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SOCIAL SET Bob Carrigan (from l.), CEO of IDG Communications worldwide; Mary Ann Fitzmaurice Reilly, senior VP-partnerships and new-business development at American Express Co.; Petra Neiger, program manager at Cisco Systems; and 'BtoB' Publisher Bob Felsenthal at the inaugural Social Media Awards ceremony last month in New York.

Cisco, American Express take top social awards

'BtoB' recognizes social media innovators at inaugural event

BY CHRISTOPHER HOSFORD

Cisco Systems and American Express Co. were the headliners last month at BtoB's inaugural Social Media Marketing Awards ceremony, winning People's Choice Awards balloting as the top b-to-b social media marketing programs of the year.

Cisco, the People's Choice honoree in the tech companies category, was recognized for its myPlanNet campaign, a downloadable simulation game in which participants played the roll of a CEO solving business challenges using Cisco products. The project featured a Facebook page that drew more than 55,000 fans and enjoyed international participation.

Cisco introduced its myPlanNet campaign using traditional channels, in particular live events, but thereafter the program took on a life of its own through Facebook, Twitter posts and viral exposure via other gaming sites, said Petra Neiger, program manager.

"The game site was reposted by third parties on their own sites, and we even began seeing posts about the game translated on overseas Facebook pages, sometimes in languages we weren't even aware of," she said. "And the competition between certain countries was fierce."

Neiger said the major challenge of the campaign, and of social media marketing in general, is staying focused.

"It's easy to get into social media, but you must keep the momentum going," she said. "Be patient. Social media takes time,

but it will pay off for you."

American Express took home the People's Choice Award in the nontech companies category for its OPEN Forum portal for small businesses. The site serves as a source of small-business information, networking and engagement.

"Our immediate metrics were to drive traffic to the site, increase the frequency of visits and the length of individual stays, to boost retweets and create buzz," said Mary Ann Fitzmaurice Reilly, senior VP-partnerships and new-business development at American Express Co. "But our ultimate goal was to help small businesses grow, so we're really looking at long-term results."

AmEx engaged 150 bloggers to write regularly about the campaign on both the OPEN portal and their own sites; created a "Connectodex" feature for members to establish an online promotional description of their companies; and aggregated 1,000 of the most active business tweeters as an additional resource for its registrants, among numerous other features.

The other People's Choice finalists in the nontech category were CME Group, for its Twitter campaign, and Emerson Process Management, for its blogs. Other tech finalists were Kinaxis and Microsoft Corp., for their integrated social marketing campaigns, and Hewlett-Packard Co., for its viral video program.

ENTERTAINMENT VALUE STRESSED

In a panel discussion during the event, the value of entertainment as a social media marketing asset was stressed. Supply chain software company Kinaxis, for example, devised as part of its social outreach

a video spoof called the "Late Late Supply Chain Show," featuring comedy turns by Kinaxis staffers.

"Laughter is an important part of our site," said Kirsten Watson, the company's director-corporate marketing. "It creates a personality for the company and shows a little bit of our culture. And, of course, in the supply chain business, laughter is really the best medicine when things go wrong."

Watson also noted the practical usefulness of dovetailing social marketing with search.

"I can't stress enough the importance of search engine optimization integrated with social media marketing," Watson said. She added that a consistent effort to optimize social content with pertinent keywords produced a 270% increase in Kinaxis' website traffic last year compared with 2008, a 320% increase in leads, and a 530% increase in traffic to the company's blog site.

Jim Cahill, chief blogger at Emerson Process Management, agreed that social media has become a central component of search marketing.

"Our blogs have increased the 'findability' of Emerson," Cahill said. "Our No. 1 metric is how easily people can now reach me."

Emerson took individual honors for its blogging campaign, which it devised to highlight the process-control company's array of staff expertise.

"Yes, the quality of the product is important; but people buy from other people who are reliable and trustworthy," Cahill said. "Our blogs were designed to showcase our experts and to build that leadership." □



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