



## Case

### *Designmate: Explorations in Corporate Social Responsibility*

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#### **Abstract**

*Designmate, a pioneer and leader in the field of application of animation in education, produces 3-D educational videos and other teaching materials in science related subjects for K12 students. Students and teachers in India and other countries all over the world use these educational materials.*

*As a matter of policy and practice, Designmate chooses to employ well qualified but differently-abled employees to carryout most of the technical aspects of work. The company prefers to recruit differently-abled persons with potential for growth and development and trains them into thorough-bred professionals. This strategy has worked well for the company. Out of its 400 plus employees, 70 per cent are differently-abled.*

*The case illustrates how to strategize corporate social responsibility in matters related to employee engagement.*

**Key Words:** *Corporate Social Responsibility. Spastics. People with special needs. Physically challenged.*

#### **Introduction**

Designmate – short name for the firm Designmate India Private Limited – was a 25-year-old organization operating in the education sector. It has been providing unique solutions to students to overcome deficiencies and gaps in mathematics and science education at high school level, around the world. The organization was a 3D eContent<sup>1</sup> provider and develops creative eContent for K12<sup>2</sup> students. Designmate was a pioneer in the use of graphics and animation<sup>3</sup> to illustrate, simplify and explain the complex concepts in mathematics and various other branches of science and thereby make learning those subjects a lot more easy.

As per the company's website "The eContent created was a unique combination of 3D videos, simulations, experiments, learning activities, quizzes, texts, images, web links, and learning objects known as "EUREKA.IN."

What set Designmate unique from others was its deep-rooted philosophy of quiet and committed work ethos. The firm's USP

was its humanistic policy and approach towards the underprivileged sections of society. Nearly Seventy percent of its employees were physically challenged, which the organization preferred to refer to as "differently abled employees."

#### **The Beginning**

Captain Kamaljeet Singh Brar, the founder of Designmate, served in the Indian Army. He met with an accident in 19.. and was declared unfit for combat any more. On this ground he had to leave the Army. He started two firms offering security services to commercial establishments:

Eagle Eye and Checkmate in Mumbai (Bombay). In a short span of time both the firms became popular among the clientele due to quality of personnel they offered and the services they rendered. Apart from the firms offering security services, Capt. Brar had also established a studio that was into the business of animation, entertainment, and advertisement. Subsequently,



in September 2001, he moved to Ahmedabad to establish a studio, as capital expenses and operating expenses were lower in Ahmedabad compared to Mumbai. That was the beginning of Designmate in Ahmedabad.

The decision to employ differently-abled persons had its origin in a chance encounter that Capt. Brar had with a young man who was hearing-impaired. During his stay in Mumbai, an elderly gentleman approached Capt. Brar with a request for employment for his 19-year old son who was hearing-impaired. The family was on the verge of starvation and the young son was the only hope. Touched by their plight and noticing a spark in the eyes of the young man, Capt. Brar offered to hire the young man provided he showed aptitude to learn the basics of computers. The young man showed such zeal and passion on the job that in no time he became the best professional animator in Brar's team. This marked a turning point in the life of Captain Brar who realized that physical handicaps could always be overcome if one had the necessary will and determination. He then decided to employ only differently-abled persons.

## Objectives

The primary objectives of the company were:

- Deliver world-class 3D animated content for K12 curriculum
- Build an image of a company striving hard to transform methodologies of school education
- Develop strategic partnerships across the globe covering more geographical areas making EUREKA.IN the global way of learning science and mathematics.

## The Product

Designmate would convert traditional text-books - characterised predominantly by text and some graphics - into interesting and interactive 3D eContent using interactives, virtual labs, and puzzles. Designmate had developed expertise and capabilities of making software that played 3D content on simple Computers. Said a company spokesperson, "We have transformed ourselves as a leading technology based e-learning company, developing unique educational content to make EUREKA.IN a global way of learning science and Mathematics. EUREKA.IN library represents high quality rich content and interactive learning objects which bring visually a beautiful and interesting learning experience." EUREKA.IN gives students a platform to learn, enjoy and understand complex topics of K12 curriculum in high definition 3D stereoscopy, which makes

education exciting and engaging like watching movies. Designmate became one of the pioneer firms across the globe imparting K12 education using 3D stereovision. The impact of visual images on the learner was definitely far more impressionistic and lasting than the images that bare text would make on the learner.

## Unique Features of EUREKA.IN

Designmate continuously strived to maintain the following key features:

- **Compatible:** the EUREKA.IN software was made highly interactive and customized. The content could be mapped to any curriculum by using English and native language providing a multi-lingual facility to understand and learn physics, biology and chemistry, in any country-specific curriculum.
- **Economical:** Designmate tried to make the content available to its clients through various subscription models. Contents could be bought for one year and five years. It could be subscribed on the basis of number of students or on perpetual basis. The prices of 3D animated contents and virtual labs were structured to be cost effective for the clients of the company.
- **Simple:** The software was extremely user friendly. The interface was also kept simple<sup>4</sup>.

EUREKA.IN was designed to have universal acceptance to any curriculum:

- A pool of quality 3D eContent covering K12 curricula. The eContent based library can be mapped to any country-specific educational system and can be regionalized.
- The 3D eContent was learning-centric, dynamic, interactive, and user-friendly which engaged students and changed the traditional classroom environment way of learning.
- Each module is a combination of texts, videos, simulations, quizzes, images, links, keywords and mind maps.
- 1200 topics in 3D with simulations, experiments, learning activities and quizzes.
- A universal content based teaching and learning experience for both teachers and students.
- Topics tailored to any national curriculum and syllabus supporting textbooks and teaching concepts.
- Contents could be localized by translations and professional voiceover, which made learning easy and specific to regions.
- Available in DVDS, hard disks, and supported for playing in different hardware configurations such as laptop, standalone PC, LCD television, analog television, projectors, and LAN networks.



## Benefits of Software

Few of the benefits provided by the software included:

- Improvement in educational effectiveness.
- Provided teachers with high quality of 3D eContent, which helps to explain difficult topics easily.
- Helped students to visualize what they learnt and thereby helping them to understand and retain better.

## Contents of EUREKA.IN Library

EUREKA.IN Pack contains:

- 2000 mono topics for K12 universal concepts.
- 1200 3D stereoscopic topics covering science & mathematics concepts
- Average duration of each topic: 4 minutes

## Corporate Social Responsibility

Among the workforce of the company nearly 70 per cent were differently-abled. In fact one of the core recruitment policies of the company was employing and treating differently-abled without any prejudice. The company had tie-ups with some NGOs and employment exchanges to recruit differently abled individuals.

The differently-abled employees were provided with health facilities, accommodation, and nutritious diet (breakfast, lunch, and dinner). Upgradation of skills, economic independence, and personal and social development were other benefits that Designmate strived to provide to its employees.

Besides the differently-abled employees, the company employed a group of retirees with experience and expertise to fall back upon, young and not so young men and women eager to add to the financial resources of their families, and a very young enthusiastic workforce majorly looking after content development, marketing, sales and production. This group of employees consisted about 30 % of the total of 400 persons it had in 2012. Despite the heterogeneity of the workforce, the company did not compromise on product quality as was evident from the prestigious national and international awards it had won over the years (Exhibit 1).

Designmate had clients from countries like US, UK, France, Germany, Greece, Turkey, China, Thailand, Japan, Korea, Portugal, and Spain while in India its unique and user-friendly software had a recognizable market in almost all major states.

Designmate had become a destination for those who lacked in

resources but nurtured big dreams. When these differently abled aspirants joined the company, they were inexperienced. The first six months were spent on training and making them familiar with the finer aspects of 3D animation.

The major benefit went to the differently abled employees who become financially independent. In return the organization enjoyed a much lower attrition rate when compared with other organizations in the IT sector (see Exhibit 2).

## Challenges

The major challenge faced by the organization was training the new recruits to the expected level of skills and inculcating a sense of independence and professional behavior to make each employee a highly skilled person in his or her profession. Invariably it amounted to significant transformation of the individual personality. While joining the differently-abled people were very happy without realizing the hard work that they would have to put in and responsibilities they would have to shoulder. Some of them were diffident and expected special treatment. Transforming each individual employee into a highly-skill professional and a confident, independent person was the real challenge before the company.

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## End Notes

1. 3 D e-Content: Electronic or digital learning content that can be transmitted, received, stored, viewed or processed in any manner over a computer network as well as the internet is referred to as e-content. In computers, 3 D (three dimensions or three-dimensional) describes an image (including graphics, animation and video) that provides the perception of depth. When 3 D images are made interactive so that the users feel involved with the scene, the experience is called virtual.
2. K12 students: K-12 is a term used in education and educational technology in the United States, Canada and many other countries, as an acronym for the publicly-supported school grades prior to college. These grades are kindergarten (K) and the 1<sup>st</sup> through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade (1 – 12).
3. Graphics and Animation: Computer animation or CGI animation is the process used for generating animated images by using computer graphics. The more general term computer-generated imagery encompasses both static scenes and dynamic



images while computer animation only refers to moving images.

4. EUREKA.IN as Universal Curriculum ([www.Designmate.com](http://www.Designmate.com)): Universal Curriculum is the largest pool of high quality interactive resources covering the subjects of Science – Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology taught at upper primary & secondary levels of education.

### Exhibit 1 Awards Received

Designmate has won many awards and recognized globally for its products. Some of these are as follows:

- National Award 2013: Designmate received The National Award for the Empowerment of persons with Disabilities- 2013 from the President of India- Pranab Kumar Mukherjee.
- Finalist at 2013 in EdTech Digest – Cool Tool Awards in *E-learning* category.
- Winner at 2013 Shiksha Ratna Awards for best *Multi-media content developer for K12 Education*.
- The best e-learning product of the decade by World Summit Award 2013
- Winner of 2013 Global CSR Excellence & Leadership awards for *Promoting employment for the physically challenged*.
- Finalist at 2012 CODIE Awards for *Best K12 Instructional solution*.
- Winner of 2012 SOE Global Education Award for Best Digital content Developer of the year.

- EINDIA 2011 Award: For the Best ICT Enabled Content for K-12 Education in the Public Choice Category.
- Best employer award (Gujarat) in 2010.
- ESIC Award, Gujarat, 2010: Felicitated by ESIC and the Minister of Labour and Employment, Gujarat for employing differently-abled persons.
- Employees provident Fund Award, 2010: Felicitated by the Employees Provident Fund Organization, Ahmedabad for pioneering efforts in positive empowerment of differently-abled persons.
- Worldwide Award for e-learning 2008: Designmate is the only Indian company to be awarded the best eContent provider by Worlddidac Award in 2008. This is recognition for best eContent provided by the company in the world.
- Winner at 2008 Worlddidac Award for E-learning.
- World Summit Award 2007: The World Summit Award (WSA) is the world's best e-content and most innovative ICT applications. Designmate was awarded the best eLearning content in 2007.
- Best employer award (Gujarat) in 2007.
- CSR Award 2007: Best Corporate Social Responsibility Practice (2007).
- Winner at 2007 NASSCOM Foundation Award.
- Manthan Award 2006 for E-education as special mention in e-Education: Manthan Award is a first of its kind initiative in India to recognize the best practices in e-Content and Creativity.
- Best Employer Award 2006: Designmate received the best employer award in 2006 from the former President of India Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam.
- Channel [V] Award: Designmate did the entire animation, morphing, compositing and special effects for the first animated video in the Indian Entertainment Industry.

(Source: [www.Designmate.com](http://www.Designmate.com))

Exhibit-2: Employment Details of Physically Handicapped Persons	
Category	Number
Male	174
Female	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>Total Number of Employees : 450</b>	
Qualification Details	
Qualification	Number
BE	7
BCA	7
MCA	8
Others	216
Levels of Education	
Qualification	Nuber
Post-Graduate	24
Graduate	124
HSC	59
SSC	25
Others	6



**Employee Turnover (for Physically Handicaped)**

Year	New recruitment	Employee separation
<b>For Physically Challenged</b>		
2010-11	42	14
2011-12	51	14
2012-13	41	05
<b>Total No. of Employees: 450</b>		
<b>Employee Turnover (Overall): 20-25 per year</b>		

**Source: Designmate company sources.**

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Economist with five years of corporate experience and more than 30 years of management teaching. Has co-authored the book: *Trade Unionism and Industrial Development*. Has published more than 40 papers in journals and as book-chapters. Has published many cases and Routledge has come out with a collection of his cases. Was awarded CRMs Fellowship, at IIMA in 1986; Won a Prize for the paper "Improving Performance in Government", Govt. of Andhra Pradesh (A World Bank Project) 1997. Was offered a one year fellowship by University of North Malaysia in 2001. His areas of interests include Energy Economics, Corporate strategy and public policy.