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**BRIEF22 | Ashwani Singla, Astrum: Real stories, people, emotions will be at the heart of Brand Engagement**



**Ashwani Singla**, Founding Managing Partner, Astrum, writes on invitation and exclusively for our exclusive series BRIEF22, where industry stalwarts, thought leaders, industry captains, business heads, brand custodians and other C-suite heads will share their learnings from 2021, and guidance and inspiration for the year ahead.

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**Ashwani Singla is the Founding Managing Partner of Astrum (astrum.in), India's first specialist [reputation management advisory](#) that uses science to understand and shape public opinion ethically.**

*In his two decades of experience, he has donned the role of a trusted advisor and strategist for both the C-Suite & Political leaders. He has advised both Indian and multinational corporations across a range of sectors.*

*He has been the election campaign strategist and pollster for leading national and regional political parties and has been involved in several successful national and state election campaigns for close to a decade, including the defining 2014 campaign of the BJP.*

*Ashwani, a Hall of Fame awardee by PRCI, is consistently listed amongst the most influential voices in the industry by leading media outlets. Since its inception in 2015, Astrum has featured amongst the listings of the top firms in the country.*

Read on.

**Brief22 by Ashwani Singla, Astrum**

### **Looking Back**



The Pandemic is re-shaping our lives and the world around us and adapting to this new normal has been the biggest collective focus. Those who were agile enough to adapt have reaped the benefits of first surviving (2020) and then thriving in 2021.

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At Astrum we ended the year better than we expected in terms of growth, staying 'green' on clients and talent and 'black' in terms of our bottom line. With the third wave in progress in 2022, we continue to remain optimistic that, given the growing number of vaccinated citizens, we will come to terms with the 'new normal' of living with COVID 19.

Our clients continued to show confidence in us and we stuck together as a team and grew with new clients and newer team members. That helped us grow our top line by over 40% and EBITA by over 100%.

### **Brief22 – Looking Forward**

2020 shocked us and 2021 was perhaps the year we recovered some of the lost ground so, naturally, 2022 could be a year of resurgence as we all come to terms with COVID 19 related challenges of life and livelihoods. However, the way, we live, work, and entertain ourselves is being rapidly re-shaped.

We are experiencing the impact of 'climate change' on our daily lives, e.g., flash floods immersing cities, washing way habitations, impact on air and water quality. Megatrends such as 'hybrid life', 'sustainability', and 'great resignation' impacting lives, livelihoods, and the planet, take center stage, we will need a deeper insight into the changing attitudes and beliefs to leverage our most significant asset, the demographic dividend.

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*Sustainability of Lives, Livelihoods, and the Planet will have to be embedded into the corporate discourse and stakeholders will extract a price from those who fail to rise to this challenge*

**ASHWANI SINGLA**  
FOUNDING MANAGING PARTNER  
ASTRUM

### **Brief22 – Priorities, going ahead**

Here are the five trends that are driving everything we are doing at Astrum to be fit.

#### **Data/Insights driven advocacy will continue to find greater adoption**

I am proud to say that Astrum has been a pioneer in basing its work on Insights. This has allowed our clients to embed reputation strategy into the core of their business, develop persuasive messaging and drive a more focused (personalized) stakeholder engagement. The Science of Reputation drives evidence-based results, answering the most important questions about measuring outputs and outcomes of our programs.

#### **Authenticity will be the currency of Communication**

Real Stories, Real People, and Real Emotions will be at the heart of Brand Engagement. The Pandemic has not only re-shaped lives for many but reshaped how they see themselves in the world. Changing priorities seen through just one example of the 'great resignation' will reshape how they engage as consumers, employees, entrepreneurs, investors, amongst other roles. On

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the other hand, brands will need to guard against 'deep fakes' and 'fake news' to protect their credibility and authenticity.

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*The Pandemic has accelerated change at a pace and in a manner that you would not have experienced before. Don't let it scare you; instead welcome it, absorb it and learn from it to make yourself faster and sharper than ever before*

**ASHWANI SINGLA**  
FOUNDING MANAGING PARTNER  
ASTRUM

### **Sustainability will take CenterStage**

Sustainability of Lives, Livelihoods, and the Planet will have to be embedded into the corporate discourse and stakeholders will extract a price from those who fail to rise to this challenge.

The changes that people are experiencing through flash floods that have immersed cities and washed away villages, heat, and cold waves that have caused mass casualties in developed as well as developing economies or the way lives have been lost due to the Pandemic has truly made the world borderless.

Citizens will force governments to respond, and consumers and employees will punish companies that fail to integrate sustainability into their corporate strategy.

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We don't have to look beyond our borders to see that this change is upon us. So, paying lip service to sustainability through CSR would be detrimental to corporate reputation, and companies practicing 'green-washing' will pay a price. Communicators can be the first responders to this challenge and become the 'go-to' resource of the company.

### **Hybrid Living will be the New Normal**

Pandemic has accelerated the adoption of a 'HYBRID LIFE' and making almost all our experiences of our everyday part PHYSICAL and part VIRTUAL. Movies, Shopping, Eating, Gaming, Working, we are discovering how to strike the right balance between both.

Communicators will need to adapt to this new reality to create bespoke engaging content that straddles both worlds. Do we have the answers yet? Perhaps no, but certainly we will need to learn quickly to understand these developing psychographics, leverage the power of technology, and become more engaging storytellers.

### **Regulators will become more cautious**

The rapid pace of the changes that the technology will unfold will confound policymakers and regulators who will tend to 'err on the side of caution'.

Loss of control and influence would drive lawmakers to introduce stringent rules to play the game or become a playing referee.

Corporations will need to relook at the lines shaping their license to operate. Add to this the shaping of global supply chain due to pandemic drive the demand for self-reliance and raising of the border fences.

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*Dream it. Think it. Do it. You are limited only by your own imagination. If it is impossible today, it is only because it is yet to be done*

**ASHWANI SINGLA**  
FOUNDING MANAGING PARTNER  
ASTRUM

### **Advice for young professionals**

The Pandemic has accelerated change at a pace and in a manner that you would not have experienced before. Don't let it scare you; instead welcome it, absorb it and learn from it to make yourself faster and sharper than ever before.

### **Brief22 – Learnings and realizations across 2021**

I have always hated the characterization of life vs. work as 'Skywalker' vs. 'Darth Vader'. I believe that our ability to balance personal and professional responsibilities is an important component of giving our best at work and at home. Therefore, I have been an ardent advocate of 'flexible working' which is now being branded 'hybrid working'. Now the world is coming to that realization.

Dream it. Think it. Do it. You are limited only by your own imagination. If it is impossible today, it is only because it is yet to be done.

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