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TRANSCRIPT

# Sarah Rapp on Ambassador Programs

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

alumni, people, alumni network, community, countries, program, big, ambassador program, platform, voluntary, create, events, person, donate, sarah, locations, focusing, jay, challenges, world

**SPEAKERS**

Anne Mbugua, Sarah Rapp

**Anne Mbugua** 00:00

All right. Okay, so hi Sarah and Hi Kat, we are going to start with Sara, if you could introduce yourself, what you do, what kind of community you work for, and how many years you've been in community.

00:21

Awesome. Hi, everyone. I'm Sara rap. And I'm currently based in Vienna, Austria. And I just got your title today that we're doing it today. I'm the Director of Alumni and people engagement at Jay worldwide. And Jay, what is a global NGO with in more than 115 countries around the world, and we mainly offer entrepreneurship programs, programs, and financial literacy and work readiness. And I actually participated myself in the program back in school. So I've been with the community for 13 years in various positions, especially in the beginning and voluntary position. So everyone who participates in the program, they're called alumni. Oppositely. So I was volunteering was heading up the European alumni network. And since now, four and a half years, it's my full time job leading the global alumni networks around the world. So quick background.

**Anne Mbugua** 01:17

That's good. Welcome, Sarah. So I would also want to welcome Kat if she could just briefly tell us who she is and how she is related to all of us here.

01:27

Yeah, sure. Um, although I'm just wondering, I just said to Shannon, that I will just come on the call just to introduce everyone. But I don't know if I'm actually meant to be involved in the interview or not. I think we were meant to just be focusing on Sara right. And ja, I mean, I can give myself an intro and an intro to hi fright, but I have the impression that it was Yeah.

**Anne Mbugua** 01:46

It will all be about Tara. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Okay. Okay. Would

01:50

you still like me to do a million draw?

**Anne Mbugua** 01:52

Yeah, just just just introduce yourself? And then that would be it?

01:55

Yeah, of course. So I'm Pat. I'm the Content Manager at hive Bri hive, right is an all in one, community management and engagement platform that Sarah's using, so that's where the connection comes from.

**Anne Mbugua** 02:10

Right. Thank you. So, Sara. So let's get back to you, Sarah, and in chat a little bit about J. A, and about the community ambassador program that you have successfully created. So if you can give us a you know, like a brief history about, you know, how you started? And a little bit more about it, maybe the best way to start would be what is the community ambassador program?

02:36

Yes, totally. So actually a we are very big, right? We have a very large community to the underworld. So we have different Ambassador programs. But I think the one which is the biggest, and probably the most successful is kind of the alumni leadership groups within the countries, right. So as I mentioned, J is in more than 115 countries. So not only countries, we actually call it locations, because sometimes there's like, you know, a split in countries and whatnot. So if we put it in put locations. So what we encourage in our ambassador program, especially also no alumni approach is from alumni by alumni, right, we really want to empower the youngsters to really take leadership roles to continue their journey, what they've learned in Jay, which is all about entrepreneurship, and all the spirit and like, you know, learning by doing approach, so we want to encourage them to continue that within the alumni network. So how it works is, we usually look in every single location, we look for one, two, ideally, three, probably call them fire starters. So these are like alumni who are very passionate, were like, Oh, my God, this is amazing. I really want to continue, and I want to give back essentially, right? So they're very young, usually they're between 16 and 18 years old, because this is when they graduate from our programs. And then we have a thing called starter kit, where we collected best practices from all the different countries and locations around the world on like, what is a good setup for this ambassador program. So essentially, what the three of them will do is actually form a what we call Alumni Board. So they have different responsibilities, right? Usually, we have one communication specialist, the other one is kind of the President of the network. And the other one is kind of in charge of events online and offline, right. And so the three of them, they work together with the JT location with the employees to really build up the alumni network. So on one hand, they go back into our schools, right and into the J program and like be mentors and teachers. And I mean, it's pretty cool for an 18 year old person to teach a marketing class because nobody else would actually give them the opportunity to do so. Right. And on the other hand, they're really creating this network. They're organizing events, which are all around leadership enterpreneurship startups, and then we also have bigger cross country conferences, right but it starts out On the national national level, we really want to build up real build it up there. And then European wide, it's really big. And my job is since four and a half years to really replicate what jlm, the Europe has done into the other regions. And we saw really great success and obviously adopting it in the regions of the country, some the needs, but really the focus, I would highly recommend to everyone to start small, with like three people who are really engaged, really motivated, instead of trying to like, everyone wants big numbers, they will come right, but you need like the core people who really want to work on it.

**Anne Mbugua** 05:36

So what would you say are some of the challenges other than, you know, starting small, which is the importance of it? Right, setting quality? So what are some of the challenges that you faced when you were structuring the program?

05:47

Yeah, so biggest challenge, probably wrong, but not now. If it's voluntary, right. So there's always this piece of people are super motivated until normal life hits with whatever comes their way, right. So especially now you're in COVID, it was super tricky for us to keep all of them in life. Because first thing people drop off the steep of a pandemic is voluntary work. They had other challenges, right. And so that's one thing to really like, keep them engaged and trying to create incentives, which are good for wherever they are in life, right? So when they're, like 16, to 18, what are they looking for is kind of like recognition, work experience, like giving the chance to put on their LinkedIn, I'm a community manager at the Alumni Network. I mean, doesn't matter if it's voluntary or not. Right. So these are some challenges. And then one of the other big challenges is obviously, like, the whole handover process, right? So we have this one group of people, and then like, how is the knowledge going to be transferred to the next generation, which we usually, we highly encourage everyone to really write down specific, like job titles, right with like tasks. And that's why we also encourage the J offices, like the employees to really work together with them and guide them. And then like our point person, for, like, the new people to come in, these are kind of like, the two biggest challenges.

**Anne Mbugua** 07:09

So did you see like your motivation, or the motivation for the ambassadors increased? As you were focusing more on, you know, what can sort of get them on to the program and keep them there? Right? Because it's totally, yeah, because, you know, I'm thinking of an example where, you know, you're in university and you become an alumni. A good example is like myself, I'm not really on the alumni for university. And so how do you keep them going and keep them? You know, talking on the platform? Right? And I think that's really tricky to do that. Oh,

07:42

100%. So, how we use especially Hi, Fred, and the platform is to really, like, keep the community alive online until we meet back offline, right? Because that's what we saw as the biggest thing in COVID. Now, it's super tricky if there are no physical events, because the whole what you say magic, and we actually call it alumni spirit. happens when the people meet in person, right? Yeah. So in ja, when they're still the programs, we also have competitions, which really helps to engage them afterwards, because they're like, as you can imagine, like regional finals, so within their country, so I'm based in Austria, there's an Austrian final off the student companies how we tell them, right, then there is a European final of the student company, so or like an Africa or Asia Pacific or whatever. And now we even have like a global final, where they can actually 15,000 US dollars for like, pretty much the global Company of the Year, we call it. And so they're already like, really engaged. So the people who are at the competitions are really engaged because they see others and be like, Oh, my God, this is really cool. And I mean, they're 16 When they're pitching their business on stage in front of investors, so they have to have a certain kind of engagement already within this. And what we always see everyone's like, Oh, so now it's done, because it's such a time investment for them during this entire year. And they really want to keep going. So as soon as we we always tried to create like one big alumni events a year, right, so we had the first global one in 2019, where we had 500, in person, right? So these were kind of like the fire starters. So in Europe, we have always bigger conferences. But the global conference we brought in from I think more than 50 countries, we had alumni, and they've been up to speed took this like, oh my god, this is amazing. Yeah, back to wherever they are, and then replicated it on the local level in a smaller scale. Right, right. Right.

**Anne Mbugua** 09:39

So, Sarah, what would you say are some lessons that you have learned from just the program itself?

09:47

Me personally, or like the whole ambassador, like the horse for the organization?

**Anne Mbugua** 09:52

Actually, let's talk about both which is which would be great personally and also from you know, the J perspective.

09:59

Yeah, So let me quickly start with personal because what I usually I mean, it's very normal in working lands, let's call it that way that people want to see. Okay, what have you done before? Right? Like, what are the skills? What are the achievements? Where is your certificate? I mean, I know we are shifting slightly towards another approach. But to be fair, it's also really hard to like, see if the person is qualified or not if they don't have a certificate, right? Right. But what I've personally learned is, the only thing it takes is one person who really wants to get it done, right, one person who's motivated and wants to learn all this stuff, because you can learn these things, right? Especially with community engagement, there's no set rule, like in finance, where you have to have a certain skill set to like, be able to whatever have the balance sheet ready. So I think, for me, personally, it's really cool to see that I'm working with so many, like, really young students like 16 to 18 in gaming really accelerate in whatever they do, because they get the chance to actually just sit right, because usually, they don't. So that's one personally, and I think for J, it's the whole approach of like, from alumni for alumni, right, as soon as j as an organization, which has been there for a very long time tries to kind of put something down for the alumni, right? It doesn't work, right? Obviously, there's always like, a strong connection between them, and they co create stuff. But if you only look at the lens from like, Oh, this is what you're a needs, and then just put it on the alumni network, it's going to fail because they give their voluntary times. So they're more than happy to give back. But also they want to get something out of it. Right. So this is probably, and maybe one other thing is, as you can imagine a lot of locations need donations, right? Because we're an NGO, right? So we're donation based and corporate partners. So there's always this like, money challenge, which is totally normal and NTLM. Yes, so but it takes time to actually nurture the alumni network to be able to give back financially, right. And a lot of people have this thought in their head, especially in like, countries around the world where it's very normal to kind of donate in an alumni network in Europe, it's not so common, to be honest. Like, nobody donates money back to their university, because it's real. Like, why would you know, it's the cultural difference? Yes. Um, so but what we saw, especially also in Europe, when you keep the alumni engaged, even at a later stage, right there, of course, if they have the money, they will give it back. But right, we're talking to like, 16 to 18 years old. I mean, there's so they can't even donate anything, because they don't even have a proper job. Yeah, yeah.

**Anne Mbugua** 12:36

So it sounds to me that, you know, engagement is one of the key points here, you know, engaging them from the very beginning. Yeah. And all the way towards the end in order for the program to be successful. Yes, for sure. And that's, that's very interesting. Yeah. And it's important. I think that, you know, it's a tip that we can borrow, you know, as also universities can borrow. Oh, yeah, alumni network going. Right. So where do you see the future of the community ambassador program?

13:04

Oh, great question. So what I what we're currently working on is, right now, we touched all on the like, juniors, how we call it right, like, so the fresh graduates coming out of school, university and just finishing the J program. However, J has been there for like, 102 years. So you can imagine how many people out there. So our CEO is always saying we have 100 billion living alumni. But we don't, where do I find all of that? So what we're ideally trying to do, which is currently very challenging to like, bring back the ones who took part in J, let's say 30 years ago, right? Or like, whatever. So we have really cool examples of really successful entrepreneurs, like Mark Cuban, for example, from the US. He's a J. alum, and he actually knows which is great. Also, Christina Aguilera. Fun fact, she's also jlm that she doesn't necessarily know but and then so also, for example, like the President of the European Parliament, now, she's also a J. alumna. So there are so many people in the J community, which went through the program, because it's such a big program, right then for us to create kind of a network for those more experienced business focused people. This is kind of what we're working on right now to have, of course, like, the entry point with the juniors where they for sure can donate time, right and then create like a more senior, it's always a stupid word, like more experienced, expansive network, where people want to come back, donate back be, for example, jury members, we always need like judges, we always need investors at competitions. So kind of like creating this ecosystem as well, which is obviously a bit more challenging because they have less time, right, but ideally, more financial resources to kind of give back in that way. So kind of going forward. It would be great to have like Good Junior and experienced alumni network in all of the countries.

**Anne Mbugua** 15:04

Wow. That's That's amazing. So what would you say that inspires you about your community?

15:10

Oh, did everything? Everything? I mean, for me, to be honest, it's very special because I went through it myself, right? So I know how much it changed my life, right? Like, everything changed upside down. I'm not coming from any kind of business minded family, right? Not at all. So for me, everything changed. And just seeing how like the in person connection of the people is so strong, like for some weird reason, all of them are really like minded no matter where you go around the world. Everyone's like, oh, yeah, did j is I mean, honestly, especially if they did the long, like eight months to 10 months program, right? We all sit day programs, they are the impact is that clearly not as much. But everyone who went through J for like, eight months, everyone remembers, because it's such a crazy experience when you're like, 16, right, you have to have money all of a sudden, to sell something. So it's, this is really what inspires me. And also, what comes out of it is like, we have alumni and alumni creating a new startup together, right? from different countries. We have some of my best friends I met in the alumni network, right? Like we have now actually, two friends of mine from alumni. They're getting married now. So it's like, the whole breadth of things in the network. And it's all honesty comes down to, yes, we have a lot of quantity, but also really focusing on the quality of like, bringing the people together, organizing, like cool opportunities for them where they can actually because it's all about the human connection.

**Anne Mbugua** 16:37

Right. Absolutely. So would you also say that platform matters?

16:42

Solely? Yes, it's 100% does, because we are with Hi, Fred for another three, three years, I think. Right? So before we didn't have any platform, right? So the idea of having a platform was born many, many years ago, as you can imagine, it was like in the gym, we would have a platform where people can connect, right? Obviously, then there was like, budget problems and all that kind of stuff. So when I joined je wilt like we really took on the project of like, okay, it's mainly voluntary, managed, and also our locations, they don't have extra funding for like grading platforms. So we established like, took on the project, also the financial risk and doing all of this and it really mattered, because what we need for our community, because it's so complex we need especially what Hi Fred offers is like the manager like the country admins in the groups, right, we need the people to work independent, because that's all about the ambassador program, where they actually lead the entire country. So they need full autonomy. And then what's also brilliant is like the whole Events section, because everyone was struggling all the time to get those ticket payments and right, like you have an event that nobody pays, remind them. So that's also one big thing. And then honestly just have a place where we can send everyone right like, because now we struggled because we didn't have a place to send everyone to like sit somewhere. So hopefully, in 20 years from now, we won't have this like big of a struggle to like find the people who've been through it, like, whatever, 20 years ago. So it definitely matters. Obviously, also, I'm sure everyone experiences the same. Online is super hard, right? Even if the platform is amazing, and has all the features, it's really hard to only have an online community. So that's why we are glad to like, finally introduce the offline events and kind of sync the two worlds again, because it's really hard to get, oh my gosh,

**Anne Mbugua** 18:36

it is because I remember I recall and I was telling Kat sometime earlier about volunteering and partnering when I used to work for an NGO, where we would do speed networking with Jay here in Arizona. And so I know it makes a difference. Being able to you know, pitch in person versus having to do it online. It definitely experiences is something totally different. So I like to end on this note on three maybe pro tips that you can share for someone who's thinking of starting either community ambassador program or an alumni program of some sort in their community. What would be your three top tips for them?

19:20

Yeah. Number one, for sure. Be patient.

19:23

Yes.

19:25

We all want to go faster, higher and whatever, but it takes time, especially if it's volunteer lead, you need to give the people the time and be patient with the outcome it will come right it just takes a bit more time than if you have to pay someone and then like they have to do the job obviously because it's paid Right. Right. Number two I think don't be afraid to like start small, right like I know KPIs and every so much pressure all the time on like reaching numbers, goals and whatnot. But if you don't start small with like the qualitative aspect and the qualitative approach you will never get the numbers because you need a core leadership team in order to like attract the people or like a core team who's really running the show and can attract people. And I think number three is like, just do it because it's really gonna increase like, depending on what you want to do, but it will always add value to whatever you are currently doing. It will especially with young people, you will get a very different like perspective of how they see for example, your industry we now for example, also have youth advisors within the alumni network. So we're asking them actively on the strategic planning of Jay wildlife like hey, what do you want to see your the youth like we're creating these projects for youth. So what do you want instead of just having it like in a boardroom or something like this, so kind of like a sounding board so really do it and really engage the students even if it's just once or twice a year? It doesn't matter but it's full for sure. Add value.

**Anne Mbugua** 21:01

Well, thank you so much, Sarah. I really appreciate you sharing and telling us more about the community ambassador program, and I will end the recording now.