

VIJAY GUPTA'S VIEWS ON CHALLENGES OF PR IN THE IT INDUSTRY

Corporate communicators and the IT industry...

The traditional role of corporate communicators is to build a corporate brand with all the target groups – customer, employees (both current and potential), investor, business associates, bureaucracy, politicians and media. What is unique about the IT service industry and what are the key priorities as far as the corporate communications function is concerned? As far as the latter is concerned for the IT industry, it is actually the employees that are the major priority. Employee branding is a concept that Wipro is working on – ‘how is Wipro branded as an employer’?

What makes the IT services industry unique in India is that it deals with global customers, both from the demand and supply side – Japan, US, Europe, Middle East. As far as the supply side is concerned, Wipro has development centres in four or five countries, though at this point of time, 95 per cent of development work is done out of India. There is however the possibility in the next 3-4 years of some part of development shifting to China as that country catches up in terms of quality, price performance, etc.

The IT business is technology intensive also in terms of technology evolution. Wipro is not really talking about a product brand as far as the IT services industry is concerned. It does software work for corporates, which is completely customised work. So, when one is talking about brand building, one is talking about Wipro as a corporate brand, and not as a product brand. In a highly people intensive industry, the issue is how to attract and retain the talent.

WHAT MAKES THE INDUSTRY DIFFERENT:

- Customer are corporates
- Global business – demand & supply side
- Technology intensive
- Rapid technology evolution
- No “product” brand
- People intensive – attract & retain high calibre talent

As far as the investor community is concerned, at Wipro we believe that if the customers and employees are satisfied, the financial results will reflect this. All the other target groups will form their opinion based on what is written in the media.

At Wipro

- Key priority is building the brand with employees – current & potential
- Corporate customers use references & track-record
- Investing community concerned with financial results
- Other target groups form their image from media

Employee branding concept...

Wipro has conducted some research with its employees and to understand their expectations from the communications function. The results that Wipro as a brand enjoys:

- *High visibility*
- *People at large speak highly about it*
- *Brand make "right" promise to attract & retain them*

The concept being worked on is called employee branding and is based on the same principle used for branding for customers. The challenge is how to differentiate the message on what the brand stands for.

What is employer branding?

- *It is the Marketing and Brand management thinking applied to the employment experience*
- *Practice of developing, differentiating and leveraging the company's brand message in a meaningful manner to current & future workforce*
- *Understanding, managing and valuing employees (during both recruitment and retention) with the same care and coherence as one would while managing a valued client*

A communication link between an employer and employee aimed at creating an emotional bond

Employer branding at Capital One..

Our own concept evolved from the experiences over the last couple of years:

Capital One – a financial services company that has taken a position where they claim that as far as the customers are concerned, they have a statement that *'you get what you want'*. They have extended the same kind of positioning to their employees.

Some of the steps they have initiated :

- *Family Assistance Programme – Confidential Telephone Counselling to handle stress in the family*
- *Holiday entitlement package – 25 days of paid leave*
- *Family Care Day - 3 days of paid leave during the year apart from normal Holiday*
- *Financial Support for employee - Fitness Subsidy, Travel*

Subsidy, Discount Credit Card, etc.

- *Share in company's growth and success - Associate Share Purchase Plan*

Employee 'Freedom' at Southwest Airlines...

Another example is Southwest Airlines whose symbol is 'Freedom'. They talk about freedom as far as the customers are concerned and they use this for their employees as well. Southwest Airlines has the following 'Employee Freedom' campaign.

In the quest to provide employees the freedom to express individuality, and to make workplace one that is more adventurous, fun and exciting, Southwest Airlines started some innovative programmes:

Freedom to continually learn : "Walk in my Shoes" - be someone else for a day

Freedom to stay connected - Open first name relationships, with all information shared internally before being exchanged externally

Freedom to be who you are - starts from the interviewing process

Freedom to have fun at work - Safety instructions delivered as stand-up comic routines

Freedom to travel - Special discounts, hotel rates for employees, friends and family

A third example is that of Convergys, which is a company that works in the area of CRM (Customer Relationship Management). They have extended the same CRM concept in terms of 'employee relationship management'.

Customer Relationship Management



Practice What You Preach



Employee Relationship Management

CRM is extended internally by virtue of the position that the organisation knows internal customers well enough to relate to them. The organisation interest in building relationships with employees by understanding their needs and requirements. The company implemented (1), (2), (3) & (4) to take away the burden of (a), (b), (c) & (d)

he above four were implemented to take care of the burden of:

(a) Investment worries - Retirement plan options (1)

(b) Health worries - Healthcare Benefit planner (2)

(c) Professional growth - Training and Development (3)

Work/Life Balance - Flexi Time (4)

Thus the organisation tried to understand the problem(s) of internal customers and provide solutions to them (by their ability to relate) just as they would for an external customer

The conclusions that Wipro arrived at from these examples are:

- (1) The Customer Brand Position statement can be extended to Internal Employees though it is not a mandatory requirement
- (2) There is synergy between external and internal positioning
- (3) Need for an internal Positioning Statement addressing the employees
- (4) Synergising all internal activities such that it is in line with the Internal Brand Positioning Statement

Wipro and employer branding...

Wipro began working six months ago on the employer branding position and looked at the following six issues:

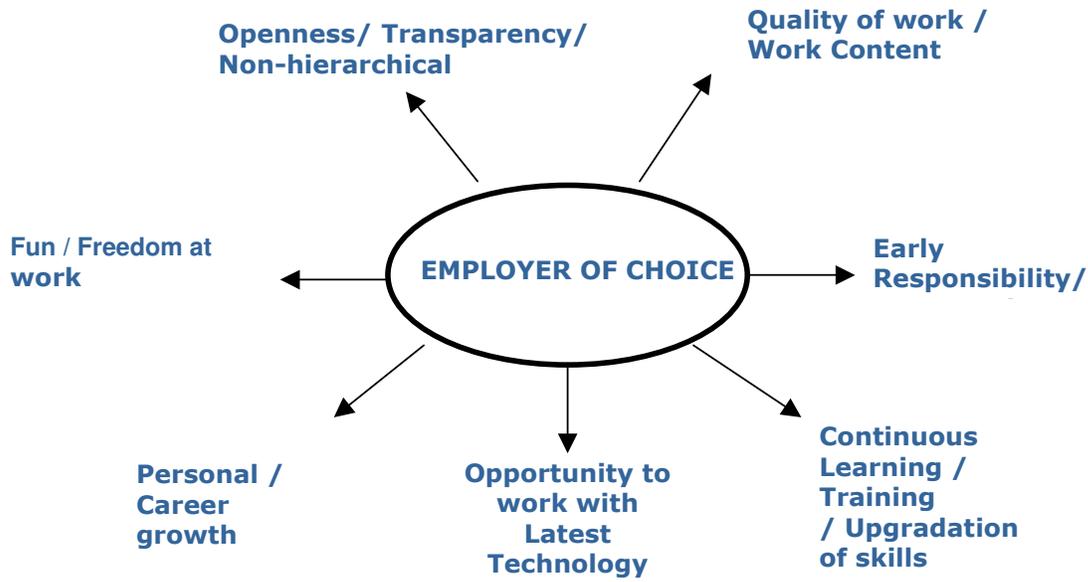
1. Identifying the target group
2. Identifying their needs / requirements
3. Identifying possible differentiators
4. Create a positioning statement around it
5. Align HR processes
6. Communication

What employees thought of Wipro as an employer...

Wipro considered both current and potential employees – from within the industry and also fresh engineering graduates who would be joining the company or other organisations. Research was undertaken on employee expectations from Wipro and other IT companies to find out the typical expectations of early career IT professionals. The top ten parameters that emerged are as follows:

1. *Constant learning potential*
2. *Exciting, challenging work ... improved job content*
3. *To be associated with cutting edge technology*
4. *Personal and career growth*
5. *Early responsibility*
6. *Informal, 'fun' work culture, flexi timing*
7. *Constant training to upgrade skill set*
8. *Opportunities at work*
9. *Transparency*
10. *Reward and recognition at work*

We grouped these seven pillars to be addressed by the company in its quest to become the 'Employer of Choice'.



Perceptions of Wipro....

The next step was to ask employees as well as outsiders on how they perceived Wipro as employer. According to Wipro employees, Wipro provided:

- Better quality of work
- Scope for learning
- Good training
- Variety in work
- Opportunity to work for a well known company
- Trustworthy / honest environment
- Practical / business driven approach
- Some media hype - however not beating one's own drum
- Better salary
- Low on employee care

The external employees attach the following attributes to Wipro:

- Better quality of work
- Latest technology
- Good training
- Businesslike
- Well known company
- Good branding
- Recognition at work
- Slightly older

The learnings....

When these learnings were compared with the important pillars to becoming the employer of choice, Wipro found out that it did not fare very well in terms of openness, transparency, fun & freedom at work, and no flexi time. The company fared well on quality of work, work content, in terms of learning, training, and opportunity at work, career growth and working with latest technology.

Openness / Transparency / Non-hierarchical

- Currently seems to be a slightly weak feature
- Communication is seen as weak

Quality of Work / Work Content

- A strong feature, image carried by both external and internal employees
- In line with employee expectation

Continuous Learning / Training / Upgradation of skills

- An image carried by both internal and external employees
- Expectation from future employees

Opportunity at Work

- Widespread operations, spread globally

Fun / Freedom at work

- Is more of a parity than a unique feature
- Not possible to do without, but will not be able to overdo and build on this given our culture

Personal and Career growth

- Success stories at Wipro

Work with latest technology

- Technology company, offering technical solutions
- Image carried by current, external and potential employees

The aim of this exercise was to see how each of these four elements was perceived by both sets of employees, and whether Wipro could really find a differentiator out of this exercise. A total of 240 people were asked to participate – these consisted mainly of engineers with 1-2 years of experience as well as final year engineering students. The parameters checked were :

- *Likes / Dislikes about the concept(s)*
- *Believability of the concept(s)*
- *Uniqueness of the concept(s)*
- *Relevance of the concept(s)*
- *Ranking of the concept(s)*
- *Association of the concept(s)*

Four concepts tested at Wipro...

A combination of work content, technology, continuous learning, opportunity to do great work – they all lead to growth. Thus these four concepts were then tested with both internal and external employees.

- **Assurance of growth with Wipro.** On joining Wipro, the employee gets opportunities and responsibilities early in his/her career. You grow as you learn and when you deliver, your growth is assured
- **Wipro equips you with the latest technology.** Wipro has clients that work on cutting edge technology like Cisco, Nortel...and hence the employee gets an opportunity to work with the latest technology

- **Upgrade your skills with Wipro.** At Wipro, employees are constantly learning and getting trained both on personal development and R&D. Hence his/her skills are always the best

Growth as the major concept...

The results indicated that the pillars of growth would be technology, learning and training and early opportunity and responsibility for work. This concept is thus the most relevant one, signifying that the foundation to building an **Employer Brand is Growth**. While the foundation is GROWTH, the building blocks to becoming an employer of choice are:

- Technology / R&D
- Learning and Training
- Early Opportunity & Responsibility

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How do you customise content for an optimum online presence?

Vijay Gupta added that as far as Wipro was concerned, they had not done too much work on the website as a tool in terms of marketing. However, when Wipro undertook business for example with Japan or Germany, the company ensured that their salespeople as well as developers were sufficiently trained in the language of that country. The idea is that as far as the customer is concerned, the company should be able to talk the language of the customer.

How do we manage global PR? Do you manage it from the homebase or do you have PR agencies working in remote locations?

Wipro has a PR agency for Europe as also for the US. However these are early days as far as Wipro is concerned and we have not made much of an effort since we did not feel the requirement for this kind of brand building in those countries. As mentioned earlier, Wipro is riding the wave India Incorporated at present. The most we have done globally is to arrange interviews for Azim Premji or Vivek Paul.

Streamlining the work culture – this is an issue with all companies, IT or otherwise. What is Wipro doing in this respect?

What Wipro has done is to ensure not more than 4 layers in any function. Hence there are not too many levels in terms of reporting. Also in terms of relationships, interaction, it is very informal. At any Wipro office, there is an atmosphere similar to that found in a university campus.

How do you check upon growth? What do you do to

Wipro has instituted an appraisal system, which is very informal. Each person has to have a set of five objectives that are given at the start of the year. The first appraisal will be done by the employee himself. This will then be discussed

ensure a non-hierarchical system at Wipro?

with his senior manager for comments and lastly by the senior most manager. The HR department will also be involved. There is also the 360-degree appraisal – here superiors as well as peers and reportees will do the appraisal. These two appraisals will determine whether the employee receives an increment and whether he/she is ready for the next higher position. This system ensures that the relationship is non-hierarchical.

What methods will you use to show the talent within your organisation to attract business?

Vijay Gupta replied that as far as the IT services industry was concerned, Wipro's priority at the moment was its employees. This did not mean that the company would not do a satisfactory job on the other target groups other than employees. In terms of communicating the talent at Wipro, the media would be effectively used to showcase the company's talent and thereby attract business.

Comments:

Ranbaxy

How effective would corporate communications be to increase pride and morale within the employees?

Communicating to employees and making a good website or making a wonderful CD presentation is not just the role of the corporate communicator, because if the HR processes do not get aligned with the company's mission or philosophy, then it is of no use. Unless from the CEO to HR to Production to R&D and Training do not talk the same language, then you are not heading anywhere.

Ranbaxy started internationalising 8-9 years ago. The company is trying to be international and today has operations in 28 countries and web pages in different languages in each and every one of them. We are using websites and very high technology-based communication tools for presentations and are looking at making inroads into the larger markets such as Western Europe, South East Asia and US. The company is trying to understand all these markets – their cultures, their thinking, their governments with the aim of ensuring that we do not have any product recall in the first five years of launch.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Vijay Gupta, GM – Brand & Corporate Communication, Wipro India, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on June 14, 2001)