



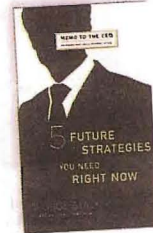
AD SURVEY

Check out how your favourite ad fared in Mint's monthly ad survey, and don't miss Future Brands' Santosh Desai's take on what he liked. >Pages C4-C5



REVIEWS VS PREVIEWS

Performance reviews are ill-advised and bogus. Instead, the boss-direct report team should be held jointly accountable for the subordinate's work. >Page C6



BOOKS IN A JIFFY

This week, Campaign and getAbstract focus on '5 Future Strategies You Need Right Now', a book that aims to ensure CEOs aren't caught napping by change. >Page C8

VISIBLE EDGE

Working to be the employer of choice

The image of a great workplace can help companies retain and recruit top talent during a downturn. But the trend of employment branding is still at a nascent stage in India

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In April, around 8,000 employees of the Rs9,130 crore (by turnover) Godrej group, which manufactures a range of consumer and industrial products—locks and safes, typewriters and printers, home appliances, edible oils and agro products—gathered in Mumbai on the eve of the launch of its new corporate brand identity to attend workshops on a new employment branding initiative.

Employment branding, a subset of corporate branding, is the perception that current and prospective employees have of an organization as a workplace—it promotes the benefits of working in that company.

The practice has just caught on in India in the past year or two but strong employment brands can give companies a significant competitive edge—something that becomes all the more important in an economic downturn, when margins are tight and business is sluggish. Organizations with strong internal brands attract and retain good employees instead of watching them join a competitor. Workplace surveys even suggest that companies seen as great employers often outstrip the market in financial performance.

Changing the look

Called Brighter Living, the (Godrej) brand's new positioning is all about (the) future and the group has embarked on its new employment branding exercise by changing the look and feel (of the workplace) through various communication touch points, including stationary, catalogue, in-house journals, website, et al, and bringing about a physical transition through workshops and gatherings," says Sumit Mitra, executive vice-president, human resources, Godrej Consumer Products Ltd.

The Rs13,500 crore (by turnover) RPG Enterprises engaged leading employment branding consultant

Richard Mosley to build the group's employer brand proposition. The group, which has at least 20 companies in eight business sectors such as power, information technology, tyres, retail and entertainment, put a formal employer branding road map in place last year.

Currently, RPG is focusing on internal employee branding for its nearly 40,000 employees and working to extend the brand experience themed around "going for growth"

across all touch points, including recruitment, performance appraisal, career development, rewards and recognition. As part of this exercise, it has identified leadership styles and behaviour that need to be inculcated across group companies.

"We need to strengthen and standardize our internal processes and systems: Basically, get RPG consistency across group companies first before we launch an external campaign communicating our employment brand,"

says Harsh Bhosale, vice-president, group HR, RPG Enterprises. "It is important that our own employees first experience the employment brand."

Godrej and RPG are not the only companies that are aggressively engaging with existing and potential employees. The Tata group, Hindustan Unilever Ltd, HCL group, Mahindra and Mahindra Ltd, HDFC Bank Ltd, Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd, Infosys BPO Ltd and Pepsico India Holdings Pvt. Ltd have been working on employment branding.

At a time when layoffs and recession are staring people in the face, talking about employment branding—usually seen as a tool to attract talent—may seem strange. However, it is during a downturn that a company's image as an employer of choice and related policies are tested, and while branding initiatives may have been started when a company was looking at expanding business, it makes sense to continue with the campaign and com-

In the next couple of years, agencies will begin to look at employment branding the way product branding is now tackled

municate with employees since the results are long term.

HR managers say companies can seize market share during a slowdown by capitalizing on their image and recruiting top quality talent. "The image of great workplaces can be a powerful tool to get the best people to work for you and, more so, during economic slowdowns," says Bhosale.

HCL, for instance, is not cutting back on its employee branding budget. "Employment branding is a long-term strategy for us and short-term volatility, such as the current downturn, does not impact our branding initiatives," says Saurav Adhikari, corporate vice-president, strategy, HCL. Prabir Jha, global head, human resources, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, puts in a caveat, saying that even a good employer branding effort in a downturn may actually have damaging implications if branding initiatives are not already strong.

"Traditionally, employer branding has been around for a longer time in the West unlike India where it is only in the last one to two years that one can see the practice catching up," says P. Thiruvengadam, national leader, human capital, Deloitte India, a consulting firm. "The trend is primarily driven by the desperate need to attract and retain talent in a market marked with manpower supply crunch."

Specialized agencies

The new trend has created a space for branding and marketing focused on employees. There are specialized agencies—such as UK-based Bring Yourself to Work or By2w, US-based TMP Worldwide Inc., an advertising and communications agency focused on employment marketing and talent acquisition, Great Place to Work Institute, Inc. or, closer home, Chennai-based Broadvision Perspectives—that help firms position themselves as employers of choice, but the space is still underdeveloped in India, say observers.

"Specialization is a natural outcome of a competitive market and in two to three years we will see the emergence of agencies that look at employment branding the way product branding is tackled," says Thiruvengadam. "We may see HR consultants, recruiters or advertising companies set up separate units or make conscious offerings." Currently, employment branding is being handled mostly by branding consultants such

