

## Microsoft India: Be Future Ready

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This case study explains how Microsoft, the computer software and technology giant, used LinkedIn, the professional social networking platform, in a business to business campaign in India.

- The target group included opinion leaders, influencers and technology enthusiasts, and the aim was to shape their opinion towards Microsoft and help them capitalise on current trends.
- The campaign's success resulted in Microsoft receiving an increase in product recommendations and votes on product features, and 2.5 times higher engagement on targeted status updates for Microsoft's company page, when compared to the competition.

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### Campaign details

**Brand owner:** Microsoft Corporation

**Agency:** Reprise Media, Lodestar UM and LinkedIn

**Brand:** Microsoft India

**Country:** India

### Executive summary

This case study demonstrates how Microsoft set out to reflect the vast changes that had taken place in both the marketplace and industry in India, and urged their customers to 'Be Future Ready'. Their audience included opinion leaders, influencers and technology enthusiasts in the new environment, and the aim was to shape their opinion towards Microsoft and help them capitalise on current trends. The campaign's success resulted in Microsoft receiving a highly insightful increase in product recommendations and votes on product features, and x2.5 higher engagement on targeted status updates for Microsoft's company page, when compared to the competition.

Microsoft itself was in the process of transforming from being a software company into being a devices and services company, and this campaign aimed to engage with key stakeholders and reach out to a larger audience.

Microsoft's long-term partnership with India goes back to 1990, when they first set-up operations in the country. They have since been working closely with the government, the IT industries, academia and the local-developer community to partner in India's growth. The areas focused on were:

- Being a key IT partner to the Indian government and local IT industries
- Enhancing India's inclusive development
- Delighting users with transformative experiences.

However, the market and industry scenario has transformed significantly from 1990 to 2013. Recent trends have provided greater leverage to customers in their buying decisions and led to a shift towards customer-centricity.

Also, unlike a decade ago, enterprise technology decisions are no longer the prerogative of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) alone. They are influenced by several stakeholders and driven by various factors. Technology decisions are now increasingly being made while keeping the business implications very much in mind.

## **Market background and business objectives**

### **Evolving role of technology decision-makers**

The global IT landscape has evolved considerably in the last few years, and India is no exception. These changes mean that the role of technology decision-makers (ITDMs) and the factors that need to be taken into account for making technology decisions in an organisation have also changed.

Technology for technology's sake is no longer the norm. The CIO/CTO needs to don the hat of a business decision-maker and look at the business implications of any technology decision, as they will have a direct impact on the business and profitability of the company.

### **Key IT trends impacting technology decision-making**

- Role of CIO/CTO is changing
- Business implications are dictating technology decisions in an organisation
- SMBs in India are driving the growth in the adoption of new technologies
- Technology decisions are being influenced by different stakeholders

In fact, in many cases technology decisions are no longer their prerogative alone; they are increasingly the responsibility of business decision-makers within the company. This trend was signalled in a Gartner Group study, which found that Chief Financial Officers alone authorised a whopping 26% of all IT-spending decisions in their organisations, as opposed to just 5% by CIOs.

A related but more recent Gartner study also predicted that by 2017, Chief Marketing Officers would outspend CIOs on information technology. This change has particularly been brought about because of the recent economic downturn, with technology investments impacting businesses in a huge way.

### **SMBs in India are driving greater adoption of new technologies**

The SMB segment in India is growing at a fast pace, and is looking at adopting new OPEX-based/cloud technologies to grow their business. According to a recent study by Zinnov, the cloud computing market in India is estimated at around US\$400m and expected to reach US\$4.5bn by 2015. SMEs, being the backbone of the Indian economy, are likely to drive that growth.

With a pincer-like grip on managing margins and increasing ROIs, SMB owners juggle many different roles, from being a CEO to being a CIO/CTO to being a CFO. Technology decisions are truly tested by their direct impact on the profitability for a business.

### **Technology decisions are now being influenced by employees at all levels**

However, it's not only the 'C-suite' taking the technology decisions, they are also being influenced by the IT managers and other employees in an organisation. With the 'anytime, anywhere' work trend gaining prominence, employees at many different levels are playing a key role in guiding their organisations over which technologies can help them work better and increase their productivity. Often these influencers are users of such technology themselves, and they will have a strong opinion on the latest products and solutions.

Hence, there are a large number of audiences guiding technology decision-making in an organisation. It is therefore important for any technology company to educate these audiences about the new technologies that can impact their businesses, and influence their work and personal lives.

### **It is imperative for a technology company to reach out and engage with all technology enthusiasts**

In such a transforming landscape, the Microsoft Corporation in India wanted to be amongst the first technology companies to engage and empower CIOs and IT managers beyond the IT vendor relationship. Microsoft as an organisation has realised IT is becoming a commodity and, as such, CIOs don't need to invest much time in it. Rather, they are focusing more on the business dynamics emanating from IT.

Microsoft sought one common platform to reach out to all their stakeholders/audiences (SMBs as well as enterprises, business and technology decision-makers) and converse with them in order to crowd-source opinions, understand their business requirements, and update them on the latest trends in the IT industry and new technology solutions that can address their business needs.

LinkedIn was chosen as the primary engagement platform, and a social campaign called 'Be Future Ready' was launched.

### **Microsoft's 'Be Future Ready' would:**

- Be driven by strong business objectives
- Underline Microsoft's positioning as a thought leader in the IT industry in India
- Build awareness around topical trends and upcoming technologies, and deliver strong business knowledge
- Activate CIOs, SMBs and IT managers to adopt modern technologies and drive business growth
- Create a group of senior IT professionals, who would look to Microsoft to come up with ideas and innovative IT solutions that could transform their business

As per the Microsoft estimate, the average business potential for a mid-sized company is close to US\$15,000. By that assumption, the cumulative business potential for Microsoft emanating from the 'Be Future Ready' group, comprising as it did of more than 3,000 organisations, stood close to US\$45m.

# Insight and strategic thinking

For IT decision-makers, information is key to staying ahead of the learning curve.

Today, technology is only a part of a CIO or IT manager's job portfolio. What is more important is for them to be updated on the latest technology practices, in order to come up with ideas and innovative strategies that could transform the business of their enterprise.

For IT decision-makers and people interested in technology, attaining information is the key ingredient to staying ahead of the learning curve. The more they converse and follow trends within their network, the more informed they would become and able to make better decisions.

We also realised that the networking audience operates like a tribe; they follow the activity going on within their community and are motivated by peer endorsements. Microsoft chose to adopt a conversational approach rather than a sales approach in order to interact with this audience.

Microsoft is transforming into a devices and services company, and hence is changing the way that it communicates with its stakeholders.

Given the ever-evolving IT industry landscape and the changed-market scenario, Microsoft was also changing their approach to doing business and addressing their customers' needs. From simply being a software company, Microsoft was now transforming itself into a devices and services' company.

Microsoft was now integrating mobility, social computing, big data and the cloud into its infrastructure, to drive business productivity and growth for its customers. Hence Microsoft has to cater to a wider set of audiences and change their communications' approach accordingly.

The question therefore, was how could Microsoft communicate its changed corporate philosophy and reach out to an audience that is eager to go beyond the technology and contribute to the overall decision-making process, to enhance the business of their company.

## **LinkedIn was the platform of choice to engage both the business decision-makers and the technology enthusiasts**

LinkedIn was the obvious platform of choice because of the immense credibility it has gained as an information and networking hub. In fact, LinkedIn today is the premier professional networking site, and every professional uses it to connect with like-minded professionals to further their professional network and career, and more importantly, to enhance their knowledge and information.

For Microsoft, LinkedIn's large subscriber base of IT professionals + SMB/MM professionals + IT influencers, across the country and across verticals, was especially attractive.

Microsoft saw the potential in LinkedIn to create a platform for industry professionals and CIOs to have conversations, and be able to spark thought-starters for the IT industry in India as a whole.

So Microsoft decided to create a community exclusively for tech enthusiasts and top decision-makers, including CIOs/CEOs, to join and discuss the latest trends and their application in the world of business.

The focus was on generating content that would arm decision-makers with insightful information that would future-proof their business. Thus the 'Be Future Ready' group came into being.

## Implementation, including creative and media development

The genesis of this social campaign lay in reaching out and ensuring that the information needed by individuals, those people shaping opinions and making business decisions within the company as well as in the industry, was communicated in order to spark discussion, conversation and debate. 'Be Future Ready' was then launched as a holistic platform that integrated the most powerful solutions that LinkedIn had to offer.

Firstly, it was a closed custom group, which meant that people with the requisite profile could only join via invitation. The profile of the group needed to be such that the quality of participation and conversations were of a very high standard.

Secondly, the involvement of Microsoft management was seamless. From the administrative standpoint of granting a right of access to a member of the custom group, to Microsoft's leadership participating in conversations and unveiling the latest Microsoft technology exclusively on the platform, their close involvement lent a strong, credible value to the entire social campaign.

Finally, some of the best LinkedIn solutions were deployed as part of the ongoing marketing muscle to generate publicity for the group. In fact, powerful solutions like SlideShare Content Ads and Reco-Builder were first introduced in India by LinkedIn for 'Be Future Ready'.

**Let us go through the specific media and content approach for 'Be Future Ready' in detail:**

### Generating awareness

The first task was to raise awareness about the 'Be Future Ready' platform. Several innovative LinkedIn tools were leveraged, most of which were tried for the first time in the industry.

Special content modules were developed, to interest the target audience in joining the group and participating in conversations.

A special application, 'The Reco-Builder' was created to simplify the process of recommendation on LinkedIn for the target segment. This app was popularised on the newsfeed of the target group.

Paid media tactics such as Roadblocks, sponsored ads and polls were used to increase reach and generate buzz.

### Building the community

The initiatives undertaken in the first phase helped us drive significant awareness and garner a decent number of followers. The second most important task was to build the community for the 'Be Future Ready' group, as well as to increase the company page followers.

A follower recruitment programme for the Microsoft Company India Page was launched. This helped us reach a larger IT-related audience base through organic spread.

There were several 'firsts' in this campaign, not just for Microsoft but for LinkedIn as well.

The Reco-Builder and SlideShare Content Ads were two industry first initiatives that were launched to reach out

to the target audience in the most interactive and responsive manner possible.

## Driving consideration and preference

Content was critical in this campaign. We intermeshed interesting content plugs with that of the LinkedIn platform, as well as some of their most innovative media tools. We instantly received attention.

The viral nature of the platform allowed discussion/comments/updates on the group and company page to gain amplification and momentum, reaching out to larger audiences and generating their participation. Constantly innovating on content, and focusing on themes that would be of immense interest to the target group helped drive consideration and preference for Microsoft solutions. The quality of engagements Microsoft had with the members of the 'Be Future Ready' group was testimony to this.

Focus areas of discussion on the 'Be Future Ready' platform included:

- New trends in the industry - cloud/BYOD/data security/IT restructuring
- New products and solutions
- Recommendations on starting a business/running a business effectively.

## Driving advocacy

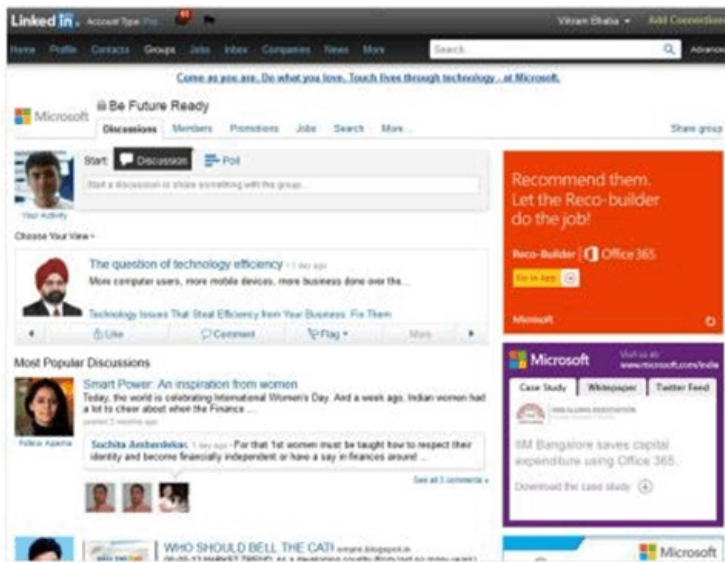
The achievement of this campaign could be measured in the number of brand advocates it helped us generate. Several members used the Reco- Builder application to recommend Microsoft solutions to their counterparts.

Today Microsoft is not just a leader in technology innovation, but also a leader in shaping business conversations on technology. The 'One Microsoft' initiative has set a new benchmark in B2B marketing and also set a trend.

Snapshot of SlideShare Content Ad



Snapshot of Reco-BUILDER



## Social effects

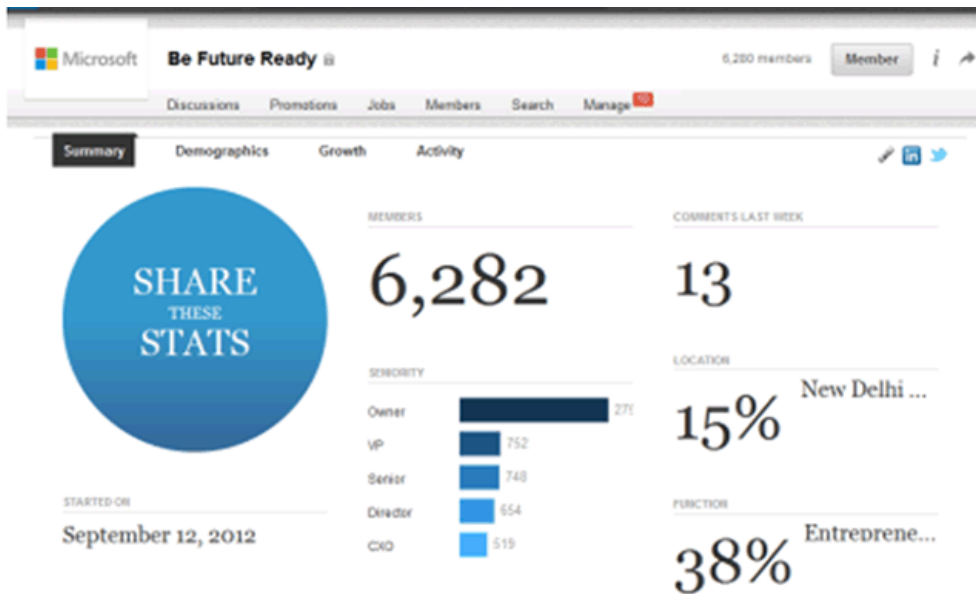
Microsoft has grown a strong, credible, influential community through 'Be Future Ready':

- 'Be Future Ready' group membership stands at 6,282 selected professionals, with a growth rate of 750% week-over-week

- Over one-third of group members are opinion leaders on LinkedIn, and influencers across the platform and their professional networks
- Of the followers, 38% are entrepreneurs
- Over 3,600 group members are IT decision-makers or SMB/MM
- It has x4.5 more monthly visitors compared to other groups with a similar tenure and geographical representation.

(Source: LinkedIn group analytics and LinkedIn brand study)

## Snapshots of conversation



Like any community, a LinkedIn group might be close-knit or vast, brand new or already thriving. Explore this group to see if it's right for you.



## Microsoft also reached out to the relevant audience amongst company page followers

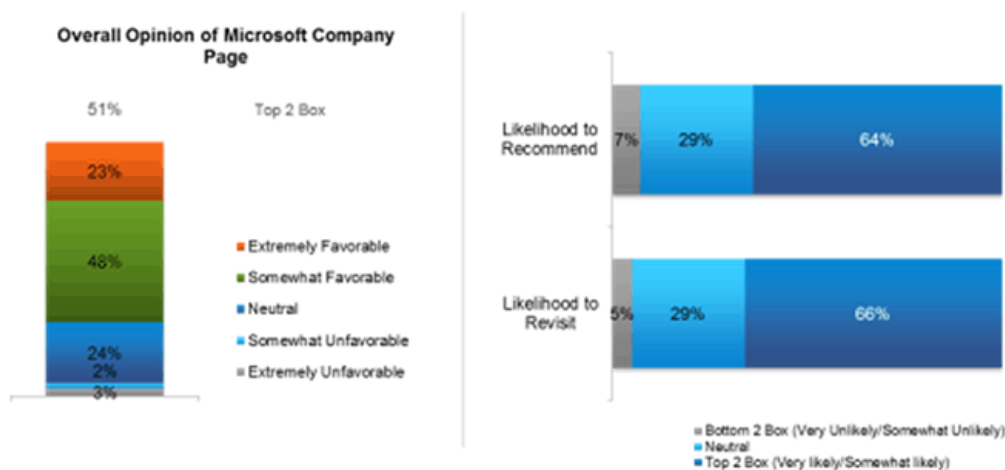
Microsoft's endeavour was to reach out to a larger audience of opinion leaders, influencers and technology enthusiasts. Hence, in addition to engaging with the senior professionals in the 'Be Future Ready' group, Microsoft also wanted to increase engagement with the larger audience of technology enthusiasts on Microsoft's company page.



Microsoft's company page was simultaneously created along with the 'Be Future Ready' group platform. Over a period of 1.5 years, it has reached a follower base of 71,000 with a high organic growth rate. Compared to the competition, there is x2.5 higher engagement on targeted status updates for Microsoft's company page. Relevant company page followers were also invited to be members of the 'Be Future Ready' group. They, in turn, served as brand advocates for the larger audience on the company page.

According to a LinkedIn survey, the overall campaign led to an increased affinity of Microsoft followers with the brand. Most of them had a favourable opinion of the company page and expressed their intent to revisit it, as well as recommend the page to their peer community.

## High recommendation and revisit intent/affinity with Microsoft



## Business effects

- The entire campaign had a positive effect on the business. Microsoft received a highly insightful 800+ product recommendations and 1,600+ votes on product features.
- As per a follower impact brand insights' survey, Microsoft followers have increased familiarity, likelihood to recommend and likelihood to purchase:

## Microsoft Followers have increased familiarity, likelihood to recommend and likelihood to purchase



(Source: LinkedIn group analytics and LinkedIn brand study)

## Lessons learned

This campaign continues to present several opportunities for new learning.

### **Social media is about conversations and shaping opinion**

In today's scenario, companies are not only competing for products and solutions, but also for mindset. Microsoft is already a leader in the IT industry, but it was important to maintain a positive mindshare amongst its various audiences to maintain a healthy business-growth momentum.

The biggest learning for Microsoft was in 'content' and 'tone of content'. Microsoft realised that being the largest IT company in the world, they were viewed as an expert. This actually made it slightly difficult for them to converse with the wider set of target audiences without sounding condescending.

We learnt that it is incorrect to 'push' one's perspectives, ideas or products in the social media space. This does not generate any interest amongst the audience, even if what is being said is relevant to them.

The right approach in the social media space is to initiate conversations, then to try and shape opinion by providing a holistic perspective to the target group on any subject, thereby allowing them to express their own opinion, make their own choices and take their own decisions. In other words, the role of the thought-leader has to be that of a guide.

### **Social media is also about generating ideas through conversations, rather than just networking for business benefits**

Today, social media is increasingly being used as a tool for sharing experiences, learning from each other's experiences and generating path-breaking ideas for driving business growth. The 'Be Future Ready' platform provided great testimony of this. As a leader in the IT segment, Microsoft learnt to guide the conversations in the right manner so as to help community members gain the most from the discussions.

### **Other learnings**

Compared to groups with a similar tenure and geographical representation, Be Future Ready has an above-average growth and visitor rate, but the engagement rate could be bettered.

Content needs to be monitored therefore, and steered in a certain direction for which it is imperative to have complete domain expertise.

Aspirational, thought-provoking questions generated the highest levels of engagement over the year.

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