

In-house social networks are being used by companies now as a measure to increase employee engagement and to retain a younger workforce



# THE WORKING NETWORKS

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ALL it a trend, fad or sheer necessity to stay connected in the information age, but there is no denying the fact that social networking and professional networking sites be it FB, twitter, linkedin, **apnacricle**, siliconindia, peer-power, toostep etc have become a part and parcel of the lives of workforce across all industries and companies. Various studies conducted all over the world have debated on how work hours are lost and productivity is dented with employees staying "busy" on networking platforms making the HR departments take preventive measures to curb excessive "networking".

Winds of change, however, are sweeping across the "restricted" cyber space in workplaces as now several companies have realised that by using in-house social networking platforms they can not only learn the language of the youth much faster, but also get a platform to put their ideas across to different teams in an informal setting. As the average working age in India is falling rapidly, in-house networking by the head

honchos has become a complete HR strategy in some companies in order to make the company Gen Next ready. While some senior managers are using the sites to pass on better-management nuggets or give mini pep-talks to staff, others are broadcasting their business plans and goals, and seeking mass feedback from employees. From small startups to midsize companies like Nikon to heavyweights like Dell all are adopting in-house networking platforms.

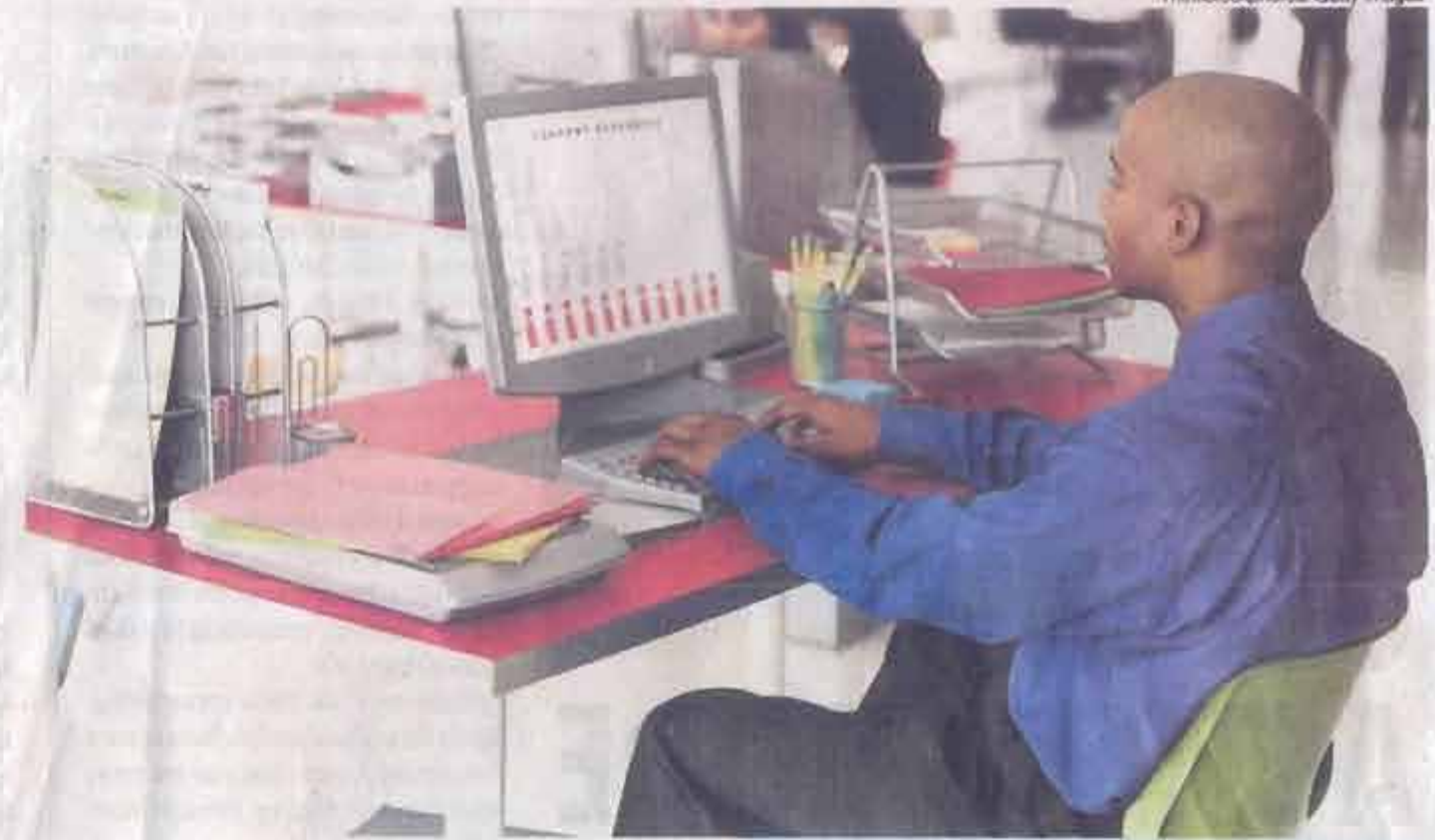
HCL is one such group that has developed its own Facebook-type social networking platform called MEME in a move to better engage the GenY workforce. "This provides a communication medium which the younger employees of the company are more comfortable with and aligned to", says Ravi Shankar, Senior Vice-President, Human Resources, HCL Technologies, while talking about MEME which already has over 48,000 registered users and 938 groups where employees can discuss topics ranging from work-life continuity to their passion factors at work. Organisation-specific social networking sites are an inno-

vative platform that boost productivity and connect employees with team members across all tangents. These also facilitate seamless interaction across multi-location teams and provide a more cohesive work environment as employees can know their colleagues better and stay in touch constantly. At TCS, the country's biggest software exporter, nearly one third of the over 1,50,000-strong workforce is

actively participating in the company's social media platforms already. TCS uses wikis, or personalised, websites that bring together specialised communities, apart from other tools to help its employees collaborate better. TCS has a platform called 'Just Ask' that is used by employees to post questions to be answered by employees. Also, to better capture nascent ideas, the company has IdeaMax, a Digg-like social network that lets any employee submit, comment, and vote on ideas. Infosys, too, launched 'Bubble' sometime back, which is a combination of Facebook-like social networking features

such as sharing pictures, combined with Twitter-like capabilities to "follow" others. Cognizant also has its C2 network on the similar lines. **The purpose** Companies like HCL are using this platform to facilitate discussions between high level management and employees and these may even translate into policies. "Leaders are using such platforms to communicate larger company

trends, their own business group trends and answer queries of employees. They also use these platforms to generate ideas", says Shankar. "This platform helps us to constantly monitor the pulse of employees on an ongoing basis", he adds. With companies getting more sensitised about retaining talent and enhancing employee engagement, in-house networks are ideal tools to share business challenges and to discuss and adopt employee ideas on the same. Moreover, the issues of interest and concern can also be captured online and companies can explore proposed pol-



icy issues with employees.

## The Users

Though the younger workforce is the more active user group, the mid-level and CEO level executives are also on the bandwagon. Vineet Nayar, Vice-Chairman and CEO, HCL Technologies is part of the networking platform. "With him coming on board and making his comments, the traffic to the site has increased manifold", says Shankar. Such social networking sites enable the top level managers to get a better understanding of team issues along with internal customer issues.

## Pitfalls

Though one can't turn a blind eye to the grey area of abuse of such platforms, such in-house networks do have a unique way of moderating themselves. "Companies do tread cautiously on this factor and have a responsible social media policy which guides employees on do's and don'ts", says a TCS spokesperson. Though safeguarding corporate secrets is a challenge in this domain, with the required checks and balances more and more employers are using these to retain and engage the workforce effectively.

## KEY FEATURES

- Discussion on issues on diversity, gender etc
- An employee can interact with his/her HR through an open medium and get his queries answered
- Employees can create their own profile page/groups and invite others to join.
- Exclusive pages can also be created for specific departments and teams
- Profile Map: Helps employees connect with people whose professional profile matches with theirs
- Friend/Group recommendation: Automatically recommends friends / groups
- Telltale: Allows employees to publish recommendations that others have written for them
- Doc and link sharing: Helps employees share links and documents with selected groups
- Discussions on the chosen areas among communities bound together by similar interest
- Teams can pose their work challenges like tech issues and an experts helps them to resolve the same

## CORPORATE TRENDS