by Aniko Czinege

When Getronics acquired Wang Global, it had to get all of its employees across the globe to buy-in to a new brand. Read how communication proved to be the cement in this integration process.

USING COMMUNICATION TO SUPPORT A NEW BRAND

Communication drives integration in global brand strategy

In May 1999, Getronics acquired Wang Global, at the time twice the size of Getronics with 22,000 people. A new management board was appointed in September 1999, and the headquarters of the new company established in Amsterdam. Subsequent internal restructuring has created a unified global organization employing over 34,000 people in 44 countries, with service partnerships extending coverage to more than 130 countries.

Getronics has a vision to be one of the leading ICT solutions and services providers in the world, and to achieve this the organization has developed three strategies. Firstly, a "go to market" strategy which is the framework of their business lines and service concepts. Secondly, a people strategy to become an employer of choice. And thirdly, a brand strategy to establish Getronics as a global brand so people are aware of what the company stands for. To achieve its vision, Getronics had a number of initial challenges to overcome:

- getting buy-in to one global brand;
- encouraging countries to adopt the corporate brand and communication program;
- communicating the vision and getting commitment to achieving it;
- establishing the credibility of the new management board;
- achieving consistent communication globally, internally and externally.

Left untackled, these issues would make it very difficult for the integration of the old and new businesses to succeed, and for the new brand to be successful. Successive acquisitions and initiatives – both in Getronics and the acquired companies – had left some people feeling "change fatigued" and inclined to wait for the next acquisition rather than investing time and effort in reinventing the business. This was further complicated by the nature of a global organization, with its national and cultural differences potentially affecting the interpretation of corporate messages and motives.

Getronics recognized that its people are central to the success of the brand and wanted to make sure that they were engaged before the external brand launch. Organizations, and especially "people businesses" such as Getronics, are judged by the actions of their people – if they do not live the brand, then it becomes an empty promise. Getronics therefore knew it would need to:

- support the integration of the business following the merger;
- create a communication infrastructure;
- encourage internal adoption of the new brand;
- start the process of culture change.

Intended audiences

There were several key internal audiences that the program needed to reach.

KEYPOINTS

- After acquiring Wang, Getronics faced the challenge of getting all employees to buy-in to a single brand. This was compounded by the fact that the organization operated in 44 countries.
- Getronics took the people-centered approach: employees would have to be engaged before the external brand launch.
- The company would also have to support post-merger integration, create a new communication infrastructure, and initiate culture change.
- Key audience groups were identified: senior management, marketing/communication managers, and "all employees."
- Getronics realized that it had to involve employees in change to secure emotional commitment to the new brand, and so harmonize the way the brand was "lived" internally with the way it was presented externally.
- Initial research included interviews with senior managers, site visits, and an internal communication audit.
- A conference was held for managers, so they could form a united front and take the same message back to local management teams.
- A brand communication pack was produced in six languages to help cement "local" ownership of the brand.

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1. Senior management (top global tier of 220 managers)
This included senior managers from across the new global business from a range of acquired companies, and a mix of nationalities, languages and business cultures. There was also a pressing need to develop a "one company" spirit, and unite behind Getronics' global vision.

2. Marketing and communication managers
This audience comprised some 40 internal communication representatives in 44 countries, characterized by different languages, communication styles and practices and influenced by culture and business history. These marketing and communication managers would possess varying knowledge and skills, and would need to act as communication champions in implementing the program in their countries.

3. All employees
The program would have to reach 34,000 people across 130 different countries, so cultural sensitivity was vital. Most of these employees were previously part of Wang or the other acquired company, and would therefore have different loyalties, values and limited Getronics knowledge. There were also large numbers of people working off-site (and with limited computer access), significant logistical challenges in terms of co-ordination, distribution and resources and six main languages to be accommodated. What's more, employees would have received only limited communication since the merger.

The communication program's objectives

Against this background, the communication program aimed to inform all employees of the integration process and the progress being made, and unite employees behind the new brand and a shared set of values, prior to the external roll out of the brand in January 2000. It would also have to establish a common internal communication framework across the global Getronics business. Overall, the program's objectives would be to:

- build understanding and support for the new vision, brand and associated values;
- increase pride and confidence in the new company among all employees;
- increase alignment between internal and external messages about the new Getronics;
- win the commitment of the top 220 management team, country managers and communication managers to their role in internal communication.

While measures were developed to determine the impact of the program, Getronics headquarters preferred not to set specific quantitative targets for it, as it was felt that centrally-set targets would undermine local ownership among those in the 44 countries responsible for implementing the program. Instead, general objectives were set, and progress monitored formally through countries reporting back on the reach and breadth of the program.

Building support

Consultancy Banner McBride was appointed by Andrew Shaylor, corporate senior VP, strategic marketing and communications, in September 1999 to develop and implement an internal communication program that would help to integrate the new company, build support for the new brand and set up a global internal communication infrastructure. All this was to be completed before the external launch of the new Getronics brand in January 2000. The team's role was three-fold. It would have to:

1. research, develop and implement the internal roll out of the new brand identity, and create a global internal communication framework in four months;
2. provide an interim management team for

Getronics is one of the top five providers of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) services and solutions worldwide, with revenues of 4.8 billion Euro. The acquisition of Wang Global and Olivetti Ricerca in Italy consolidated Getronics' position as a leading global player in the ICT market.

Banner McBride is a global business communication consultancy that helps its clients deliver results through people. It develops practical ways to harness the power of people to transform business. It has three core areas of expertise: communicating change; bringing brands to life; and creating and communicating visions internally.

Building a brand on-line

1. **Check out what the competition is doing**. To distinguish yourself on-line you need a site that differentiates you from the rest of the pack.
2. **Get your site tested**. Poor usability is the quickest way to damage your on-line reputation. According to a study by Forrester Research, only 51% of the corporate Web sites surveyed complied with simple Web usability principles. See www.useit.com or www.site-test.co.uk for more tips on usability.
3. **Keep the brand consistent**. It may sound obvious, but the biggest mistake most make is not to be consistent with branding in traditional media. Unless you take extra care to follow strict brand guidelines you may end up confusing your end user.
4. **Work with IT**. It's another common-sense point, but don't allow the techies to take over the site. The Web is primarily a marketing medium, so communicators must be involved from the start if the site is to be consistent with the desired brand image.
5. **Remember that the end user is not always interested your product**. You may rightly be very proud of your products, but they will not sustain interest without some context for the end user. For example, pharmaceuticals company Pfizer Inc. has created a site rich in information on allergies, while shoemaker, Reebok discusses fitness in general on its site. Adding a community bulletin board to the site will also increase the probability of customer returning. Ask yourself: what are the users of our site interested in?

five months at the new Getronics head office in Amsterdam. This team was to set up the internal communication department, establish a global communication infrastructure and oversee the implementation of the new internal communication strategy;

3. coordinate the various agencies working on the external communication and advertising of the brand development initiatives. Agencies included event production, public relations, advertising, and design. There would have to be consistency across the agencies, alignment between internal and external messages, and streamlining of the communication process to suit the different countries.

Project outline

To win the intellectual and emotional commitment of its people, Getronics divided the project into the following four-part program:

1. Research (September 1999).
2. Communicating the messages about the integration (October-November 1999).
3. Building the brand internally (November-January 2000).
4. Developing an ongoing internal communication strategy and framework (October-December 1999).

Key to achieving intellectual and emotional commitment was employee involvement in change, so that people were encouraged to actively help shape the future of the business. There needed to be alignment between the way Getronics talked to its customers and its own people. This would create consistency between the way the Getronics brand was presented and lived.

1. Research

This first stage underpinned the other three program strands by providing comprehensive research into audience attitudes, communication needs and current communication practices across the business. This involved 40 interviews with senior managers internationally (conducted with Helen Hill-Knowlton); 11 site visits or "Discovery Days" to Getronics companies around the world to meet employees and assess the internal communication climate; and an internal communication audit of existing practices, materials and channel effectiveness.

2. Communication during integration

The second phase concentrated on building an understanding of the integration process and communicating the global Getronics vision to employees. Research showed that very little had been communicated to employees about the

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vision, the merger, or the future. Previously, the communication output of some of the countries had tended to be in the form of global e-mails, with limited tailoring or face-to-face communication between managers and their teams.

Getronics sought to address this by taking a two-pronged approach that targeted senior managers first, and then (through the senior managers) middle managers and their teams. This worked on the assumption that face-to-face is the most effective method of communication, and that information has greater credibility when it comes directly from the line manager. Banner McBride also needed to work through those responsible for communication in their country. It was essential that the countries owned and rolled out the implementation.

Winning the support of the senior management team for the integration strategy and taking an active role in the internal communication process was an important first step. This was sought through a conference designed to involve and inspire the top 220 managers. This was the first time that the new company had been brought together, and the research helped to shape the messages, format and content of the conference. The Management Board played an important role by presenting a united front, and hosting workshops that created an opportunity for discussion about company strategy.

Conference delegates were given a "cascade pack" summarizing the content of the conference, which many used to run mini-versions of the conference for their country management teams. The management conference was followed by a global communicators' conference targeted at the people responsible for rolling out the communication program. Forty communication leaders from across the global business were invited to learn about internal and external communication strategy, the new brand, and their role in the internal launch. This was one of the first steps in developing the Communicators' Network. This was followed by a later conference for the largest countries.

A regular (every six weeks) integration newsletter distributed to managers locally supported these activities. The newsletter was designed to keep managers informed about the progress of integration activities, and they in turn were encouraged to discuss this news with their teams. The last newsletter was distributed on the completion of the external brand launch.

Countries were supplied with the first communication pack outlining the vision and strategies to achieve it (this was also used by managers to present to their teams).

3. Building the brand internally

The third phase sought to increase pride and confidence in Getronics among all employees, particularly as research had indicated low morale across the business. This entailed creating a sense of being part of one company, united behind a common brand. The new branding exercise provided a focus for energizing and re-motivating people.

First, it was necessary to create awareness of why brands are important, and why Getronics needed a new brand. Then people needed to understand what the new brand would be, why it was chosen, and the behaviors necessary to support the new brand values. This was done using a special cascade pack and through the management cascade process developed during the integration phase. Finally, during the external brand launch week in January 2000, screen savers and posters reflecting the new advertising were distributed, along with an employee brochure giving a definitive view of Getronics. The brochure – which was printed in six languages – summarized the business vision and strategy, the role of the brand, and the need for everyone to contribute.

4. Developing an ongoing internal communication strategy and framework

As a result of its fresh acquisitions, Getronics was in a sense a new company, with few common practices or processes globally. Therefore, in order to implement the program elements, it was necessary to put in place some rudimentary communication processes. These included a central database of all communication contacts, regular updates by e-mail and conference calls, communication cascade guidelines, and communication guidelines (an intranet site with corporate background material is also being developed).

Alongside these initiatives, an internal communication strategy was developed that would help support the new corporate communications director joining Getronics in January 2000. This was based on an evaluation of the communication practices in the acquired companies compared with Getronics, recommendations on best practice for the company as a whole, development of an internal communication strategy, and suggestions for an ongoing measurement process. This strategy q b will be developed and implemented later this year.

Implementation and challenges

The main priorities while implementing the program were to:

- build the internal communication structure from scratch;
- support changing management communication styles to include more face-to-face communication;
- reach a new global audience (where were they and who were they?);
- accommodate linguistic and cultural differences;
- limit timescales to make an impact;
- research, develop and roll out the various program elements in only four months to win employee support for the new brand, launched in January 2000.

Banner McBride conducted thorough research before starting the program, and worked closely with senior managers and the communication team to identify issues which might hinder the implementation. Following the research, the program was developed and coordinated centrally by a core Banner McBride team of three working closely with the client project team. But, due to the tight timescales, the need for local sensitivity and ownership (plus the sheer numbers of people who needed to be reached), local implementation of the program relied on communication contacts within each business unit or country. The communicators in each country were responsible for managing the internal roll out of the new brand. They oversaw the distribution of the cascade packs and brochures, ran events during the external brand launch week in January and feedback to the corporate team on progress and needs. Many countries also used the material to run conferences, road shows, launch meetings and other special events to communicate with their people. This meant that local management owned the communication within their country, tailored it to local needs and were seen to lead the integration process. Also, the support of the senior management team was secured by involving them in the research process.

Measuring and evaluating project success

While Getronics did not wish to set quantitative targets, several indicators were used to track the success of the program against the objectives set:

- achievement of project milestones;
- performance against budget;
- internal message consistency compared with external message consistency;
- management involvement in communication;
- formal reports via e-mail and conference calls on progress in countries;
- evaluation following the management and communicators' conferences.

Against these indicators, deadlines were met, material was distributed effectively, the budget was adhered to, and there was consistency in all communication. There was also a marked increase in face-to-face communication across the Getronics business. Feedback so far from the communicators' network and employees strongly indicates that managers are communicating with their teams more frequently and effectively.

The effectiveness of program elements was also measured. The post-conference questionnaire for delegates indicated that 89 percent understood the business vision, and 97 percent the financial strategy. In addition, a "dipstick" qualitative survey of employee awareness of the new brand and associated messages was conducted in March 2000 – some six weeks after the external launch of the brand.

The feedback is still coming in on reports from country communicators on the success of the roll out, but comments suggest that people have greater pride and confidence, and there's a sense of excitement about the brand. And it's just this sense of involvement that the integration program needs in order to succeed. SCM

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