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Case Study: Symantec
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CIS410-02

Summary

Mission Statement

Symantec's mission is to provide the best possible software products aimed at simplifying information management, productivity, and the software development needs (Cash). The organization was very proud of the fact they did not miss deadlines and release dates, essentially cornering the market for their respective products.

Background

Symantec was founded in 1982 by Gary Hendrix who specialized in artificial intelligence and language processing. Soon after, Symantec would merge with C&E Software under the new name Symantec Corporation. As the company grew with sales, they also grew by acquiring different companies. In 1987 alone, they acquired three large companies that would later be used as separate main offices for the organization: Breakthrough Software, Living Videotext, and Think Technologies. All organizations were stationed in either different cities in California or on the other side of the continent. After acquisition, they stayed in their respective locations (Cash). This process of gaining acquisitions would continue and shortly after, an executive staff member would be sent to the new location to "facilitate the transition and assess the performance of its managers".

Problem

The main problem facing Symantec Corporation was that communication and the flow of information between divisional groups was shoddy at best, and non-existent in some cases. Given that they were divisional, it also meant they focused on differentiation in their product

(Morgan). Engineers wanted to know more from customers what they liked and/or disliked about their products, but the information flowed through sales representatives who did not disclose enough feedback (not withholding purposefully) (Cash). Product groups did not enjoy or were not used to sharing information outside of their group or to a parent organization. Thus, a friable and volatile communication system was born out of avoidance from inception after acquisitions.

Communication and information flow was not so much an issue when the company was just Symantec, an organization of 30 individuals located at a single main headquarters. However, since it has well over 300 people employed, it becomes a lot more difficult to manage who said what. Not only that, but Symantec Corporation's products "were marketed in 23 foreign countries through 41 independent distributors" (Cash). So not only did they have to worry about information coming in from the organizations based out of the United States, they also had to deal with many distributors and customers in foreign countries.

Industry Competitive Analysis

Industry Rivals

High: There are many other organizations that create software very similar to Symantec Corporation's. Symantec must keep their prices set to what the market dictates or customers will go elsewhere.

Threat of Substitutes

High: Symantec does not develop unique products and some products can be substituted for less value or free of charge completely. This was also around the time when free, open-sourced software started popping up.

Threat of New Entrants

High: Loosely summarizing a professor at the University of Louisville, 2018: “anyone with a computer can write a software program.” If this is true, then the threat of new entrants should be high. Software can be written by anyone, and organizations could easily enter the market as a competitor.

Bargaining Power of Suppliers

Low: Symantec may have products like other companies, but what they offer in their product differentiates them from competitors. Moreover, most of the suppliers depend heavily on the business of a large and software giant like Symantec to stay afloat. It would be too costly to lose Symantec.

Bargaining Power of Customers

Low: There is not much that Symantec can do about the price of their product. It is mostly set by the market and as such should be priced correctly to stay competitive in the market. Customers don’t have much say in how the prices are set.

Stakeholders

Symantec Employees: All employees of all separate acquisition groups, including management.

Executives: All VP and C level individuals of Symantec.

Shareholders: Anyone invested financially in Symantec as a publicly traded organization. First went public in June of 1989 (Symantec Investor Website).

End-Users: Those who use products that Symantec develops.

Customers: Distributors of Symantec products to the end-users.

Alternatives

Do Nothing: If the organization does nothing, the current MIS system will stay in place and communication tools stays unchanged. Growth may be hindered in the future but profits should continue to rise, given that products are still being developed.

Change Structural Component: This would be an overhaul in how the company communicates, specifically how distinct groups communicate with each other. Bob Dykes believed in companywide communications that started with management, and Kathy Johnson stated that the organization “needed to institutionalize a unified corporate philosophy that emphasized communications and to establish a policy whereby managers were expected to communicate that philosophy to newly hired employees.” What Kathy suggests is the premise behind “Apes Demonstrate Facts About Humanity”.

Hire New MIS Director: Hiring a new director to come in has the potential to bring a fresh mind that could solve the current issue they face: they do not have any type of leadership in the MIS department. New leadership in MIS could find ways to work with the current MIS system to solve the company’s communication problems.

Purchase New IT System: Get a completely new system that would satisfy the needs of 90% of the organizational needs (nothing satisfies all). Potential to eliminate communication problems and network failures. Also, helps accounting and purchasing. Most employees now if they need supplies go outside the company to purchase their own material and expense it later. This adds extra work to accounting. The new system would eliminate this.

Recommendation

My recommendation would be to change the structural component of the organization.

Currently, they have no set standards for communication, ticketing, purchasing, and production. One employee has stated “We’ve been using e-mail for quite a few years now, and I can’t imagine surviving without it. We check it constantly” (Cash). Rethinking this idea would be very cost effective, would take very little time to implement, and gives the employees a chance to provide feedback directly to the executives. Whether it be to allow for daily, weekly, and monthly standing meetings in and between different organizational groups, or having all communications documented in some way, something must be set. New employees would be hired on knowing exactly how information should be communicated.

Sources:

Management of Information Systems CIS410-02 Cash – Gray's Books

Morgan, Gareth. Images of organization. Sage Publications, 2006.

"Investor Alert Subscription." Symantec Corporation - About - Investor Relations - Investor Resources - FAQs, investor.symantec.com/About/Investors/Investor-Resources/FAQs/default.aspx.
(Symantec Investor Website)

Apes Demonstrate Basic Facts about Humanity. Reading 1