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FEATURE

In-house publications—inform and engage

Even in the age of blogs and the intranet, internal publications have their own importance and impact of informing and engaging employees.

By **Renuka Vembu**



With employee engagement assuming increasing importance and companies formulating varied means of reaching out to every employee, newsletters, blogs and the intranet seemed to have shown them the way. The definition and the approach differs, but the motive remains more or less the same. Weekly or monthly or quarterly, print edition or online version, in-house publications are one of the most common ways of disseminating general company information, and encouraging employee participation in their interest areas.

Companies and their publications

Atos Origin India publishes HUM LOG, a quarterly in-house magazine. Rather than straightforward reporting, their articles include points of view and analysis. An

effort is made to achieve a balanced coverage of the various locations, made possible by the presence of 'correspondents' to cover different areas and functions. So also, a balance of the nature of contents—corporate, informative and human interest—makes the magazine more interesting and readable.

Every company has its own charter for publishing its newsletter—company performance during the interim period, the events that took place and the forthcoming programs, sharing of general information pertaining to the workforce, quality measures, rewards and recognitions, outstanding performers and innovative ideas, developments that they have made or any future projects they are likely to undertake, social commitments, etc. It also acts as a medium to not only unearth the talents lying within

every individual and enlightening them about the company, but also throws a different light by highlighting and providing insight about people who matter and who guide the way—its top management. The softer aspects are often more touching and strike a chord strengthening the emotional bond.

At Sify, the idea is to share with the family members of their associates the culture and atmosphere at Sify. "It is considered important to involve and interact with not only associates, but also their family members, so that they can identify with and relate to the company and its activities," said David Appasamy, Chief Communications Officer, Sify Technologies. The editorial team, with help from the admin people, ensures every employee receives a copy of Prime Time to take home to their family.

► SymConnect is Symantec's quarterly publication which captures internal and external developments regularly. The core of the publication is to deliver the 'One Company One Team' message, by communicating their innovation strategy and go-to-market plans as well as our rewards and recognition programs.

The idea in short is to espouse the values of the company and keep the flow of information and channel of communication. Ishita Medhekar, Manager, People Excellence, Avaya GlobalConnect, opined, "We have tried our best to make it a meaningful means by putting a theme around it i.e. 'Living values' and maintaining the same in all section and all publications. The main objective behind this publication is to help create a value based work culture and align individual values with our values. We believe that members of the leadership team are in excellent positions to lead by example to promote a culture of values within the organization."

Padmini Sharathkumar, Senior Vice President, Corporate Marketing and Communication, Polaris, added, "It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that we run a media house by itself, with weekly newsletters, monthly newsletters, quarterly magazines and internal publications. These help in 'connecting' with our most valuable assets—our employees. Our weekly newsletter is a six sigma process itself, reaching the desks of 10,500 employees every Monday morning. Print editions are special. Polaris has not one but four regulars—a weekly, monthly, quarterly and bi-annual, which reflect the commitment towards robust communication architecture.

■ **Connect:** In these days of



VVP B Karthik
AVP, HR, iSOFT

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e-versions, the weekly newsletter in its print edition gives touch and feel version, 'connects' with the associates, bringing in news and updates from all locations. The different features like 'Coffee with the CXO' (an insight into what the top management thinks) coverage on high performing teams and domain and technology features, convey Polaris' passion to develop a holistic brand.

■ **Spectrum:** The monthly four-page newspaper features thought provoking white papers, industry trends, analyst views, customer speak, technology white papers, Polaris news and events, an associate participation corner, informative sections, entertainment and special features.

■ **Toggle:** The quarterly in-house magazine acts as a window to associates' families on what their spouse's work place is all about. Associates eagerly await features like the CEO's column, books to read, entertaining spoofs, a mix of information and humor spelt out in an engaging way.

■ **Polaris Times:** A twice-a-year collation of news snippets on Polaris' coverage in the media collated and sent to the employees' families, keeping the extended family abreast of happenings and events.

■ **ADRENALIN (Intranet):** One of the most vital and 'daily-dose' is the intranet portal called ADRENALIN, which showcases all significant company information, latest news, what is happening in the customer world, the market and industry and the PHIR FUN section, that captures the soft side of our teams.

FINO with its newsletter feels that it is a platform for announcing achievements of teams and they also vouch that it acts as a motivator for employees to do better and prove themselves by looking up at others.

Participation across levels

What is normally observed is that these initiatives are primarily focused on the employees, their chosen heads for handling the process and execution along with the HR personnel. It seldom has any active participation from the middle-level and top management. Internal publications are looked at as more as an outlet for employees to break the monotony from their routine.

Also, in the times of going green, organizations have shifted gear towards the e-edition. iSOFT comes out with a organization-wide bi-monthly e-newsletter iNEWS and a monthly PMG newsletter. The PMG newsletter is published by the Product Management Group of the



Bala Girisbala

VICE PRESIDENT AND HEAD OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING, iVIZ

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organization, and focuses on Portfolio Management, Program Management, Technology and

Platform Management and Product Specific news. VVP B Karthik, AVP, HR, iSOFT, asserted, "There is active participation from both the middle-level and top management. The senior management provides business updates such as product upgrades, new implementation, new project acquisitions while the middle-level employees and other staff members provide inputs on initiatives and innovations, staff events and achievements related information for the newsletter."

Today with companies going global, and the world shrinking, it is imperative to have a touch-point across all locations. Newsletters act as an internal communication strategy and also an internal branding mechanism. Gargi Sharma, VP, Corporate Marketing and Communications, Geometric, said, "Connect is not a location specific publication, and we receive inputs from our offices across the world. So in a way, it acts as a bonding glue and contributes significantly to bringing together global cultures, particularly in a company like ours, with over 18% of our employees being non-Indians, to create a 'one corporate culture.'" Recently, they carried stories on both Diwali as well as Halloween which fell in the same month, and gave them an insight into the different customs in different cultures. This also helps employees understand and appreciate the differences.

Two-way communication

There are some paradigm changes taking place in the way the traditional newsletters were published. From being a paper version to now promoting environment-friendly measures, ►

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► from an information/communication approach to now a participative/interactive forum, it has evolved with changing times. Bala Girisbala, Vice President and Head of Product Management and Marketing, iViZ, explained, “Instead of having a one-way communication through newsletters, in this age of social networking, we need an interactive medium to be in touch with our team. So, we launched a social networking platform for our employees which has forums, blogs, photos, videos, groups, alerts, etc. This is today actively used for all communications—from new employee joining, anniversaries, major company highlights, news dissemination, organizing events, blogs, etc. Employees find this medium very engaging.”

Instead of just giving out information, organizations conduct quizzes so that employees are not only abreast of the happenings but are also engaged in it. Categorizing the newsletter into different sections also helps capturing employee attention so that they can refer to the one that attracts them the most and is the most relevant. Ulhas Aher, HR Head, Datacraft India, said, “The Quiz corner and Technology Area sections are dedicated to trivia based on technology and fresh information taking place in the industry,

respectively. ‘Smart Worms’ is a section that disseminates latest news bytes from the Datacraft Intranet. The ‘Breaking News’ section carries current news related to Datacraft and its clients. The newsletter also carries stories based on its HR department and news from that division. The ITG news section provides articles or updates that every employee would require being more efficient.”

The difference

While organizations have multiple means at their disposal of disseminating news and views, what would prompt them to look at newsletters when the same can be passed through the Intranet and blogs and be more real-time and effective? Iti Kumar, AVP, People Development and Employee Services, GlobalLogic, viewed that 60% of it should feature employee-related topics while the other 40% should give organization-specific information. She added, “Information related to organizational restructuring, acquisition, merger, sales win or losses, all such information can effectively be shared through such periodicals and employees surely look forward to such information coming on their way through such periodicals than

through a blog or intranet forums.”

Appasamy felt that these printed magazines have a specific objective of sharing news with the family in print—with pictures and articles, and also have a longer shelf life and a much broader and deeper impact. Sudeesh Venkatesh, Head, HR and HR Shared Services, Tesco Hindustan Service Center, recommended that critical information should not be shared through a forum like an in-house newsletter. Fundamentally, they are meant to motivate, inform and update employees about the organization, services and employees. As opposed to an intranet/blog, which is maybe less time consuming and inexpensive, the internal newsletter can provide a tangible and a significant meaning to an employee.

To invest in a hard copy and come out with regular editions means the returns are justified and the company leverages benefits—both tangible and intangible, out of it. Connecting individuals of all hierarchies across all locations, collating and imparting news, synergizing and compiling information and presenting it in a single form/format is the key benefit of having an in-house publication. ■