

How a Fast-Growing Nonprofit Rebuilt Its PR Team Using Agency Principles

By Marisa Long

Whether you are managing and growing a team in-house, looking to build better relationships with colleagues and senior executives or establishing the best way to work with consultants or clients, creating a PR team structure that produces results and meets demands is critical to success. PR pros must create a thoughtful plan, identify individual strengths, recognize weak spots and address change and challenges head on—all while creating compelling campaigns that produce results.

Growing to Meet Demands

At the **U.S. Green Building Council** (USGBC) we've had to navigate significant growth and find the right way to make sure PR was meeting demands. USGBC is a non-profit dedicated to creating a healthier, more sustainably built environment. Our primary vehicle for this market transformation is LEED, the world's most widely used green building rating system.

Since LEED launched in 2000, it has grown to certify more than 5 billion square feet of space in more than 160 countries. Today, approximately 1.85 million square feet of space certifies every day. There are nearly 200,000 LEED-credentialed professionals and thousands of volunteers globally and more than 12,000 national member organizations, ranging from Fortune 500 companies to small businesses.

When I arrived in 2010, USGBC had about half the 30-plus staffers that today make up the marketing department. USGBC had somewhat plateaued in attracting new audiences and was seeking to expand its reach. I was tasked with overseeing the launch of the Center for Green Schools, which reached beyond the B2B community and introduced us to consumer audiences.

Over the past few years, our efforts also started expanding to new products and programs through USGBC's sister organization, **Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI)**.

With so many B2B brands and B2C causes, disseminating information that resonates with the right audiences can be a challenge. The marketing department is responsible for growing USGBC's marketplace presence and making sure the message is clear and bipartisan for a variety of stakeholders that expect information, transparency and support. And we are mission-based; ultimately we are focused on advocating for a more sustainable future and providing solutions to create a sustainable environment for generations to come.

Creating a Plan

With such rapid growth we filled gaps to meet demands. In the past few years, though, we've become more strategic in hiring staff that bring specific skill sets and in making sure existing staff are correctly deployed. When I worked on the launch of the Center for Green Schools my role extended from web

and collateral development to media outreach, social media, overall messaging, event support and more. As a jack of all trades, I had to get scrappy and step outside my comfort zone to make sure goals were met. I certainly stepped on toes without a full understanding of who was responsible for what within our team.

As we continued to grow, USGBC's head of marketing, COO, myself and other leaders in the department started to implement changes, moving away from program silos to focus on subject-matter expertise. I was tasked with growing our PR and communications team, an exciting opportunity for a former PR agency executive who was somewhat new to the nonprofit world. I had supported the NY-based agency I worked at during a time of rapid growth. I knew some of the lessons I learned there would apply to USGBC.

I started thinking about how I could implement some of the practicalities of a high-performing agency structure for an in-house team that supported internal departments, member companies and industry professionals as our "clients." In-house departments serve a similar function to an agency, but the priorities are different. At an agency, while you focus on client happiness and proving your value, your value also rests on revenue and the bottom line—you can make decisions and prioritize your level of support and staff hired for clients based on monetary value and a fee structure. In-house, you certainly try to focus on the same areas, but prioritizing clients can be more challenging when your work isn't subject to a monthly retainer or hourly rate. This is when setting goals and prioritizing are most important.

Creating a plan on paper doesn't make it successful. Similarly, writing a job description doesn't make it your job—you have to work and let the results talk. It doesn't hurt, though, to create a plan that will hold you and your

team accountable and create transparency around success.

When we began restructuring our PR team, I took a few weeks to create a 90-day plan that incorporated goals from our SVP of marketing and COO. I also met with my team and others in the organization who worked with our department to solicit feedback. These goals were clear and achievable for the time period. They included individual and team goals, such as increasing media coverage for the next quarter, streamlining our consultants' work, identifying clear roles for each team member and establishing new internal programs. In addition, I included my vision on the long-term role I wanted our team to play within the organization.

Establishing Adaptable Structure

For goals concerning how we wanted to expand the team, I took several steps to help inform the decisions we made toward growth:

1. Identify strengths and weaknesses: We looked at what was working from an individual, team-wide and organizational standpoint and played to strengths that allowed each team member to claim a sense of ownership over their work. For example, we focused some staff on media engagement, while others worked primarily on creating written materials.

We also evaluated where there were holes, such as being more proactive with media pitching and tracking and better leveraging our stakeholders. We created positions to fill these roles or identified how we could use our consultants more effectively.

2. Client feedback: As an in-house PR department, our clients include other departments and external stakeholders, so we talked to our business development, program and technical teams to see what support they thought was most crucial. This also helped identify what stories we wanted to tell

through our PR campaigns. We talked to our member companies and local community leaders to assess their needs from us. For example, we decided to assign a POC within our team and increase the PR benefits we provide to member companies. We recognized the impact these stakeholders could have in the success of our PR strategy.

3. Anticipate and tackle turnover: Once we made a plan to grow our team and set ambitious goals and objectives, we realized this would shake things up a bit and that there was a chance not everyone would be on board. As with all change, it is important to be adaptable and create a culture that allows people to grow and feel secure. At USGBC, we use a feedback structure loop that identifies what’s working and what’s not on an ongoing basis. Accordingly we moved some staff into new roles that were a better fit for their skill sets.

Getting Organized

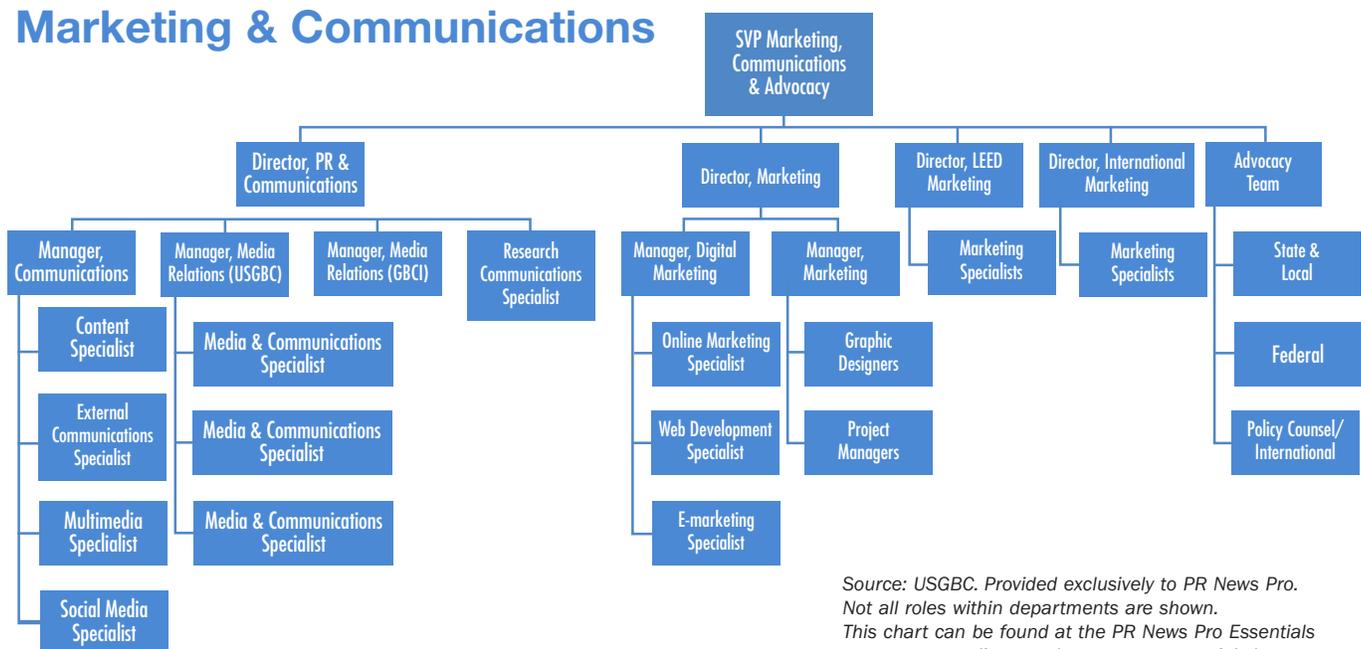
As our basic org chart (below) shows,

marketing now is organized to support our growing needs. The PR & communications team’s responsibilities support the rest of the department, other departments and external stakeholders while pushing forward our PR goals.

Daily responsibilities: The communications team is primarily responsible for creating messaging for USGBC and its programs. This includes maintaining editorial calendars for content distribution. Other responsibilities include: direct stakeholder engagement and external relations; content creation for USGBC’s online channels; social media and multimedia management; management of USGBC+, the member magazine; management of an internal and external speakers bureau; management of research and public data; oversight of media relations at the local, national and global levels; and management of consultants and vendors.

Integrated marketing communications: We are closely integrated with marketing

USGBC Organization Chart, Marketing & Communications



Source: USGBC. Provided exclusively to PR News Pro. Not all roles within departments are shown. This chart can be found at the PR News Pro Essentials page: prnewsonline.com/pr-news-pro-essentials/

team members and support content creation for USGBC online channels. We create multi-faceted PR campaigns that include visuals and marketing materials, e-marketing engagement, advertising and more.

Public affairs: The communications and advocacy teams work closely to manage public affairs campaigns that help push our policy agendas. Much of our media work, particularly in the U.S., is based on where we see value from an advocacy and policy perspective.

Local, national and international engagement: Some of our best media coverage comes at the local level. Our media team is responsible for knowing the markets we are pitching so we can support local and national media as well as industry and consumer press. For international, we engage in-country/region-specific PR support for targeted campaigns that we manage. We also work with consultants for larger PR campaigns.

Campaigns: Our larger PR campaigns are heavily focused on stakeholder engagement, not just media relations and traditional PR. We know the best way for us to tell our story is to have our stakeholders share theirs. Each communications team member has a role in outreach, which fosters a culture of collaboration. We evaluate what worked and didn't on each campaign so we can make tweaks and improve efficiency. We also use a shared re-

source like **Google Docs** or **Dropbox** to make sure our campaign information and plans are in one place, and we create spreadsheets and work plans that assign responsibilities and move everything forward.

Reporting Results

When growing a PR team (or making the case for new staff or resources), metrics play an important role to showcase the importance of PR. As part of our restructure, we started to compile campaign-specific and quarterly reports that delve into results. Each component of our team is responsible for reporting out and evaluating their performance.

We also track media and social media coverage and sentiments daily. While the process can be tedious, this data showcases our team's contributions in a digestible way for senior leadership. Also, providing staff with the opportunity to reflect on their work over a period of time validates individual contributions and successes as part of a team. If you have the budget, investing in external platforms/vendors that help track metrics, distribution and results will provide beneficial support and help rate subsequent campaigns. ■

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