

Harish Bijoor's Views on Thought Leadership – More than a Catchy Phrase for PR Professionals

Life is very simple...life is all about brands...everything is about brands. The brand is:

- A thought – a simple thought that lives in a person's mind.
- Nothing more & nothing less

There are many thoughts. They could be big or small; friendly or wild; benign or malignant; positive or negative.

Thought leadership is really brand leadership...

For example, if Tata were to enter the baby food market, people would buy the product because they associate the brand with honesty and reliability. A brand one can trust. On the other hand, Union Carbide baby food would find no takers.

Would one consider Jayalalitha or Veerapan to be positive brands? Some people do. This is because different minds have different thoughts ...some find them negative while others positive.

***The brand is a thought therefore
thought leadership equals brand leadership***

There are models of thought leadership. Leadership is a spectrum - people pass from one spectrum to another to another and there are many spectrums that consumers operate within.

Most people emote first of all from the level *I and me*. This is the inner circle. One always thinks of anything from one's own perspective.

Once the inner circle satisfaction is achieved, people move on to the outer circle and look at *'me and my family'*.

The third spectrum people operate in is *'I and my locality'*. This is followed by *'I and my city'; 'I and my country'; 'I and South Asia'; 'I and Asia'; ... ending with the final circle... 'I and the cosmos.'*

Thought leadership is inclusive...

Thought leadership is about transcending these spectrums. It is about going from the narrow and niche to the broad and all-embracing.

- From selfish to unselfish
- From micro to macro: the micros is the inner circle while the macro is the overall circle
- From mindset of 'exclusive' to 'inclusive'

The very key concept of branding as it exists today, is about exclusiveness. The problem is that exclusive brands are not working any more. The new trend is the movement towards inclusive brands.

Thought 1:

The glib & the slick shall not inherit the earth

Market share leadership will go to those companies who are more than glib & slick.

Thought leadership is rising above the category...

What is thought leadership? Possibly Vijaypat Singhania creating a new altitude record in his hot air balloon or Capt Gopinath of Deccan Airways offering a Re 1 ticket on his flight (even though only 25 tickets are offered a year). Thought leadership is probably Capt. Gopi appropriating the common man as a property and treating it as thought leadership.

Thought leadership is being looked at in a competitive arena where Jet Airways has been around for about 12 years, Indian Airlines for 51 years, and several other recent entrants. In this scenario, Air Deccan has achieved high ground. Air Deccan is a very commercial entity, it wants to make money, wants to do an IPO; wants to be the largest carrier in India. How will Capt Gopinath achieve it? Through thought leadership... by being a *non-me too!*

Thought leadership is all about rebellion, about creating excitement, which nobody else has created, about rising above the category.

Thought 2:

People are taught to believe that they are all rational. However one is quite irrational. In earlier days, the education system in India followed two streams. The system was used to coax the irrationality out of students and refine it. One way was through music, which is no longer taught in schools. The other was religion. Today it is considered politically incorrect to teach religion in schools. There is too much rationality in business strategies - we are essentially irrational beings trying to be rational.

Building thought leadership...

Thought 3:

There are two ways of building thought leadership.

Top Down - pushing down through the might of advertising. For example, the way Colgate builds its brand. And Bottom Up - for example, Mahatma Gandhi who is India's best-known brand. He built himself up from the bottom end through his work.

Thought leadership that is built bottom up will look at all the real things in life and is better and more solid. The macro route rather than the micro is far better every time.

Death of brand loyalty...

Thought 4:

Brand loyalty is dead! An average American is married to another average American for *only* 11 years. If one cannot be loyal to the sacred institution of marriage, how can one be loyal to a brand of shoe?

Replacing brand loyalty is service loyalty, which is reality. In service loyalty, no brand is a brand at all. Every brand is a service. Service loyalty will also go out of fashion to be replaced by cause loyalty.

Cause loyalty is thought leadership. It is about Vijaypat Singhania and hot air balloons, Capt. Gopi and his Re 1 ticket and his role in transforming India's airline industry into India's flying railway carriages. There is business sense in thought leadership that goes beyond the obvious goal of stated commerce.

Even corporate social responsibility allows you to demonstrate thought leadership...

Thought 5:

CSR PR has arrived as a tool. A great example is SURF. If one looks at the earlier advertisements of Surf, the message being conveyed was about removing stains. Today, the message being conveyed by Surf Excel is "Saving 2 buckets of water." It highlights all those collective buckets of water that are being saved. This connects with people across the board especially those living in areas where there is water shortage. The brand also comes across as one that cares for the people and the community.

Today's consumer is promiscuous and the promiscuous consumer will be loyal to the biggest cause and most disloyal to the smallest cause.

Thought 6:

Public relations itself needs to peel itself from its paradigm. Most PR is not so public after all. Why? When one peels the onion of PR there are several layers -

Layer 1: Pink Paper PR restricted to financial publications

Layer 2: Pink TV PR limited to CNBC, NDTV Profit

Layer 3: White Paper PR which includes mainline dailies

Layer 4: White TV PR where PR will target every TV channel that reaches out to the masses, and finally

Layer 5: Real Consumer PR which is intrusive 'on the ground' PR. The largest numbers sit in layer 5, the smallest in layer 1.

Thought leadership goes forward only with Layer 5 PR

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Cusp activity between marketing & HR...

Harish replied that this has been implemented before in another company where he worked in the management of 28,000 odd franchisees and thereafter managing around 40 lakh consumers. It was fundamentally an activity where the entire company went through an internal branding process, understood the business process and realised that the public relations had to be very broad spectrum and practised by each employee. Subsequently there were a whole set of ground level activities in the market place to reach out to consumers.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Harish Bijoor, CEO, Harish Bijoor Consults, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on November 30, 2005)