Inconvenient Truths

Five defining 'soft' signs of our times and a call for Indian IT to lead the way.

The fortune cookie

Some things are really worth noting - although you don't see them in your book of accounts!

In March this year I had the opportunity of addressing the CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) meet in Coimbatore and was pleasantly surprised by the initiatives of the Tamilnadu government in creating state-of-the-art IT infrastructure across the state. While the government is doing its bit by providing the superstructure, entrepreneurs and technology ventures are trying to understand how to leverage this to create enterprises of the future. One of the topics I highlighted was the need for technology professionals to position themselves as global thought leaders and follow it up by effectively presenting ideas and content in a manner that international customers relate to.

In this article I make a departure from the nuts and bolts of IT and attempt to highlight some 'soft' signs that have gone unnoticed, since they do not qualify as 'accounting' measurements.

Sign #1: Context has dethroned content.

We have a new king. Context will reign supreme for the next few decades. Globalisation has exposed challenges in terms of cultural diversity, communication dynamics, language differences, and opened out new fields of research, study and training to address contextual needs. Content ceases to be the driver of 'how-to-do-business-today'. What this implies is that there will be a need to develop context experts who can define the solution for the technology people to implement.

A new breed of professionals is emerging. These will be people who have varied interests; who will gain combined knowledge and will be able to define the 'what' part of the solution brief.

Sign #2: Presentation has mattered.

Image is important. That's why so many millions are spent on advertising. Consumers 'trust' a brand that they can relate to. Many of the presentations made by Indian professionals simply have content put together without a heed to structure, flow or aesthetics. It does not seem to matter that the fonts are inconsistent or the graphics are of poor quality. Presentation is the other half of a good experience. The US does quite the opposite. I call them the presentation economy of the world.

Sign #3: Communication has started to mean more than just language.

NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Services Companies) estimates a shortage of 500,000 IT professionals in India by the year 2010. This is ironical, as India churns out an impressive 14 million university graduates each year, and this number is likely to swell by 2.5 million more in the coming years. However the flip side is, not all of these are ready to 'hit the floor, running' or, in other words, are not employable by most multinational companies based in India. According to their assessment, only one out of four engineering graduates and one out of ten graduates in other disciplines are 'employable'. It is apparent that though India may lay claim to a ready workforce equipped with the required technical skills, it is still short of graduates with sound interpersonal and communication skills.

Sign #4: Human capital has become scarcer.

While we all understand what 'human' means, many of us do not quite grasp the true import of the word 'capital'. We still look at it as an accounting figure on the balance sheet and all we are willing to consider are the actual costs of people in an organisation—the cost to company. Well, human capital will become scarce as long as we see human beings as an alternative to machines or even as operators of machines. The equation has flipped 180 degrees. The machine (computer) is nothing without the human being since it cannot produce anything on its own. Heart capital anyone?

Sign #5: Interdisciplinary professionals are ruling the roost.

The general physician is still the person that we go to for the first diagnosis. In the IT world, businesses started going directly to the surgeons–IT specialists. Not only does it sound foolish to seek an appointment with a neurosurgeon at the first hint of a headache, it is also an expensive proposition in every way. So why should IT be different. A new breed of professionals is emerging. These will be people who have varied interests; who will gain combined knowledge and will be able to define the 'what' part of the solution brief. I suspect several IT professionals have a headstart since they already know the nuts and bolts.

There are several other things happening that have defined the world as we see it today. Power has shifted to individuals all over the globe and businesses have started taking advantage of this. Time to soften up I guess. I just couldn't resist pointing out that Inconvenient Truths also has the same first letters as IT. **i.t.**

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Wanna go on a Web Safari?

Apple's Safari 3.1, which it claims is the world's fastest Web browser for Mac and Windows PCs, was recently launched. Safari 3.1 loads Web pages 1.9 times faster than IE 7, and 1.7 times faster than Firefox 2. Apart from this, it runs JavaScript up to six times faster than other browsers. Both Mac OS X and Windows users can download Safari 3.1 for free, from: www.apple.com/safari.