

# Shobha Vasudevan- Head-Enterprise Communication and PR Dell

## **SPEAKERS**

Shobha, Charu

**Charu 00:05**

Hi Shobha, Welcome to Mrigashira.

**Shobha 00:08**

Hi, Charu, thank you so much for having me.

**Charu 00:12**

Dell has been trying to do a lot of things beyond just what it's really known for, the machines, Old Time tech companies, typically, you know, grown from selling boxes to services to solutions, how has Dell transitioned? I mean, is the popular perception of just a computer brand still associated with it?

**Shobha 00:40**

Well, very interesting question, just start with so now, if you look at Dells purpose, we have a vision to create technology that drives human progress. So it's a really, really big goal. And it's a vision that goes beyond doing business, beyond the numbers, beyond the boxes. It's really to drive a change and drive, you know, drive progress in the way that people work, live, and, you know, just communicate with each other. So, you know, we obviously now have long since moved beyond the machines and the boxes and just a computer brand. We now have, you know, technology solutions across the spectrum. We are innovating, we are in the process of you know, moving a lot of business pieces into areas which are future focused. We know we are actually you know, it's such a such an essential company for the data era, because we store re-process we move, protect, actually more data than almost anyone you know, anyone in the world, actually, half of the world's mission critical data, is stored on a Dell technology platform. So you know, with this vast amount of data that will, you know, probably fuel the IT investments going forward. We are very uniquely positioned to be a leader in a more connected, automated, intelligent, distributed data world. So yeah, so it's our perception now is as a as a technology brand that's helping drive human progress.

**Charu 02:21**

With leadership comes a lot of challenges, right? And b2b communications, people think it's fairly strait-jacketed. But relationship building with stakeholders is really hard. What are the best practices for continuous and consistent engagement?

**Shobha** 02:42

Okay, so you know personally, I have been working in the communication space for many, many years, almost more than two decades, I have worked across brands and both b2b to see a mix of b2b and b2c. And I've actually, you know, watch the business model move from being sales driven to be in service driven, to be relationship driven. And now it's you know, it's moving from you know customer focus and added value, to gaining trust from the consumer to maybe looking at business pain points, it's becoming more about, you know, embracing the brand personality into the promise that you're making and not really talk about speeds and feeds as it used to be in the earlier you know, many many years ago decade ago, business communication, or b2b as you would say, was mainly about, you know, boxes and speeds and feeds. And now it's moved more beyond that, what it can do for you what it can do for your enterprise, how it can make you more efficient, more productive, more competitive. So it's become you know, I like this word called segments of one. So while you know, usually b2c marketing is on an individual level, b2b is now moving to a segment of one. So, you know while it is working towards the enterprise communication, but it will attempt to individually a piece to each of the stakeholders that we would have.

**Charu** 04:19

Tell us more about the segment of one.

**Shobha** 04:21

Okay, so, so this is another way of probably saying a lot about customer intimacy, you would have heard a lot about this word that, you know, even b2b brands want to be in the customer intimacy space, you know, we don't want to be in the space, where Earlier it used to be, you know, like a PR mechanism, you would do something which works to a large section of audience but it's not customized to anybody. But now, in whether it's a product, whether it's a solution, whether it's a service, or whether it's the communication, even if it is targeted to a larger audience, it will still make you feel when you're watching it, that it's appealing to you. It will be, it will speak to you, it will speak to your needs. So the customer intimacy will be something that even a b2b marketer or communicator will be able to do. And we are trying that successfully you know, things like podcasts, for example, you know, we do that for internal audience or an external audience. We do it for a product launch, we do it for talking about a new technology, innovation, we talk about you know our achievements, things that bring us together. In the COVID times he was talking about how, you know, we can use that for our own internal team building as well. So, that's another just one of the many examples that work in this you know, segment of one principles.

**Charu** 05:54

No, absolutely. And, you know, tailored approach, and especially in today's day and age, it has far more better results, or is far more effective than just having a, sweeping approach.

**Shobha** 06:12

Spray and pray technique that we used to be, you know, so popular for that, as an industry, you know PR people very famous for doing the spray and pray that, you know, you just put out a release and pray to God that provides it interesting. Well, now, no prayers can help that segment. So, yeah I mean, we have to be agile we have to be you know, more with the times to understand you know to make sense in terms of what you're talking.

**Charu 06:39**

Right. And what you mentioned a few minutes back. You talked about, you know b2b and b2c, I mean, in the last few years, we've witnessed that convergence of the two right? In terms of ideation initiatives, what have been some of the major changes

**Shobha 06:58**

So the primary difference that you and I will also understand from a b2b to b2c is the kind of people it's reaching out to. So when you are being addressed as a consumer, then you are making a choice as an individual. However, when you're making a choice, as a business leader or a business person, that you're making a choice, which impacts a larger section of audience. So whether you're making it for your organization or whether you're making it for your business, or whoever you're making it for, it impacts more than a few people. So hence, the propositions that you ideate with whether it has to appeal to or has to appeal to a larger section of audience, it can't be just about that one person who will who will be impacted for it. So you will have to maybe, you know talk more about efficiency, productivity time saving, cost saving and still be able to make it in a fun or in an engaging way that it makes sense to them and appeals to them. Your differentiation has to be much beyond then, you know, just the product speeds and feeds. Like I mentioned earlier. The other important factor, I think this makes a difference in a b2b space, is our approach to sustainability is our approach to ethical business. Because when you're making a choice, from an organizational standpoint these things make a difference. We've seen for many researches that you would, you know, be reading about where people who now want to make sustainable, they want to buy from organizations, which are committed to the environment committed to you know, ethical purchases committed to visit good business practices. So these are also factors which weigh in a lot when you're working on a b2b campaign.

**Charu 08:53**

I agree with you completely and this brings me to another question, which is again related and it's more to do with the stickiness quotient. So the biggest challenge when it comes to storytelling, where b2c is concerned, it's far more easier. But the biggest challenge that b2b companies have is really how do you humanize your products or services and develop that stickiness towards your business? You know, and can storytelling be a strong solution to that problem?

**Shobha 09:25**

Yes, the one word answer to your question is definitely yes storytelling is the only way I would think, where you can promote stickiness. It is a busy space. I mean, we could be marketing or b2b Communication is an extremely busy place. I'll be honest in saying that there is actually no playbook for anybody. I mean, we just keep figuring out the pieces as we go along. we would have figured out the thought that something will work maybe didn't work, the kinds of things that we imagined. But the one common thing that we know for sure is that, you know, it has to be digital. So that's, you know editing which now needs to be sticking has to be digital. That's the, that's probably the one constant that I have noticed in the past couple of years. The other couple of things, maybe that will make a difference is being a child. Because sometimes by the time and it's also because of the first point that I mentioned, you know, because it is digital, it's also constantly moving. So we don't have the, you know, sometimes we have to think on our feet, we might just design a really brilliant campaign, but by the time it hits the ground,

things might have changed. And I'll give you the most recent example that everybody will, you know, align with, which is the pandemic, you know, before it hits, nobody really understood the magnitude of how much impact it's going to create. So once the first wave was over, and people started sort of, you know, coming back on their feet, and suddenly, second wave would come, you wouldn't really know how to prepare for things like these, you know, publications, were not being able to function at full capacity, people are working from home, the kind of new space that we have, whether it's for digital or whether it was print, or whether it was a conversation. So we had to be very, very thoughtful about what people are going through you can't really, you know go on a completely different direction than what the world is feeling at that point of time. So empathy was very important, your campaigns needed to have that. So being a child to the situation, being a child to the needs knee, being a child in general, to understand if there is a change that needs to be made to the campaign before it rolls out, or even sometimes, while it's being rolled out, is really important to sort of develop that stickiness. The other couple of things, I think, which helps in doing, you know, getting through with stickiness is maybe have a slightly you know, more you use the opportunities that we have to collaborate you know, whether it's collaborating across the industry collaborating across, you know different organizations with the same vision, collaborating across people who bring a similar point of view to yours and you know, help your brand, get that message across better. You know, interesting example of this would be something like use of an influencer. So if you know, if your brand works with an influencer who actually supports the kind of work that you do, and is able to lend a voice, which brings in a slightly different audience, also into the fold. And that's, that's a great way of doing storytelling. More stories and we are a land of storytellers. I mean our stories, you know, go way back some you know when the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, so we are a land of storytellers our stories have to be using characters which makes sense to people you know so when I as a, as a communication person, think of a campaign for my brand, then I have used you know, mediums as different as a jingle, as a radio show as a cartoon strip. As you know pot so we work across mediums, and we work in a completely hardcore you know, business to business kind of space and sometimes the differentiation helps

**Charu 15:19**

I'm going to go back to digital and ask you, how are you using digital for engaging with your stakeholders?

**Shobha 15:29**

All stakeholders are both in the internal system and externally as well. For internal, like I mentioned before, we actually do a podcast that we run every month, where we speak with our leaders speak with industry leaders speak with you know influencers speak with people who can give a have an inspiring take on their journey, you know whether they've made a journey from a corporate life to an entrepreneur life, or they made a journey from doing business work to being maybe social work, or people who use technology in very interesting ways you know, like you know doing using technology for farming or using technology for genome sequencing. So things which are very very interesting for us to learn about and get inspired from. So that's, that's in a podcast that we run called fine tuning. The other way that we use externally spy, you using influencers for doing webcasts, we do a lot of podcasts with our spokespeople and media houses to sort of take our message in a slightly different platform.

We use for press briefings we've used it for, you know, doing live demos for people. We actually have you know our flagship event, which happens in the US every year, called the Deltek World. Before all

these previous years, we've had the attention traveled from the country to experience firsthand about our products and solutions. But you know because of COVID and restrictions, it wasn't happening. So we created a digital experience for the event for our friends in the country. And they've been able to sort of log into attend the keynotes and attend the demos and the live sections, etc. So yeah, we've used it and probably a lot of relatable, impactful ways for all our stakeholders.

**Charu** 18:25

Thank you so much for talking to us. It was really an interesting conversation.