

India Inc finds new ways to beam up to staff

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NEW DELHI: In 2006, 20,000 IBM employees in India logged on to an online conference along with 1,30,000 employees from across its global offices and partner companies. The 72-hour brainstorming session threw up ideas that changed the business landscape for Big Blue. Post the event, president and CEO Sam Palmisano announced the launch of 10 new businesses with seed capital of \$100 million. "That's the power of communication, or better still, innovative communication," says Chandrasekhar Sripada, VP and head HR, IBM India/South Asia.

IBM executives conceived the JAM, or the mass online conference, in 2001 to promote innovation and unite employees who work from home or client locations. With a group of interlinked bulletin boards and related web pages on IBM's intranet, and centrally managed systems that seek answers to important questions in three days, JAM gives people a sense of participation and of being listened to, as well as generate valuable new ideas.

Companies like PepsiCo, HSBC, RPG Life Sciences, CEAT Tyres to Spanco BPO, are designing out-of-the-box internal communication strategies — to get their employees to listen, engage, ideate, reward even prepare them in sync with merging market values. "In today's fast changing environment, the way companies communicate with their employees determines their success or failure," NS Rajan, partner, Human Capital Practice, EY & Young India.

At Pepsico, global boss Indra Nooyi writes to 150,000 employees and regularly asks for their suggestions and feedback. At RPG Life Sciences, 'Eureka' is a centralised email system for employees to suggest ideas and business strategies. Every employee who comes up with an idea which is implementable and successful gets 10% of the profit. A researcher from the R&D division and a workman from the production department have been the first beneficiaries this year. "Now, everyone in the company thinks of how to come up with such ideas. It's a great motivator," says Ratish Jha, head, HR, RPG Life Sciences.

CEAT's MRM Connect, a quarterly dialogue between senior management and employees about company growth is fun-filled. Launched in May 2010, it brought together employees in a village set up in its Mumbai office. From bhangra dancers to peanut and balloon sellers, CEAT had gathered them all to entertain its people.

Such exercises become crucial as organisations grow in size. "In a start-up, a promoter has plenty of time to spend with his subordinates, but CEOs in big firms don't have that luxury. That is why

it becomes important to have a structured and innovative communication process to cut through the chaos and drive a message home," says NS Rajan, partner, human capital practice, Ernst & Young India.

HSBC uses a mix of mediums to convey messages to employees — from idle screen savers, intranet, posters to plasma screens. Its 'World's Local Heroes' programme, which recognises extraordinary achievement and best practices and its Desktop Calender, a collection of best theme-based photographs from its staff worldwide, are instances of that.

The campaign capsules introduce people through a flash file video on an idle screen saver and asks for nominations. It runs for a fortnight with parallel messages on plasma screens, intranet and posters asking for people to vote after an initial phase of nominations. Post a regional, national, global round of voting and panel selections, results are declared at group chief executives' video conference and winners are felicitated with a citation or trophy. Following this, screensavers of all HSBC staff desktops/laptops feature their achievement and Plasma screens and the intranet run their picture for a month.

The calendar, a collection of 12 best photographs from across HSBC global offices, lists out the photographer with a caption. This year, the 'sense of security' themed calender had two India employees' contribution. "It's a vicious circle. If you can engage your employees well, they will engage themselves in business to profit you. Besides, it provides an immense sense of gratification to people and is a great way to connect with employees," says Rajani Ramakrishnan, senior VP, internal communications, HSBC India.