

## **#COOLESTINTERVIEWEVER: INSIDE THE WORLD'S FIRST END TO END RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN ON TWITTER**

*“Really? You can’t be serious!”* The one-line email response from the legal department did not surprise Naveen Narayanan, Head of Global Talent Management, at HCL (Hindustan Computers Limited) Technologies in the least. As he sat there in the Mumbai office, in the Fall of 2013, he was anticipating such, or more severe, reactions. After all, it is not every day that a company decides to be the first in the world to attempt an end-to-end recruitment campaign on Twitter.

The plan was not going to be easy to execute but Narayanan knew that if HCL had to compete with all the new-age companies for world-class talent, they had to make an impression on the digital world that no one would forget in a hurry. With much excitement and nervousness, Narayanan sat at his desk and started to plot out the specifics.

The plan to hire a consultant exclusively on Twitter in a three-week time period was innovative and ambitious. At the same time, it carried immense risks. Apart from the possibility of the campaign failing in a very open forum and the resulting public relations nightmare, there were many procedural hurdles to overcome. The legal ramifications, the technology, the choice of roles and the protocols for risk management would all have to be in place for the exercise to have any shot at success. Recruiting in the 140-character world of Twitter would be a whole new territory.

### **HCL Technologies**

Founded in 1976 by Shiv Nadar, the company was one of India's original information technology (“IT”) garage start-ups. Under Nadar’s leadership, HCL revolutionised Indian technology and product innovation with many world firsts to its credit: HCL created the world’s first 8-bit microprocessor-based computer in 1978, the world’s first relational database management system in 1983, the world’s first client-server architecture in 1984, the world’s first fine-grained multi-processor UNIX installation in 1989, among others.

HCL Technologies, which was a spin-off from HCL’s R&D unit in 1998, is currently a top IT services company in India and a global leader in engineering and R&D services. Headquartered in Noida, it was debuted on the stock market in the year 2000. It was a US\$5.2 billion global company as on 31st March 2014, and it is the fourth largest IT company in India. HCL Technologies brought IT and engineering services expertise under one roof to solve complex business problems for its clients. Leveraging its extensive global offshore infrastructure and a network of offices in 31 countries, HCL provided holistic, multi-service delivery in industries such as financial services, manufacturing, consumer services, public services and healthcare.

The company saw its propositions as distinct from other IT service providers. The company called its offerings the “Alternative”, which offered full lifecycle coverage, from upfront

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strategy and consultancy to managed services. It also prided itself on management and transformation of organisational change to ensure benefits realization, localized delivery centres with in-depth subject matter expertise in numerous industries and creative commercial models that included risk transfer and benefits sharing. These products and services ensured clients received measurable impact from their IT investments.

### **Ideapreneurship: Employees First, Customers Second**

HCL Technologies prided itself on its “Employees First, Customers Second” (“EFCS”) beliefs. The company attributed its growth over the last five years to this approach, including its ability to stay afloat during the depth of the economic downturn which took place in early 2000. This approach, described in the book, “Employees First, Customers Second: Turning Conventional Management Upside Down”, which was published in 2010, had become a revolutionary idea in managing and motivating the workforce. The author, Vineet Nayar, the then Vice Chairman & Joint Managing Director of HCL Technologies wrote the book to tell the story of HCL’s transformational journey, as the company recognized the need for change and created a culture of trust through transparency and turned the organizational pyramid on its head. HCL had won many awards for being an employer of choice, such as one of the most democratic workplaces globally.

At the core, the philosophy shifted the responsibility of change from the CEO to employees. The approach was groundbreaking and was covered in a case published by the Harvard Business School, which received extensive coverage by media and analysts alike.<sup>1</sup> Based on this philosophy, the mission of HCL Technologies was stated as:

*We will be the employer of choice and the partner of choice by focusing on our stated values of Employees First, Trust, Transparency, Flexibility and Value Centricity.*

The EFCS belief had been the cornerstone of many initiatives related to building the company’s employer value proposition, employee engagement and innovative practices within HCL. More importantly, it had played a defining role in shaping the culture of the firm. The first version of EFCS (2005-2009) was seen as management driven and employee embraced. Its evolution into the second version of EFCS (2010 onwards) was termed as “ideapreneurship” — meaning a culture where employees not only ideated but also exhibited intrapreneurial behaviours of making their ideas come to fruition. Ideapreneurship, as a culture, was truly employee driven and management embraced. While in the first version of EFCS, there were employee councils that worked on strategizing and implementing the philosophy within the company; the next emphasis was on the ideapreneurship philosophy geared towards building this strategy into the very fabric of business itself. HCL aimed to treat its more than 90,190 employees as partners in finding innovative solutions to client needs.

In its quest to be further employee driven and management embraced, HCL formally named the approach as ideapreneurship, which was driven by the recognition that the future of work was likely to have flat work structures, a global workforce and greater connectivity. Ideapreneurship allowed HCL employees (now called ideapreneurs) to spontaneously come up with innovative solutions that would help solve a potential client or industry need. A cross-functional top management team reviewed these solutions. The promising ones would then be funded for the team to execute thoroughly.

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<sup>1</sup> Kamalini Ramdas and Ravindra Gajulapalli. HCL Technologies: Employee First, Customer Second. Harvard Business Review. 2005. <https://hbr.org/product/hcl-technologies-employee-first-customer-second/an/UV1085-PDF-ENG>, accessed November 2014.

At HCL, over 75,000 employees had undertaken the ideapreneurship assessment — a tool that had helped ideapreneurs identify their individual “ideapreneurial” profile. Ideapreneurship encouraged the adoption of tools and programmes that enabled different generations to work together and share knowledge so as to meet clients’ goals. To this end, HCL launched an internal social and professional networking site, MEME, in 2011, where all employees across the globe could connect, collaborate and share their thoughts and ideas. There were more than 74,205 employees and 687 groups active in MEME discussing a variety of topics. On an average, an HCLite visited this page twice a day. A distinguishing feature of the MEME was that the platform was self-regulatory, with no censorship from the management. The platform allowed employees to collaborate across hierarchies and boundaries. For instance, CEOs’ had used MEME to seek employee suggestions on topics that they could discuss in the World Economic Forum. They had used these suggestions and acknowledged the employees when they did so. MEME also fostered team bonding and affinity networking by allowing people with similar social interests to come together through virtual teams (music, dance, SQL team, etc.).

Other initiatives such as “Make a Difference, Lead the Difference” (“MAD LTD”), launched in 2010, aimed to foster social innovation by tapping into the entrepreneurial energy of Gen Y in colleges. Similarly, the “Power of One” programme enabled ideapreneurs across generations to engage in community service together. These initiatives were all aimed at building a culture that engaged with employees internally and externally. It allowed HCL to keep collaboration at the heart of its practices.

### **Talent acquisition at HCL**

*20 resumes sourced every minute, An offer made every 4 minutes, 45 interviews every hour, 11 joiners every hour, 1 in 4 joiners referred by employees, Over 94% satisfied new hires, Hiring across 24 countries, 30,000 Hires Every Year.*

*- Recruitment Dashboard, HCL, 2013*

Despite its multiple employee friendly initiatives, historically, HCL’s external customer-facing brand was not a leading one. In a market survey conducted in 2011, it was seen that HCL had the lowest recall and brand equity index amongst its peers. Despite the transformational work done internally by EFCS, it was still seen as a human resources policy and did not have a consistent meaning for external stakeholders.

A weak customer brand was a distinct disadvantage for a firm like HCL which operated during the global economic downturn. HCL, like other technology firms in the Indian subcontinent, was dependent on the businesses of “outsourcing” and “offshoring” from large global organizations. Given that a large portion of the revenue in the IT sector came from the US, the slowdown in its economy in 2013 had impacted the IT sector as well. HCL’s revenue unsurprisingly declined due to the low promotion rate and uncertainty.

Attracting talent was further complicated by the preferences of potential hires from elite global business schools, whose students preferred to work in banking, consulting and fast-moving consumer goods (“FMCG”) companies. IT services would be at the bottom of their target list. The challenge was compounded due to a large portion of the recruitment budget in HCL being used for sourcing, which in turn left little for employer brand building.

When reflecting on the tools available for the talent acquisition group to engage a larger pool of talent, Narayanan observed:

*Recruitment divisions need to realise that they need two types of recruiters: the hunters and the farmers. The hunters go out and get food on a daily basis; the farmers sow the seeds and tend the fields for the future. Social media allows us to do both and hence it has to be a central part of our strategy.*

The HCL talent acquisition group decided to tap into social media in an effort to increase its reach across talented job-seekers. An outcome of the ideapreneurship within HCL was the app called Start-app, which was launched in March 2013. It acted as a one-stop shop for the prospective hires on Facebook (a US based international social media site used by individuals to keep up with friends and family as well as follow pages of companies or products they like) to go through all the job openings in HCL and share or apply for the jobs. This was a new automated way for all employees, including recruiters and hiring managers, to dramatically increase the audience and reach passive candidates. HCL also had a career page on LinkedIn (a social media site used by recruiters and for individuals to display their professional profiles and to connect with other professionals around the world), which allowed HCL to take the employer brand message to the talent network and showcase their employee value proposition through customized experiences. On the LinkedIn's career page, jobs, company images, employee testimonials and more were shared to showcase the brand of HCL as an employer of choice.

### **Disrupting recruitment standards on Twitter**

Given that most companies had already started tapping into Facebook and LinkedIn for reaching out to the talent pool, the existing efforts were still not seen as enough to bolster the employer brand of HCL in a manner attractive enough to compete with the likes of Whatsapp and Facebook. Narayanan noted:

*We wanted to be the aspirational employer of choice when competing with such brands.*

Further, a strategy was needed to balance a global campaign along with being cost effective. In order to attract a younger generation who engaged with organizations online, a different strategy was required that would catapult HCL to the top of the mind recall position. Given that 47% of HCL employees were Gen Y, leveraging social media was going to be a core part of the strategy.

Narayanan reached out to Apurva Chamaria, Director and Head of Global Brand and Digital Marketing for HCL, to come up with a plan that would be both disruptive and viral in the world of IT recruitment. Narayanan knew Chamaria to be a man who believed that a person needed not only good intelligence quotient ("IQ") and emotional quotient ("EQ"), but also operational quotient ("OQ") or execution capability that allowed people to translate grand ideas into executable ones. This was exactly the kind of leadership that Narayanan was looking for in order to carry out a plan that would disrupt the recruitment standards of the industry.

Chamaria felt that HCL had to adopt a bold approach towards recruitment while sending a clear message to its potential employees about the culture of innovation and entrepreneurship that HCL wanted to nurture. The objectives of the recruitment campaign were to cut across markets, be relevant to Gen Y and create a "first in class" buzz. He said:

*I discussed this internally with my team and we agreed that this was an exciting opportunity to shatter the range bound list of activities which traditionally has been used in recruitment marketing. While it had attached risks, not taking a risk in an undifferentiated market was a bigger risk.*

There were a series of decisions to be made with regard to the choice of the social platform, the actual nature of the campaign, mechanisms to promote the campaign, the legal hurdles and the actual strategy given the limited funds. After studying the options and their own strengths, the team eventually chose Twitter. While an obvious point in favor was the 175,000+ followers the company already had on Twitter, there were also a few additional data points that swung the votes to Twitter:

- More than 500 thousands social job announcements were released each month.
- Reports showed that almost 40% of the job seekers used Twitter.
- More than 6 million people on Twitter were expected to change their jobs within the coming year.
- The 140-character limit on Twitter would make candidates respond more precisely and eloquently.

The channel had a favourable skew towards the industry: of the top 50 positions posted on Twitter, IT and sales comprised more than 24%. The platform was also mobile friendly, which was an added plus.

Both Chamaria and Narayanan were of the view that the metrics of success would have to be clearly defined in order for the campaign to carry credibility and to establish itself as a worthwhile initiative. Therefore, right at the start of the program, they defined a few measurable objectives:

- Reach across all 32 markets they operated in.
- Drive engagement of more than 200 thousand through this campaign across digital channels.
- Establish leadership position in terms of reach and engagement on Twitter vis-à-vis competition.
- Limit the campaign spend to the average annual salary of a fulltime employee.

Next, it's time to name this campaign. The suggestions on the table ranged from "the most transparent interview ever" or "hashtags" that would incorporate the meaning of trust or flexibility that aligned with the company values. Ultimately, the team decided to choose a word that would resonate with the lexicon of the Gen Y that they were hoping to attract, and that was how the hashtag #coolestinterviewever was born. While there were concerns about the character limit of the hashtag it was felt using an acronym would dilute the feeling that HCL wanted to associate with this interview.

The campaign of the coolest interview ever involved an end to end hiring of a candidate from a global talent pool for a one-year assignment. The search, interviews and shortlisting were to be done using the Twitter platform. Five roles would be on offer, one of which would be the winner with a twelve-month contract that carried a US\$25,000 one-time cash prize and US\$50,000 annual compensation.

### **Internal momentum**

*This campaign was going to throw all rules of conventional recruitment out of the window.*

*- Naveen Narayanan*

HCL was no stranger to social media, yet recruiting on Twitter was taking the engagement with social media to a whole new level. With no global precedence internally or externally, HCL would have to carve out a careful strategy for executing the campaign. Although everyone thought it was an interesting idea, many people within the firm were wary of social media and did not wish to sign off the document that would put the campaign under their charge. On one hand, the apprehension arose out of social media disaster stories that received prominent coverage in the media. On the other, there was a lack of understanding on how such a campaign would be executed. Chamaria noted:

*The legal department, for instance, had been trained to write vendor contracts for the real world and not for social media! The idea of the coolest interview ever pushed everyone out of their comfort zone. Yes, we needed a legal contract of some sort to mitigate our risks but the challenge, at the same time, was to not make it so complex that it would turn the predominantly Gen Y candidates away.*

Given the apprehension surrounding the campaign, it was decided that the team would create a document to capture all concerns and key ideas. This was to prevent any confusion arising from misinterpretation of plans or misinformation due to the fast-paced nature of the campaign. In this tracking document, all potential highlighted risks would be noted and a corresponding plan of risk management would also be created. This was to ensure that everyone was on the same page with regard to the key concern areas and that a response strategy was clearly available and documented.

One of the early concerns raised was the very public nature of the interview. This interview would depart from the norm in that people usually had interviews behind closed doors without their colleagues knowing. Recruitment on Twitter would be happening in an open forum where a candidate's boss or HR manager could be on the same platform. This could reduce the chances of the campaign being successful. Another concern lay around the public reaction of the people who did not get shortlisted or selected. These were the limitations of the platform and had likely been the reason that no one had ever attempted an open recruitment and interview process on Twitter before.

While these concerns were valid Narayanan felt that given the trailblazing nature of the campaign, ultimately there had to be a willingness to work with the pool of candidates that did come their way. Chamaria noted:

*We must also recognize the profile of the candidate pool we are dealing with. The potential pool of talent on Twitter is mostly Gen Y who value the attributes of honesty and transparency and those are values that we want our employer brand to personify as well. As long as we are open, fair and transparent about the process, we expect to weather any storms that might come in the way of this path breaking campaign.*

As for reactions from those who were not selected, the view taken was that HCL was open to such reactions even if a company was not recruiting directly on Twitter. At the same time, a crisis management team was put together, which would be available around the clock and seven days a week to respond to any major issues that might arise. This team would be cross-functional, including people from marketing, HR, finance, public relations, corporate communications and other groups on an as needed basis. The people who could be called upon to navigate the crisis at any given point in time were known to all. The exact composition of the team would depend on the situation that arose.

The senior leadership team at HCL was expected to actively participate in the campaign through tweet chats with the candidates. However, many were unfamiliar with the nuances of the platform. Some were apprehensive about not knowing what to say in the moment or saying something that could backfire. It was decided that the leadership team would be provided with

training on the functionalities of the platform. In case of any uncertainty, it was acceptable to note that the leadership team member in question would get back to the candidate on his/her query.

Given the global nature of the campaign, other raised concerns pertained to the language in which the campaign would be conducted as well as the inability to verify candidates' identities — whether the candidates tweeting were indeed who they said they were. In the digital era it was all too easy to fake identities online or post their tweets from a third party — HCL could end up interviewing individuals who might be underage. These were real considerations that had to be taken into account.

To tackle the identity issues, the team decided to conduct verification check and in-person interviews for the top-five candidates who were shortlisted, before a job offer was made. As a result, the risk of fraudulent identities could be brought down substantially.

The team also decided to conduct the campaign in multiple languages for which translators would be hired. HCL decided to leverage the social command centre that was started in 2012 and which operated around the clock. The social command centre was created with the aim of monitoring mentions of HCL and related activity on various social media sites. This ensured that responses from the HCL team was not limited by geography and the team could engage with candidates in multiple time zones around the clock.

The very public nature of this campaign would mean substantial coverage by the media and a decision on who would respond to media tweets had to be made? Chamaria noted:

*While we had a print and TV strategy for such scenarios, we did not have a digital one. In some ways the entire campaign was forcing us to see what the gaps were in the way we were ready to engage and lead in the digital era.*

HCL always had a group of people authorized to comment on behalf of the company. In the case of Coolest Interview Ever (CIE), however, the speed and real-time nature of the response that was required was different from the traditional response protocols that had been in place. Traditional media requests for information normally happened through emails. However, in the case of CIE, there was no luxury of time or regular protocols as the campaign was unfolding in real time. As a result, the external communications team facilitated responses to the media, in collaboration with the individuals authorized to comment on behalf of the company. The team tried mapping all possible risks and scenarios while recognizing the limitations of such plans when engaging with social media (refer to **Exhibit 1 & 2** for a snapshot of the risk tracker for the rules and conditions). Narayanan noted:

*We tried to plan for all possible scenarios while bearing in mind that one simply cannot prepare in advance for every single contingency. We go in with the best intentions, with a team ready to engage and our resources lined up. We are fair, transparent and flexible and ready to adapt and lead in the moment. That is just the nature of engagement on social media.*

## **Defining job roles**

The team realized that the job profiles would be the ones that commanded a lot of interest online. They did a detailed Google search volume analysis and social listening analysis on different domains in the IT sector, and identified five high search volume work profiles. Top jobs searched for by candidates were taken into account. The team also examined the comments made on job search sites as to the factors that made a job attractive to candidates. For instance,

apart from the popular digital roles, the majority of the candidates had noted that diversity and sustainability as corporate values made for an attractive employer. Hence, a decision was made to not just look at digital roles, but also roles that emphasized these values.

Five roles were created and given catchy titles so as to get the attention of candidates. Each role was then mapped on to five senior leaders in HCL who would act as a mentor for the role. The selected candidates would not only work in the field, but also get to shadow the senior leaders for the duration of the stint. On the website, the profiles of the five mentors were also featured.

These roles and mentors were as follows:

Big Data Guru was the data analysis consultant. The candidate assuming this role would need to stay abreast with numbers and understand data analysis as a domain. The candidate would be mentored by Matteo Colombo, VP, Business Analytics Services.

Hacker-In-Chief was the champion software coder. The candidate assuming this role was supposed to know various computer languages and would be aligned with the delivery teams of HCL. Kalyan Kumar, Sr VP and Chief Technologist, HCL, would mentor them.

Digital Trotter was the digital marketing consultant to HCL Technologies, who would explore ways for HCL to leverage digital marketing to reach out to target audiences. The candidate would be mentored by Kiran Somalwar, VP, Enterprise Transformation Services.

The Ideapreneurship Evangelist was the business and IT consultant. The candidate assuming this role was expected to be aligned with the company's culture of ideapreneurship and would work closely with Dharmender Kapoor, VP, BITS and explore HCL culture.

Womenspiration was the consultant to HCL Technologies in the area of diversity. The candidate assuming this role would focus on improving the way diversity was implemented in the company and would work closely with Srimathi Shivashankar, Associate VP, Diversity and Sustainability.

The choice of mentors was determined not by hierarchy but by social aptitude and interest in being involved in the campaign. Mentors were chosen across bands and levels in order to demonstrate that the quality of ideas and social influences were not determined by a particular position in the hierarchy. The team of mentors and the campaign execution team decided to start using basecamp, a proprietary software program that enabled project management, to brainstorm ideas and for reviewing questions to be posed during the interviews.

### **The coolest interview process ever**

The coolest interview would consist of a total of three rounds. In the first round, which would last a week, participants would be asked a series of questions on logical reasoning, quantitative aptitude, verbal skills and emotional quotient. The aim of this round was to shortlist a total of 100 candidates that would be moved to the next round (refer to **Exhibit 3** for a sample of domain specific questions from the Twitter interviews). Round one, would be called the shortlisting marathon.

During the gap between round one and two, the recruitment marketing team would host a tweet chat with senior leaders called "interview the interviewer". The shortlisted candidates of round one could ask questions about their potential project roles, HCL culture and so on. During the session, HCL leaders, namely, Krishnan Chatterjee (Sr VP, Strategic Marketing), Naveen Narayanan (Global Head, Talent Acquisition), Apurva Chamaria (Global Head, Brand & Digital) and Dharmender Kapoor (VP, Business and IT Transformation Services) would



directly interact with the participants. Given that the platform was open, non-shortlisted candidates could also join the tweet chat but would not be evaluated.

The leaders chosen to participate in the tweet chat were intentionally different from the ones chosen to be mentors to the participants. This was to expose the participants to a wider range of HCL leadership. Chamaria noted:

*In a traditional interview, you get to meet a few people and have to take a call on the culture of the place based on that. Our approach was different. We wanted them to be exposed to a larger pool of our leaders to get a sense of what we are about. We thought of it like hosting an open house, anyone could turn the key and walk in and get to see what we are all about. This was driven by the values of transparency that we hold fundamental to the way we do business.*

In round two, which would last two days, the 100 shortlisted candidates would answer questions from their chosen domain. This would further narrow the pool down to 5 people. All questions were asked exclusively on Twitter.

In the final round, the five selected candidates would be given a chance to meet the HCL executive mentor depending upon the domain they chose. Although HR would meet with the candidates before they met the mentors. An offer would be made to one candidate after all three rounds were over.

### **The actual campaign**

The campaign itself was designed like a classic marketing campaign, with three distinct phases to drive awareness, interest, desire and action (refer to **Exhibit 4** for a roadmap of the campaign).

The awareness phase launched in mid December 2013 began with HCL launching a mobile responsive microsite and three teaser videos to start generating interest and curiosity in what lay ahead. The microsite was just a landing page with minimal information and a call to action (CTA) where interested candidates could enter their email addresses to receive information about the campaign. Neither the content nor the three teaser videos were meant to reveal the campaign details.

The microsite was search engine optimized so that search engines could easily pick it up if someone ran a query on the topic. It had social sharing enabled functions with customized messages for each platform. Within 20 days of its launch, the website reached among the top three search results on Google globally, which generally happened in 2-3 months post launch of a campaign.

### ***The interest & desire phase***

Three weeks prior to the campaign launch, the full-fledged website was made available with the objective of offering interested candidates complete information about the campaign. This website had two new videos which explained the campaign briefly. There was a CTA that said “Start Tweeting Now”. Through this, interested candidates could share the following text on Twitter:

*I am giving the coolest interview ever. Are you? [www.coolestinterviewever.com](http://www.coolestinterviewever.com)  
#coolestInterviewEver*

This began to drive a lot of engagements on the Twitter hashtag. The site reached the top search engine position ranking, through the key phrase “coolest interview ever”, on Google within seven days of the launch.

The team launched a marketing campaign across all three types of media (paid, owned and earned media) to keep costs in check. Paid media was where the company paid for the promotion of its content such as banner advertisements. Owned media was where information spread through channels owned by the company itself such as its websites, blogs, Facebook page. Earned media referred to the shares, likes and reviews, which happened on social media, by consumers of the content. The earned media was the most difficult to get as it was based on how useful your audience found your content and whether they chose to share it. In the paid media, two types of platforms were leveraged.

The first paid media was social channels. On Twitter, the aim was to reach the target audience through the Twitter handles of major job search sites. The Twitter promoted cards, and tweets were a Twitter advertising option which helped increase conversion and redirected the visitors to the campaign website. Twitter had just introduced these cards and the team decided to experiment with them with under US\$1,000 of spend.

The second was campus outreach. In order to have an integrated outreach around the campaign, physical banners were sent to business schools and the HCL campus marketing team carried out interaction sessions. QR-code embedded posters were used to engage the tech savvy Gen Y. QR codes are computer generated small images which need to be scanned by a special app in order to release more detailed content. These are akin to bar codes on products which contain detailed information about the product. Moreover, mailers of the campaign were sent to students of 67 major business schools in India, 6 business schools in US and 6 business schools in UK.

For owned media, HCL did an internal outreach to its 75,000 employees through internal channels such as intranet, physical interactions, floor walks, webinars and individual emails, which informed them about the campaign and got them buzzing and sharing via social network sites. Secondly, HCL website visitors and job seekers were tapped. In order to do all these, the corporate website was aligned with the campaign and the career section was updated with information about the campaign along with a clickable banner leading to the campaign site. Email marketing was used to send out mailers to a database of 200,000 job applicants who had applied for jobs at HCL in the previous years.

When it came to earned media, the team leveraged the social channels it had been using in the past. The website and the videos were organically shared with HCL’s audience on various social media channels and any queries that came in were promptly responded to. The team also leveraged prominent influencers in the HR space on social media and shared the concept with them. The influencers, too, spread the word on the campaign in their own large networks.

### ***Action phase: the launch***

*Yes, failure is a real possibility. We don't fear failure; we plan and execute and take our chances. At the end of the day, you can only be flexible, transparent and true to your values. I believe that others will treat you fairly for having been so. It's a leap of faith based on "law of intentionality" which basically says that people are mostly well intentioned.*

*- Apurva Chamaria*

The campaign was launched on 10<sup>th</sup> of February with the team actively engaging with participants. A daily status update was sent to the team and the other internal stakeholders to get their inputs on further optimization. HCL's world-class social command centre was leveraged to track engagement 24/7, providing engaging, listening, reporting, shortlisting and optimising.

Starting from three days prior to the launch, the team was actively responding to the queries pertaining to the campaign (refer to **Exhibit 5** for screenshots of some of the "tweets"). They used an extremely personal tone to express the three tenets of the HCL brand:

- a. Trust, transparency and flexibility
- b. Value centricity
- c. Employee first customer second (EFCS)

Users were asked to follow HCL on Twitter for participation. From the start date of 10 February 2014, there were interview questions every 2.5 hours. The questions consisted of logical reasoning, quantitative aptitude and verbal categories. Users were shortlisted based on their answers. The process of reposting questions was an attempt to be fair to those who joined the process later – they could answer six consecutive questions at any given point.

The Twitter ID of each candidate was used as the primary mechanism for capturing responses from their account. A small piece of code was written to consolidate the tweets from a particular account and calibrate the fact-based questions, including those on quantitative aptitude and IQ, for right or wrong answers. For the more subjective questions such as the emotional quotient questions, the team consisting of mentors and HR used the Delphi technique to see how they would rate the response. Narayanan noted:

*We wanted to ensure that the incoming diversity of tweets and answers was treated in a fair manner. By increasing the internal diversity of the team analysing the responses we ensured that the candidates was evaluated fairly. The judgment of the team also allowed us to assess cultural fit more carefully, rather than relying on the inputs of any one hiring manager. The medium of interviewing and the format of response required this level of extra attention that each candidate deserved.*

### **The campaign took on a life of its own**

The tweets were flying fast and the momentum of the conversation was picking up pace. At one count, there were more than 80,000 applicants, as seen from the registrations generated from the interview site, campus campaign and Twitter cards. People from close to 60 countries were participating.

*When the tweet volume hit 50,000 within a few days of campaign launch, I was glad for the months we had spent mapping the contingencies and systems that would allow us to handle this. Every single participant's Tweet or comment on all social platforms was replied by the HCL team. And in the moment, it was the willingness and team spirit of the group which worked 24/7 during the campaign that allowed us to stay on top of the game.*

- Gaurav Kakkar, Group Manager, Strategic Marketing, at HCL Technologies

No one had anticipated the level of response the campaign was starting to generate. In the midst of the campaign, the official website went down due to the overwhelming response. The site was down for half an hour, during which the web-engineering experts worked hard to resolve the issue.

As expected, a series of interactions and situations arose during the interview session, which had not been anticipated. Some of the participants started using videos to respond to questions in order to stand out from the crowd. While such submissions were not evaluated as they stepped outside the norm of 140-character communication, innovative ways of communicating were encouraged. One of the candidates decided to use Haiku poetry to tweet answers; the team then responded back in Haiku. The HCL team responded to the memes<sup>2</sup> generated by the participants by creating more memes. Narayanan noted:

*At the end of the day, the idea was to have fun while doing work. This is a sentiment that Gen Y identifies with and it is a culture we wish to encourage in all our people.*

At one point, a candidate put up a site called the “coolest interviewee ever” and began promoting it. He even put up the profiles of other candidates as well as collated questions that were being asked by HCL. A decision on how to deal with this had to be made in real time. A question arose as to whether or not this site should be banned or a notice should be sent to the candidate requesting him to take it down, as it was an unofficial site building on the campaign brand. The team decided against it and even congratulated the candidate on his creative streak and starting what could be deemed as a fan site for the interview.

The winners of round one were announced on Twitter and to make sure no one missed out on the communication, an email was sent to the shortlisted candidates as well.

Tweet chats involved shortlisted candidates and their mentors. The candidates got a chance to ask any questions about the potential projects or anything else that they might be curious about. This conversation was analyzed for the type of questions the candidates were asking so as to get a sense of their attitude and interest in the company and its culture. Chamaria recalled:

*It was important for us to observe how the candidates acted online with the mentors as well as their fellow participants. It was an opportunity for us to see how they would fit into the culture of our company. We have a distinct culture that fits in well with those who value collaboration and entrepreneurship as a trait and we were hoping to see some signs of this in our online candidates. Ultimately the hired candidate would have access to a lot of data and opportunities within the company at a very large scale and for this we needed to ensure we had the right fit.*

All the shortlisted candidates were given buddies from the existing pool of HCL employees. The idea was to encourage a conversation between the shortlisted candidates and the employees on any topic ranging from content rules to the culture of the company. This was to enable HCL to humanize the brand in an online environment. The buddies were to provide any help the candidates needed to prepare for the next round of interviews. Five candidates were short listed for the final round.

The winner of the interview was Anandan Pillai and the result was announced on Twitter.

Pillai was both privileged and humbled after winning this contest. He went on to write a blog post immediately after winning:

*Here, I claim that winning this campaign was the most successful moment of my life. It's always a pleasure to be evaluated by the top honchos of the industry. The interaction with top leaders of HCL was very encouraging and it gave me a hint of where they are headed*

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<sup>2</sup> i.e. image, video and texts that quickly got popular on social media

*towards course. It's always a different feeling to win the very first edition of an innovative campaign.*<sup>3</sup>

## Major outcomes

Looking back, the campaign supported the mission of improving the employer brand of HCL and portraying the internal culture of ideapreneurship to the Gen Y candidate – it got media coverage from more than 60 international and national media outlets worth a commercial value of one million USD. The goal of getting participations from all 30 markets of operations was exceeded: the campaign drew participants from more than 60 countries across the globe. The total engagement was more than 250,000 participants, exceeding the target by 25%.

The campaign also pushed HCL's Twitter follower base to more than 200,000, which placed it well ahead of other global companies including IBM, Accenture and established Indian companies like TCS and Infosys. The campaign trended across 19 cities and across the nation for four days, drawing people's attention to the employee-centric and innovative culture of HCL.

The campaign got an organic reach of 336 million across 102 countries. Moreover, the total campaign cost did not exceed the average recruitment spend for one full time employee due to the campaign's smart utilization and mix of organic and inorganic reach through different online and offline channels. HCL also earned the title of the best brand in India, from a reach and engagement perspective, in February 2014, according to HCL's followers on Twitter increased by 31,000 since the launch. This was an 83% increase in follower rate in the last two months of launching the campaign as compared to the previous 10 months. The campaign made HCL lead the IT industry in reach on Twitter with more than 208 thousands followers, which was ahead of IBM, Accenture, TCS, Infosys, Wipro, etc. Further, the HCL website ([www.coolestinterviewever.com](http://www.coolestinterviewever.com)) reached the top position within seven days of launch on Google (there were 95,000 page views from 102 countries). While these were promising results that most recruitment and marketing teams dreamt of, Chamaria noted:

*The biggest joy for us was the level of engagement and support we got from the people. If there was anyone who was behaving unprofessionally, others fans would shout him down. The brand did not have to do anything. All our fears of the rejected candidates turning sour were unfounded. In fact, they became even bigger fans by thanking us for the experience. It was very humbling to see this. We are not an Apple or a Nike or a consumer brand and yet we had just experienced what stewarding a cult brand can feel like. We were totally in awe of what communities can do when they come together.*

Tweets had already started pouring in to ask if there would be a round two in the future. While Narayanan did not believe in resting on his laurels, he could not help but wonder, "Was this something that could be repeated?" If it could be repeated, would it have the same impact? This appeared to be an effective way of creating engagement on social media, but could it be deemed the most effective way of recruitment? If HCL had to do a repeat, what could they change to maintain their first-mover advantage and the innovative quality of the campaign? Whatever it would be, it would have to continue to mirror the values and culture of HCL. As in the long run, Narayanan believed that it was the culture that would bring inimitable advantage. He knew he could count on his team to think of something soon.

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<sup>3</sup> Pillai A. (2013) *Why winning HCL Technologies' #Coolestinterviewever was a successful moment for me*. Available at: <http://www.anandanpillai.com/why-winning-hcl-technologies-coolestinterviewever-was-a-successful-moment-for-me/#sthash.2fQPsAb5.dpuf>.

**EXHIBIT 1: SNAPSHOT OF THE RISK TRACKER**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Raised By</b>	<b>Risk Response</b>	<b>Risk Severity</b>	<b>Probability of occurrence</b>	<b>Mitigation plan</b>
A fake person who participates or a person who participates with multiple handles	Human resources	Mitigation	High	Medium	Even in the traditional interviews, during the telephonic round, one cannot ensure true/genuine participation. The last round will involve extensive background verification (BGV) done by an external agency, which will mitigate the risk.
Interviews generally take place in a closed room. Candidates may not participate because the interview was being conducted on Twitter, which is open to everyone.	Marketing	Mitigation	High	High	The campaign is being conducted on new age social media and targeted at Gen Y who believes in openness & transparency. The task is to communicate the same values to the Gen Y and excite them.  People have resigned on YouTube video.
There is risk involved in communicating the brand values of HCL.	Marketing	Transfer	Medium	Medium	A rulebook is being created which contains approximately 500 questions related to brand, philosophy and values of HCL. Some flexibility is being left for the team involved in responding. Senior member will be monitoring the whole communication.
One round involves direct communication between participants and HCL leadership through social media. This requires presence & knowledge of digital channels.	Marketing	Mitigation	Medium	Medium	Digital team of HCL will help the leaders feel comfortable with the new media & will ensure that the leaders understand the nuances of the platform.

Since just one person would be selected, there would be a high risk of negativity being generated due to the low conversion ratio.	External communication team	Mitigation	High	Medium	By making sure that the process of the interview and candidate selection is very transparent and well explained/articulated, the negative sentiment generated can be brought down to as low as 5% throughout the campaign. Crisis management team will also be put together, who will be available 24/7.
Since the rules are quite extensive and platform specific, what if the TG could not connect with them. The candidates should not confuse the outcome with a lottery as it was just a contest.	Corporate marketing	Mitigation	Medium	High	The risk will be mitigated by creating graphics pertaining to FAQs, rules, JDs, etc. All this creative work will be promoted continually on all social media platforms. A command centre will be created, which will be placed in charge of responding to all the queries of participants. Since Twitter will be used as an engagement platform, there can be real-time resolution of queries. The command
What if the participants question the selection criteria and create a negative buzz?	Corporate Marketing	Contingency	High	Medium	The selection criteria will be publicly disclosed in an elaborate manner on our website and as FAQ posts. During round 2, all the candidates will be assigned HCL buddies which will help candidates clear their queries.
As the participation rate is expected to be high, the real-time monitoring and reporting will be a challenge.	Corporate Marketing	Contingency	Medium	Low	Multiple specialized tools like Simply Measured, Twitonomy, Mention, Oracle SRM, etc will be used to make sure that none of the engagement goes unnoticed.
As the participation rate is expected to be high, there is also a risk of unmanaged engagement.	Corporate Marketing	Contingency	Medium	Medium	For proper real-time engagement, Tweet Deck will be used and HCL's world class Social Media Command Centre will be leveraged. A dedicated team will ensure that all Tweets by participants will be replied. Team will be available 24/7 for real-time monitoring.

Source: HCL Technologies

**EXHIBIT 2: #COOLESTINTERVIEWEVER TERMS & CONDITIONS**

1. The promoter of this competition is HCL Technologies (the “Promoter”) along with its affiliated companies. This competition is being promoted on the website [www.coolestinterviewever.com](http://www.coolestinterviewever.com) with an objective to select a participant who shall be offered an opportunity to work as an independent consultant (and not as salaried employee) with HCL for a fixed period on terms and conditions mentioned hereunder.
2. The employees and consultants already working with the Promoter are not eligible to participate in the competition.
3. To participate in this competition, you have to get yourself registered at [www.coolestinterviewever.com](http://www.coolestinterviewever.com).
4. THERE IS NO PARTICIPATION FEE OR ANY PURCHASE NECESSARY FOR THIS COMPETITION.
5. Start/End Dates. Contest begins at 9:00 AM Pacific Standard Time (“ET”) on February 10, 2014, and ends at 11:59 PM PT on March 3, 2014.
6. To the extent legally permissible, the Promoter reserves the right to cancel or amend, at its sole discretion, this competition and these terms and conditions without any notice for any reason including but not limited to the events like catastrophe, war, civil or military disturbance, act of God or any actual or anticipated breach of any applicable law or regulation or any other event outside the control of Promoter. Any changes to the competition will be notified to participants as soon as possible on the website of [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) with detailed explanation at [www.coolestinterviewever.com](http://www.coolestinterviewever.com). It is the responsibility of participants to keep themselves informed as to any changes to the rules/results and other information related to this competition.
7. By entering this competition, you hereby warrant that all information submitted by you at the time of registration is true, accurate and complete in every respect. The Promoter of this competition reserves the right to verify any information provided by you and reserve the right to cancel your participation or restrict you from further participating in the competition if the information provided by you is found to be false or materially incorrect. Furthermore, you also warrant that all the details available at your Twitter account are true and correct and you are not operating through any fake account.
8. Unless otherwise stated herein, this competition is open to all the interested participants who are registered on Twitter and following the Promoter’s Twitter handle “@HCLech”.
9. All information to be provided by any participants, including answers/tweet must be in English only.
10. The Participants shall respond to various questions posted by the Promoter and the Promoter will select 100 participants out of the total based on their answers and response speed.
11. The submissions must not contain material that is inappropriate, indecent, obscene hateful, tortious, defamatory, slanderous or libelous.
12. The submission must not in any way disparage the Promoter, any other person or party affiliated with the promotion and administration of this Contest.
13. Once you got selected in round one, there will be a two-day tweet chat with the HCL Technologies' HR and Recruitment Office, where you will be asked further questions related to



your interested projects and domain of your choice.

14. Out of the 100 shortlisted candidates, the Promoter will select five (5) candidates for the next round based on their answers and response speed.

15. These five (5) selected candidates for the final round would be required to visit the HCL office nearest to such selected participant's location at his/her own costs, and answer the final round of question posted on the Twitter platform.

16. The participants are free to opt out of the competition at any stage.

17. The Promoter will select the winner based on the overall performance of the participant in this competition. The winner will be notified by tweet, email and/or phone call, as appropriate. If the winner cannot be contacted or do not claim the award within fourteen (14) days of announcement, the Promoter reserves the right to cancel the winner and pick a replacement winner.

18. As a pre-condition to work as an independent consultant, the winner must clear the background verification as deemed fit by the Promoter and for the same the Promoter may use services of a third party, for which the participant would need to sign and return, where legal, a consent form, an affidavit of eligibility, liability/publicity release and/or rights transfer document within five (15) days of prize notification.

19. The final winner of the contest shall receive a prize money of US\$25,000 (or equivalent as of the date of payment, if payable in any other currency) subject to necessary withholding of taxes as applicable to prize money of such nature. In addition, the final winner will also be offered an opportunity to work for the Promoter or any of its group companies as an independent consultant, subject to the execution of necessary agreement as deemed fit by the Promoter, for a period of one year and in compensation thereof shall be entitled to receive US\$50,000 (or an equivalent amount as of the date of payment, if payable in any other currency) subject to necessary withholding of taxes as applicable to consultancy work of such nature, divided into four quarterly tranches over a period of one year. If the participant refuses to take the offer of opportunity to work for one year, no cash in lieu thereof will be paid. For the benefit of doubt, it is clarified that the Promoter will not be responsible to reimburse any other expense whatsoever and above stated prize money will be the only consideration.

20. The opportunity to work shall be offered to the winner in the country of his/her residence or where HCL has the projects for the relevant domain for which the winner is selected.

21. Each participant acknowledges that other participants may have used ideas and/or concepts in their submission that may be similar in idea or concept to what is included in participant's submission. Each participant understands and agrees that he/she shall not have any claim against any other participant or the Promoter arising out any such similarity or be entitled to any compensation because of any such similarity.

22. The Promoter is not responsible for any false information provided or warranties or promises made about this contest by any third party.

23. The Promoter's decision in respect of all matters to do with the competition will be final and no further correspondence will be entered into.

24. The participants hereby grant consent for royalty free irrevocable, perpetual, exclusive license to use, reproduce, modify, publish and create derivative works from their name, photo, answers/tweets and information provided in any and all form of advertisement by the Promoter

on a worldwide basis. You confirm that your answers/tweets are original and you are the sole and exclusive owner of answers/tweets and not infringing on any rights of any third party, including but not limited to copyright, trademark, privacy, publicity and/or any other intellectual property right. The Promoter shall become the proprietor of any and all intellectual property rights in the answer/tweets. The Promoter shall also have all rights to use, reproduce, publish, display, transmit, copy, amend, store, sell and sub-license your entry worldwide for all practical purposes including promotional purposes and for the purposes of the competition. The Promoter of this competition will use any personal information, subject to its privacy policy, that you provide with your entry for the purposes of the competition and for marketing purposes including the distribution of regular email updates or newsletters and you consent to the same by participating in this competition. To the maximum permitted under law, the participant to this competition releases and forever discharges the Promoter of this competition from any losses, damages, actions, claims, demands of any sort whatsoever arising from or related to this competition, including but not limited to third party IP infringement claims with respect to your answer/tweets to the questions posed by Promoter in the competition.

25. By registering for this competition at the [www.coolestinterviewever.com](http://www.coolestinterviewever.com), you are providing consent to the Promoter to hold and process, both electronically and otherwise, data it collects at the time of registration, for the purpose of managing the contest and various marketing purposes. You further grant your consent to the Promoter to access, transfer and store and process your personal data, as provided by you for this competition outside the country of your residence, including but not limited to India, US, UK and other countries the Promoter have offices in.

26. CAUTION: ANY ATTEMPT BY AN PARTICIPANT TO DELIBERATELY DAMAGE ANY WEBSITE OR UNDERMINE THE LEGITIMATE OPERATION OF THE CONTEST MAY BE A VIOLATION OF CRIMINAL AND CIVIL LAWS AND SHOULD SUCH AN ATTEMPT BE MADE, THE PROMOTER RESERVES THE RIGHT TO SEEK DAMAGES FROM ANY SUCH PERSON TO THE FULLEST EXTENT PERMITTED BY LAW.

27. IN NO EVENT WILL THE PROMOTER OR ANY OF ITS DIRECTOR OR EMPLOYEE BE RESPONSIBLE OR LIABLE FOR ANY DAMAGES OR LOSSES OF ANY KIND, INCLUDING DIRECT, INDIRECT, INCIDENTAL, CONSEQUENTIAL OR PUNITIVE DAMAGES ARISING OUT OF YOUR ACCESS TO AND USE OF THE SERVICE AND/OR THE COMPETITION, DOWNLOADING FROM AND/OR PRINTING MATERIAL DOWNLOADED FROM ANY WEBSITES ASSOCIATED WITH THE COMPETITION. WITHOUT LIMITING THE FOREGOING, THIS COMPETITION AND ALL PRIZES ARE PROVIDED "AS IS" WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND, EITHER EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED. SOME JURISDICTIONS MAY NOT ALLOW THE LIMITATIONS OR EXCLUSION OF LIABILITY FOR INCIDENTAL OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES OR EXCLUSION OF IMPLIED WARRANTIES SO SOME OF THE ABOVE LIMITATIONS OR EXCLUSIONS MAY NOT APPLY TO YOU. CHECK YOUR LOCAL LAWS FOR ANY RESTRICTIONS OR LIMITATIONS REGARDING THESE LIMITATIONS OR EXCLUSIONS.

28. This promotion is in no way sponsored, endorsed or administered by, or associated with, Facebook, Twitter or any other Social Network.

29. This competition should not be construed as an offer of employment.

30. The Promoter of this competition accepts no responsibility for any damage, loss, injury or disappointment of any kind suffered by any participant of this competition, including as a result of any participant winning or not winning any prize.

31. The Promoter of this competition accepts no responsibility for entries lost, damaged or delayed in the post, or due to computer or internet error in transit.

32. The information shared on Twitter will be subject to Twitter's Privacy Policy (<https://twitter.com/privacy>).

33. Entry into the competition will be deemed as acceptance of these terms and conditions by any participant.

34. The competition and these terms and conditions will be governed by Indian law and any disputes will be subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the courts of New Delhi, India.

### EXHIBIT 3: SAMPLE OF DOMAIN SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FROM THE TWITTER INTERVIEWS

#### *Big data*

- Tell us 4 industry standard tools for Data Analysis. #CoolestInterviewEver
- What is Big Data? #CoolestInterviewEver
- What is the most widely used tool to grapple with Big Data? #CoolestInterviewEver
- What is the difference between Interval and Ratio Data Types? #CoolestInterviewEver
- What is  $\sqrt{4}$ ? A) 2; B) -2; C) +2 or -2; D) None of these #CoolestInterviewEver
- What is Data Slicing? #CoolestInterviewEver

#### *Hacker-in-Chief questions*

- What does a web blueprint depict? #CoolestInterviewEver
- What is a CMS? #CoolestInterviewEver
- What is an XSS attack? #CoolestInterviewEver
- "AS" clause is used in SQL for (A) Selection operation. (B) Rename operation. (C) Join operation. (D) Projection operation #CoolestInterviewEver
- What is the server side scripting language? #CoolestInterviewEver

#### *Womeninspiration*

- Define diversity. #CoolestInterviewEver
- How will you promote women related initiatives? #CoolestInterviewEver
- What type of training programs will you start for women? #CoolestInterviewEver
- How will you engage with all women HCLites across geos? #CoolestInterviewEver
- Is flextime policy important for women in corporates? #CoolestInterviewEver

#### *Ideaprenureship evangelist*

- Define EVP in 110 characters. #CoolestInterviewEver
- What are the parameters that define culture in an IT company? #CoolestInterviewEver
- How will you build a culture in an organization? #CoolestInterviewEver
- What is the difference between an entrepreneur and an employee? #CoolestInterviewEver
- Which metrics define an effective culture? #CoolestInterviewEver

Source: HCL Technologies

**EXHIBIT 4: CAMPAIGN ROADMAP**

Phase (AIDA)	Awareness	Interest & Desire	Action
Theme	Curiosity Build-up	Detailing	Launch
Period	23/12/2013 to 20/01/2014	20/01/2014 to 10/02/2014	10/02/2014 onwards
Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No details provided but the name of the campaign</li> <li>Subtle hints about the idea were provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Details about the campaign were provided</li> <li>Captured audience base created</li> <li>Buzz created on Twitter and other channels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions themselves created a lot of buzz</li> <li>Buddy Concept for enhancing the campaign</li> <li>Tweet Chat to let the candidates communicate directly with the leaders</li> </ul>
Collaterals	1 single page microsite and 3 Teaser videos	A full-fledged tabbed website + 2 full length videos	The website + The Twitter hashtag

Source: HCL Technologies

**EXHIBIT 5: SCREENSHOTS OF SOME INTERVIEW “TWEETS”**

Source: Twitter screenshots