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Best Corporate Communication:
Best B2B Campaign

Xylem is driving the water sector's digital transformation. The company asked Edelman to help them build share of voice to match its business leadership.

Campaign
Raising Xylem's profile and voice, to match its business leadership

Description of Campaign
Xylem provides water management solutions to utilities and other water operators, globally. Xylem's brand prominence across global channels was underperforming its leadership position. The company asked Edelman to help them regain a greater share of voice and build investor confidence: the resultant four-level campaign achieved dramatic results.

Public Relations Consultant
Edelman

Client
Xylem

Background to the Campaign

Headquartered in New York and with $4.8 billion in revenue, Xylem is a world-leading global water technology provider, solving the world's toughest water and water infrastructure challenges. The Company designs, manufactures and services engineered and digital solutions across a range of critical applications in the water cycle, serving public utilities, residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial clients.

Xylem is driving the water sector's digital transformation, but its innovative solutions were, until recently, not being matched by its share of voice, prominence or brand strength. Whilst Xylem's sensors and meters were helping companies and communities drive a step-change in water management, it needed to get its own message across with similar, positive impact. Consequently, Edelman was retained to work with Xylem's corporate communications team, developing the Xylem brand through integrated efforts in building global brand awareness; boosting stakeholder engagement (through digital and media profiling); promoting thought leadership and content; and through executive positioning and issues management.

In shaping the 2020 communications programme, we needed to tackle certain challenges:

1. Following a series of recent acquisitions, we needed to help the corporate communications team deliver 'one Xylem' communications. The brief was heavily focused on unlocking new opportunities for integration, across a family of brands.
2. Xylem has a broad portfolio of water solutions, applicable across both traditional heritage and innovative digital applications. With the water sector at different stages of transition to a digital future, we had to meet and engage audiences at different stages of the journey. Accessible and relevant communications were needed, to build confidence in digital technologies and provide tangible evidence of their positive impact (ultimately accelerating adoption).
3. Xylem has a track record of helping communities deal with critical water challenges, enabling affordability, accessibility and resilience. As a result, the Company has a strong sustainability story to tell investors (in particular ESG investors) and the wider world. In a crowded space, our challenge was to develop a programme that would differentiate Xylem and powerfully showcase its ESG credentials.

Statement of Objectives

Within Edelman, we knew that our primary and clear communications aim was to correct the imbalance between Xylem's actual and apparent prominence. Despite its leadership position, Xylem had ceded ground to competitors and new entrants in the fight for share of voice. This was having an impact on perceptions across core audiences, particularly customers and investors.

Our core objectives for 2020 were to:

1. Create a ROI-driven communications structure that would fuel informed decision making and bring clear focus to all our communications activities (measured by a clear and robust framework)
2. Bring together all the constituent parts of the Xylem portfolio to create one coherent narrative that spoke with purpose and clarity to top tier global media. We would then measure success in terms of media coverage across top tier media titles.
3. Use the power of our communications to drive tangible business outcomes. We would grow and maintain market share of the US and Europe utilities market by positioning Xylem as a leader in innovation and digital transformation (measured by share of voice versus competitors and market share). At the same time, we would build investor confidence (especially ESG investor appreciation) of Xylem's sustainability credentials – measured via share of voice vs competitors and share price growth.

Each of the above goals was tracked using a comprehensive range of metrics and benchmarked against past/industry performance.

Programme Planning and Strategy

Tackling the objectives we had set and agreed required clarity of purpose. We needed to develop a framework driven by deep insight which allowed the brilliance of what Xylem does to be seen and appreciated.

To achieve this, we turned to the B2B research we conduct annually, in partnership with LinkedIn. This showed us the key elements which separate impactful communications and thought leadership from the rest. This research helped us construct four pillars for our messaging, which should be:

1. highly **relevant** to real customer needs
2. **visionary** for the industry
3. clearly **trusted** as a source of information
4. able to **fill the 'white space'** in industry conversations

The results are noted below.

Pillar one: Relevant
Here we directed thought leadership towards the area of greatest and most immediate customer need.

As the pandemic unfolded, maintaining critical water and wastewater operations had never been more important. However, COVID-19 unleashed a perfect storm for utilities, with fewer staff to deal with a growing workload. Digital solutions could play a vital role in ensuring continuity of water and wastewater services.

Recognising the urgent need for practical advice – and the impetus the pandemic gave to the sector's digital transformation – Edelman worked with Xylem to develop a narrative that captured the heightened potential for digital solutions. The narrative laid out specific strategies to address customers' challenges, such as maintaining 24/7 network visibility during remote working. Messaging was informed by perspectives from utility leaders and Xylem subject-matter experts, as well as competitor benchmarking. Case studies and customer testimonials lent further credibility.

This narrative formed the basis of a 360-degree thought leadership programme, rolled out across owned and earned channels. Activations included a White Paper, webinar series, editorial plan, podcasts and social programme. Ongoing objective conversation and competitor analysis helped us translate information and insights into topical content, ensuring the narrative remained relevant throughout a rapidly evolving pandemic.

A combination of proactive and opportunistic outreach resulted in multiple earned placements in global business, tech and IoT outlets, including **CNBC**, **Wall Street Journal**, **Forbes**, **Raconteur**, **Smart Cities Dive**, **IoT Now and Digital Journal**. Earned media reach exceeded 214M and the team successfully **increased Xylem's share of voice on these topics by 19% year-on-year**.

Edelman had helped Xylem shift the marketplace conversation from digital as an option, to digital as an imperative.

Pillar two: Visionary
All decision-makers want to know where their industry is going, so best-in-class thought leadership sets out a vision.

However, that vision has to work for all players, not just the most advanced. Our messaging had to excitepartners already implementing 'smart water' programmes, whilst inspiring utilities still in the early stages of digital adoption.

We devised an integrated storytelling programme spotlighting utilities at varying stages of maturity in their smart water journeys. The program balanced aspirational stories about the future of water with tangible proof points about the impact digital technologies are making for water operators today.

Edelman worked with Xylem to build a new content architecture; establish processes to support sharp story selection; and deepen integration across the company. Xylem's content hub, Making Waves, was transformed into a one-stop-shop, showcasing stories of digital transformation. The same content was then amplified through paid social and supporting creative work. Emotive storytelling was complemented by technical thought leadership in the form of webinars, White Papers and earned media. This added up to a compelling and widely accessible call to action for our audiences.

We judged success in terms of the time people spent in the hub and how many stories they explored. We also distributed the same content beyond the hub, across multiple platforms, assessing video views and click through rates on social. The results beat our best expectations, with users spending on average 4 minutes on our site, visiting nearly 4 separate pages. Our content led to more than two million video views across social media, and the best CTR we'd ever seen.

Pillar three: Trusted
The Edelman Trust Management framework identifies four drivers: dependability, ability, integrity and purpose. While Xylem's dependability & ability were understood and acknowledged, we recognised a huge untapped opportunity to leverage integrity and purpose.

We did this by telling the stories of the people behind the brand – the innovators at Xylem whose work every day is improving lives for people around the world and shaping the future of water.

Edelman devised 'One Minute In Water', a series of brief thought pieces which would communicate Xylem's character, competence and opinions. This would differentiate and humanise the company, as passionate leaders explored and explained the company's mission and innovations, as well as their personal investment in 'solving water'. One Minute In Water also aimed to drive a 'one Xylem' message across the company, whilst serving as a rich content source for business units.

We drew up a shortlist of innovators from within Xylem and across the industry, aiming to create a tapestry of stories about the culture of innovation that permeates Xylem and the water industry. By building the campaign's creative platform around videos shot at home (using the innovators' smartphones), we developed a user-generated format that allowed storytellers from all over the world to participate. This added to authenticity whilst enabling the series to continue when faced by Covid challenges.

Videos were shared organically across Xylem's social channels and through paid distribution. Directed to a campaign hub, those targeted were able to supplement each video with blog content and supporting resources, enabling each to explore further.

The campaign exceeded all KPIs and delivered best-ever Cost Per Metrics on social media for a Xylem corporate brand campaign. The headline results record 2.7 million impressions and 730,000 video views across LinkedIn and Twitter. The campaign has driven more than 1,600 website visits within Xylem's web hub, with low bounce rates and a high number of average pages viewed per session.

Pillar four: Capitalise on white space

Xylem had taken action to embed sustainability in its business strategy, making it a core differentiator. The company holds itself accountable for developing solutions that drive meaningful water, energy and cost efficiencies which help its customers and their communities progress sustainably. Although Xylem had received much recognition through industry awards and broader league tables, this was not widely known or recognised. We needed to ensure that Xylem's progress against key sustainability metrics was more widely understood by its stakeholders.

As media conversations on post-pandemic recovery brought ESG factors into sharp focus, we identified an opportunity to capitalise on this interest, placing Xylem in new and influential forums close to ESG investors and customers. We shaped a profiling program for Xylem's Chief Sustainability Officer and crafted a narrative that would resonate beyond the water sector. This was based on insights from the company's sustainability progress and practical take-outs, leaning in to trending topics like green finance. Business milestones and key moments in the Xylem calendar gave us additional opportunities to amplify this message, including the Company's annual sustainability report launch and inaugural $1 billion green bond offering.

Our targeted focus and clear content paid off: Xylem's sustainability leadership story cut through, both within and – vitally – beyond the water sector. The program delivered multiple tier one hits in international business and ESG destinations, including:

- Feature interviews with Chief Sustainability Officer in the Financial Times, Medium.com, Law.com; Digital Journal; Global Water Intelligence; WaterWorld
- Prominent brand mentions in sustainability leadership features: Forbes; Fortune; Bloomberg Green; Daily Mail
- Keynote & panel placements at:
  > Reuters Responsible Business Summit USA
  > World Economic Forum's Sustainable Development Impact Summit
  > Environmental Finance sustainability-linked finance summit
- Multiple prestigious recognitions in 2020, including:
  > Barron's Most Sustainable Companies
  > Forbes & Just Capital: America's Most Just Companies
  > Newsweek: America's Most Responsible Companies
  > Human Rights Campaign Equality Index: 100%

Total reach for the campaign exceeded 47M.

Measurement

As noted, each of the four pillars of our campaign delivered impressive results:

Relevant: Earned media reach exceeded 214M. Xylem's share of voice up 19% year-on-year.

Visionary: Results vastly exceeded expectations. Users stayed 4 minutes and visited 4 separate pages, with 2m+video views across social/best-ever CTR.

Trusted: All KPIs exceeded. Best-ever Cost Per Metrics on social media. 2.7 million impressions and 730,000 video views on social media. 1,600 internal views.

Filling white space: campaign reach in excess of 47M.

This delivered our wider Communications Goals:

Goal: Grow share of voice amongst competitors to 17% (up 4 pts from previous year).
Result: Significantly grew share of voice among water sector peers, exceeding target by 53% reaching 26% SoV in 2020.

Goal: Achieve set number of placements in key categories of media: water trades, technology and ESG, and mainstream news and business.
Result: Outperformance in media placements – securing 375 pieces in key media outlets (vs target of 228), exceeding overall target by 35%.

Goal: Grow Xylem's share of voice amongst competitors on key topics: sustainability, innovation and digital transformation.
Result: Outperformance across all three topics, exceeding our KPI by 6%.

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