



How Siemens and R/GA redefined employer branding

By Nicola Kemp

If employees are the business world's greatest untapped marketing resource, then a new approach to employee engagement and recruitment, crafted by Siemens and R/GA, is evidence of their power. Against a backdrop of increasing transparency, and as Glassdoor threatens to do to the recruitment industry what TripAdvisor did to travel, the pair unlocked the communications potential of 351,000 employees to spark a new global conversation.

While many are aware of the Siemens name, some consumers and potential employees might struggle to define what it does. The company is in the midst of a seismic transformation: moving from being a "maker of machines" to a digital business. This shift means ensuring that it has the right people in place is crucial. Talent, rather than capital, then, is the company's scarce resource.

In February 2016, Siemens hired R/GA to tackle this challenge, and the change programme started just weeks later.

The problem: an intense competition for talent

Two decades ago, McKinsey researchers declared that a "war for talent" was brewing; arguing that talent, rather than technology, would be the most important corporate resource over the next 20 years.

According to the McKinsey report: "In the new economy, competition is global, capital is abundant, ideas are developed quickly and cheaply, and people are willing to change jobs often. In that kind of environment all that matters is talent. Talent wins."

Separately, R/GA had identified a skills gap within STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths), which put companies fighting for those skills on the frontline of that talent war. It

is a conflict with which Siemens is familiar across every geography and industry. From Silicon Valley and the automotive industry to aerospace, and from Latin America to the Middle East and North Africa region.

This problem comes as brands are turning to more creative ways to attract and retain talent. These include flagging up unique employee benefits, investing in non-traditional recruitment campaigns and setting out a powerful vision and purpose for the company.

The problem of attracting talent has been compounded by maverick business leaders such as Elon Musk, whose SpaceX project recently made history by landing a rocket at sea. Such projects leave more traditional corporates appearing boring, overly hierarchical and risk-averse.

The insight: what is it really like to work at Siemens?

The R/GA team crunched the data from an extensive global research project Siemens had undertaken with employer branding consultancy Universum.

Alongside this, the team spent time interviewing a broad selection of Siemens employees, including engineers, business professionals and students, across seven key markets – the UK, Germany, India, China, the Middle East, the US and Brazil.

According to R/GA, regardless of the location, each person had a passion and unique expertise. The agency was struck by the fact that these employees were working on projects that made a real difference to society. Siemens was tackling the same problems its competitors were: the future of transport, smart cities, digital factories and sustainable power generation. However, Siemens was not shouting as loudly about it.

The research identified three key opportunities:

- There are very few companies with such a large, diverse and international workforce.
- There are very few companies doing such critical work (such as automating cities and transport networks) across industries.
- There were 351,000 people who were already "building the future" at Siemens, but their story had not been shared.

The challenge: the power of engagement – building authentic conversations at scale

To bridge this communication gap, R/GA sought to create a strategy to "inspire and empower employees to spark a global conversation about the future of engineering and what it takes to get there". In this way, every single employee would be shaping the Siemens employee brand, every single day.

For Andrew Lam-Po-Tang, R/GA's executive director of consulting, this approach reflects a sea change in employee engagement. "In the past, companies relied on an external company to carry out employee feedback once a year. Now, continual feedback is crucial," he says. This is why Siemens started with the concept of "conversation". "To have a profound effect on company culture, you have to be real," he adds.

However, with 351,000 employees, Siemens' biggest asset was its biggest challenge. Faced with this vast number, how could the campaign reach them all and channel their voices?

R/GA contended that Siemens' employees, spread as they are across markets and industries, were not connected to a shared purpose. As such, they were focused on the day to day and not what the company was making possible on a global scale. It was a situation that made connecting what they were doing to bigger conversations a key challenge. ›

The project also faced a significant communications challenge: namely the fact there is a “humble, private and closed culture” at Siemens. Here was an organisation simply not used to shouting about what it does; a common stumbling block when it comes to employee engagement. In essence, the business was too busy getting on with the task in hand to find time to highlight its employer brand, meaning there was a genuine concern over its ability to communicate. As one Siemens executive quipped: “We don’t even talk to each other about what we do.”

The solution: a cultural shift

It was clear that the answer would not be an individual campaign. Instead, R/GA set about creating a suite of tools to help spark a cultural change both inside and out.

The project commenced with a new brand identity and social campaign to communicate the strategy to employees and connect them to the shared vision.

The Siemens brand is strong, but it was built for B2B, to reassure corporate clients. R/GA recognised it needed to create a warmer, open side to the master brand. So, to give more space for employees to own a part of it, a more human view of Siemens was required.

Beyond marketing: breaking down the silos

Bringing the strategy to life within Siemens meant that the team had to look beyond the traditional corporate silos.

Many of the people needed to drive the strategy were not marketers. R/GA designed and ran training sessions with human resources, talent acquisition and recruitment marketing teams, alongside their local corporate communication teams. The project connected teams that previously had never worked together.

To supercharge this collaborative culture, the campaign also built ambassador programmes to train individual employees on how to find and share their voices, as well as building their online profiles.

Breaking corporate fatigue: ‘We are future makers’ 360 campaign

The team identified that there was employee fatigue over carefully crafted corporate messages, vision statements, empowerment programmes and existing internal channels, which were poorly used or extremely crowded.

With this in mind, it recognised it needed to carve out a new, authentic approach to cut through the clutter. The result was the Siemens “We are future makers” 360 content series. To kick-start the conversations, R/GA built a video

55%

Month-on-month increase in visits to JIBE – the Siemens jobs portal (July 2017)

462%

Increase in unique visitors to the Siemens Jobs & Careers website (August 2016/August 2017)

67%

Increase in average time spent on the Siemens Jobs & Careers website (August 2016/August 2017)

24,000+

Downloads of the 360 app and films in China and India (May-July 2017)

Source: Siemens, R/GA

channel that transports Siemens’ employees from their own workspaces into someone else’s world at the company.

The series documented the stories of people at Siemens “making the future” in India, China, the US and the UK. About 300,000 branded cardboard viewers were distributed to employees as an open invitation to explore Siemens, the company they worked for.

R/GA also created a dedicated app, which was designed to act as a central window into the company and a channel for inspiration and discussion.

This “conversation publishing engine” connects conversations across the Siemens network, and communicates them to talent in the market. According to the agency, by using the depth of data available on what talent is looking for, they are able to tailor conversations to each audience. This flexible editorial model allows the specific requirements of each market to be met. Moreover, the team is constantly experimenting with prototyping technology solutions that can help to scale these conversations.

The results: from communications to cultural change

From a top-down, corporate-broadcast culture to an employee-led discussion, this new approach unlocked Siemens’ potential to attract, retain and grow the best talent. By showcasing a warmer, more approachable and open side to the business, the brand could highlight employees learning new skills. Through these employees Siemens was able to build a new culture of conversations.

Rosa Riera, vice-president employer branding and social innovation at Siemens, says that the work has underlined the importance of telling stories that people can relate to. “We are a global company, but we have leaned on local employees and filmed different films for each region,” she adds. “People need to see themselves to really connect with the story.”

Developing a concept that gave local markets plenty of freedom has been key to creating what Riera describes as a “global movement”. It also delivered its own sense of meaning to Riera.

Launching the campaign in India, where Siemens used workers from a local factory in posters, she describes being moved by the words of a colleague who said he could not believe that he was part of something like this. “It reminded me that what we do really means something,” she says.

This is only the first step. R/GA is continuing to work with Siemens to rethink the entire employee experience from the inside out to make it fit for the future. •