



The Fun is yet to Begin

As I head to office each morning, there is just one reality that I can count on – that, compared with yesterday, the world of Indian public relations will move forward a few more inches today.

The year 2006 will go down as a watershed year in the history of public relations in our country. And the best is yet to come.

We have witnessed a shift in global focus towards India and a consolidation of operations by several large international public relations practitioners on our home turf. Yet the best is yet to come.

We have also witnessed a coming together of our industry to welcome professionalism, measurement and adoption of standards, as espoused by the Public Relations Consultancy Association of India (PRCAI). Some of us have even voluntarily invited an audit to measure ourselves against internationally benchmarked consultancy management standards. We sailed through successfully. And yet, the best is yet to come.

The last couple of months have been invested in preparations for the largest event the public relations fraternity in this country has witnessed. The next few months too will be spent tying in the loose ends.

Come October, we will be the proud hosts to the International Communications Consultancy Organisation's Global Summit 2006. An umbrella organisation for more than 850 consultancies through their trade associations in 28 countries, ICCO's objectives, amongst others, are to contemplate and discuss the issues that the industry faces and to provide a platform to share experiences and best practices across the globe.

The theme of the Summit reflects India's challenge to the world of business: Forget Best Practices, Think Next Practices

To brainstorm the need to think ahead, to steer through and lead the transformation in global business practices, the Who's Who among the gurus of communication are converging in New Delhi including the glitterati among ICCO Hall of Fame. Those who have already confirmed their participation include:



Harold Burson, Chairman, Burson-Marsteller; Helen Ostrowski, CEO, Porter Novelli; Yann Risz, COO & Founding Partner, The Next Practice; Aedhmar Hynes, CEO, Text 100; Lou Capozzi, Chairman, Publicis Public Relations & Corporate Communication; Jean-Leopold Schuybroek, CEO, Interel, Brussels; Harris Diamond, CEO, Weber Shandwick; Christopher Graves, President, APAC, Ogilvy PR; Andea Coville, CEO, Brodeur; Dan Sandhu, Chairman, Vertex ...and the acceptances are still flowing in.

The passion to outdo the best that the ICCO has witnessed is running high as PRCAL works hand in hand with India Brand Equity Fund to put together an event that showcases the prowess of our industry as well as our country hoping to raise the bar for the event internationally.

Together, we will attempt to put together a strategy map for the industry based on the Balanced Score Card. A map that would devise strategies to overcome the most pressing challenges our industry is facing.

It goes without saying that among the first is the crunch for *talented* talent. A high growth industry in a high growth economy has to be prepared for a talent hunt like no other.

Some people tell me that there is only one R in 'HR in PR' today and that is Recruitment. The second R – Retention - seems to have taken a knock as those in demand play the market. Yet, for those of us from the old school, this is a situation that needs patience and the strength to hold on to the basics.

The fun is yet to begin. And now I am not referring to the ICCO Global Summit. Just as HR pundits group companies into farmer and hunter companies, the crop of talent too is emerging as perennials, annuals and seasonal. The terms are self explanatory and needless to say, I would still place my bets on the former. As a firm, we invested in Knowledge at a time when the price spiral was sucking in some of the best players. Once again, we are investing in Training at a time when Retention strategies seem to have gone out of fashion.

Investments in human capital are perhaps the most difficult to link to business outcomes and overall financial performance. Yet, as confirmed in *The High Performance Workforce Study* by Accenture, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is possible to demonstrate those links. According to the Accenture study, companies it had identified as 'human performance leaders' – those that were mastering the human capital capabilities they believed were absolutely critical to their success – also showed a significantly higher return to shareholders over time.



Keeping this link out of the debate and as a given, we need to look at the main factors that would carve a successful HR strategy in circumstances such as ours. The first among these would be the effective use of technology. While the transition to technology has been smooth in recruitment, other critical areas are lagging behind such as a strong employee relationship management system, powerful e-learning modules and knowledge management. The second is instilling measurability in HR strategies. Frequent measuring of success against predetermined goals and expectations brings a sharp focus to a function where success has traditionally being considered intangible. Finally, outsourcing specialized functions such as training through partnerships with experts makes sense in a world that is being rebuilt on right-sourcing.

However, there are miles to go before we can safely say that we have a firm grip on the situation. It is no longer a simple principle of recognizing the fact that people are our most important resource. It is more about aligning talent to business needs, identifying competency gaps, developing critical capabilities, providing a career growth plan to key talent as well developing a culture of innovation and change. Much as the trend in PR worldwide, this is the time for us to question established mores and rewrite the talent management rule-book.

Interestingly, that is the very focus of the ICCO Global Summit 2006 as PR pundits descend upon The Grand in New Delhi this fall to discuss Next Practices. New vistas will be explored, new theories espoused and demolished, new rules written as best practices that led to success in the past will be questioned and re-evaluated in the context of anticipated trends.

Impact is a magazine that is in the right space at the right time with the right team behind it. Congratulations on your success and wish you all the best for the next 20 at least!

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