's memorial service. Below are details for the weekend. Please e-mail Mike at mwesleybuttry@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Friday

There has been a CHANGE in Friday evening's plans. We ended up having too many people for bowling at Pinstripes (a good problem to have), so anyone who wants to get together on Friday evening can connect at Fuddruckers in Bloomington, MN. We have part of a back room/patio from 5-8 pm.

January 2021						
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According to Barilla US's CCO, the corporate blog "represents a unique opportunity to provide intimacy and immediacy and guarantee a high social presence. Additionally, the blog allows us to share with our digital users' huge amounts of information in a short time without necessarily participating to conversations. For these reasons, the blog represents the main tool of our reputation campaign."

The use of visual imagery on Instagram

Moreover, differently from the past, Barilla US has decided to invest on Instagram, by adding to the editorial plan a certain number of images strategically created by the communication department. The following four images have been shared by the CCO with the Barilla social media team as guide for the development of a visual identity style in order to stimulate digital engagement on the selected social media channel.



Results.

The digital communication campaign has not achieved the expected results. In order to evaluate the corporate reputation, Barilla CCO's asked to qualitatively analyze the positive comments published only by digital users in order to understand topics and categorize eventual needs. Unfortunately, the response rate was very low and social media team was not able to categorize or cluster the collected comments. Then, Barilla CCO's asked to organize focus groups with specific young stakeholders in order to test the image profile of the company and evaluate how the adjective sustainable is associated to Barilla US. As a result, Barilla is continuing to be perceived as a conservative company oriented to sell a product.

To evaluate the level of engagement on Instagram, Barilla CCO's asked to analyze the engagement rate on Instagram that was about 0.012% (with 42500 followers). For what concerns the level of digital engagement on Twitter, the use of hashtag #BarillaforUS has registered controversial results. Young American stakeholders started to use the hashtag campaign improperly. The hashtag has exploited as an opportunity for criticizing the company and move the focus on discussion on other topics. According to a thematic analysis of stakeholders' tweet using hashtag, 30% of tweets criticized the organizational behaviors related to the social policies implemented towards young employees; 35% of tweets were characterized by a general sarcasm towards the company; 35% insinuating that the hashtag campaign was only a form of greenwashing.

Finally, the Barilla CCOs asked to prepare a report about needs, expectations and possible areas where Barilla US can operate in order to facilitate stakeholders, according to the social media intelligence activity. Also in this case, social media team was able only to put on evidence negative comments addressed to Barilla's

products emerged by social media channels. In order to discuss the digital communication strategy, top management has decided to organize an internal meeting with the communication direction (where you are involved) in order to evaluate pros and cons of what done so far. Please answer to the following questions.

Question 1. You are the communication manager. Your top management is not satisfied with results obtained by campaign. Your first task is to identify potential mistakes made by the organization since the beginning. Please identify what are the main mistakes made by the organizations that have led to the negative results.

Question 2. Some preliminary analysis has been conducted. How do you evaluate the listening activities implemented by the organizations? What are the main strength points and the main weaknesses that could affect communication initiatives by the company?

Question 3. For what concerns the use of visual and images within Instagram: what suggestions would you provide for improving the company's account?