

BIDISHA NAGARAJ'S VIEWS ON PR FUEL

This presentation aims to provide an overview on contextual PR and the need to marry content and context, which will help achieve better results. The presentation highlights case studies of marketing initiatives undertaken in India and Taiwan, which deftly use both context and content to deliver the message to the target audience.

The Intel chip or the microprocessor...

The Microprocessor (MP) is not a product that the end consumers get to see, feel or even touch. It is a key ingredient of any computer, actually the brain of a PC and yet most PC users are not aware of its function. This lack of knowledge however is not a hindrance to Intel as long as the consumer knows what a PC is and what it can do.

However, given the above fact Intel counters many challenges that have to be overcome.

- How to prove to consumers the presence of something that they can't see, feel and touch.
- Existence of technical mumbo jumbo in the category. For some consumers it's a matter of pride, that they understand it, some hide their discomfort and some do not want to understand it since it will take away the myth surrounding it and it won't be cool anymore. Thus getting closer to consumers by telling him or her about something they do not relate to is definitely a challenge.
- No experiential opportunity. Unlike a purchase of a TV or music system, there is hardly any opportunity for a consumer to experience a PC's usage before buying.
- The multifaceted benefits of a PC, gaming, entertainment, education tool, etc. also creates confusion among marketers. What should be the right positioning?
- Consumers are mystified by technology, a PC is not something that you can plug and play, many feel it's beyond their control and thus a PC at home is mostly kept as a showpiece, nicely covered and wrapped
- Gestation period between desire and purchase of a PC is six months to a year unlike any other electronic gadget, which is between two to three months. Price also plays a part.

- Buying and usage pattern differs after a PC is bought. Education is the reason for purchase but is mostly used for gaming, surfing, etc.

Summarising all the challenges, the task at hand is:

- A Microprocessor (MP) is an ingredient brand, which a consumer cannot feel or touch but it is key to a PC, thus Intel needs to portray its relevance and make a connect to end consumer.
- Connect with right kind of content at a right context.

The approach...

The 'Intel inside' as a concept today, is a case study in most well known business schools across the globe. It showcased that the fundamental thing of an ingredient brand is, the part (MP) is equal to the whole (PC). Its not that the whole is bigger than the part. Thus in principle, the part equals the whole.

Being a part of a computer and not a whole creates a difficult proposition. The MP has to establish its relevance, provide significant benefit to the consumer and create that pull. Ensuring end consumers recognise and interact with the brand is a challenge.

Intel pursued an approach of examining the consumption situation in order to create the right context and focussed on the consumer experience and thereby provides the right content. *Summing the two gives us the desired results of trial and purchase.*

Examining the consumption situation...

Given a PC's multiple benefits, it becomes imperative for Intel to understand which one or two benefits can be utilised to position the product and reach out to the consumers.

More often than not marketers introducing a new product in a market place just want to ensure that consumers lap it up and lose sight of the relevance aspect. They fail to focus on whether the product fits into the consumer's lifestyle. Intel recognises that a consumer is unlikely to change his or her lifestyle to embrace a product. Thus it becomes a marketer's responsibility to ensure that the product seamlessly fits into consumer lifestyles.

If the PC is positioned as an education tool we are drawing attention of its relevance to a child. The second step obviously is identifying different areas where one can touch the child in the context of education. Schools, teachers, parents, textbooks, libraries are a few of them.

At Intel it has always been our approach to seamlessly fit in

with the consumers lifestyle without letting them feel that there is a marketer trying to barrage them with products. Surprising consumers with the context of touch points helps marketers to stay away from being predictable.

Continuing with the PC as an education tool, when a mother goes to buy textbooks for her child, she sees a big PC at the shop and the shopkeeper enquires if she would like to purchase software or textbooks. This definitely adds a surprise element for the consumer.

Examining the consumption situation thus is all about the right context. The touch points are really the context in which one is communicating with the consumer subtly and seamlessly but not through hard sell.

Focusing on consumer experience...

We also recognize that the MP is a boring dull product hidden inside a PC. The importance thus lies in providing a sensorial and emotional experience to the consumers. But how?

Usage is key to excitement, especially for MP's, as opposed to cosmetics!! Until and unless the consumer sits on the PC and experiences its wow factor he/she will not get excited. Another aspect to be kept in mind when providing consumer with an experience is to strike a right balance between overwhelming them and being relevant. There is no point in overwhelming them too much so as to literally postpone their purchase decision.

Summarising approach...

Examining the consumption situation, creating the right context, using the right tools, which seamlessly integrate into the consumers lifestyle and the right content, all come together to deliver the desired outcome. Content and context goes hand in hand. At Intel we believe that one cannot separate the two, as they go hand in hand.

Let us consider four case studies where Intel has successfully married content and context to create excitement all around. These case studies showcase a few marketing initiatives undertaken which not only interface with consumers but also worked to trigger interest among the journalists which in turn translated into coverage. These initiatives even helped the journalists understand the product better than the regular press releases and conferences.

Case studies...

PC Party – Instead of naming it a PC seminar, it was called a PC Party to create a context with which the consumer can relate. Since its inception in 2002 the event has become bigger and better in tier III markets (Lucknow, Bhopal, Coimbatore). Every weekend, a two-day session is held with consumers and journalists in some city or the other in these markets.

The agenda of this party is to have fun while you learn. Workshops, sessions with the PC where people are taught how to create their own music, video, movie etc. The person taking the class is not a teacher but a new consumer who narrates his/her experience. Music and dancing and a complete party ambience is created.

Thus the party is the context. Attention to details is necessary. The venues must be places consumers like to spend their weekends and easily accessible. Messaging at these parties have been kept simple, merely to seed the thought of buying a PC in the consumer's mind. This simple messaging would not have reached the consumers if dull boring slides were shown with technical jargons.

After the context has been suitably identified content is the key. So instead of talking about motherboard, chips and processors, consumers are taught about creating photo-albums, music etc. Simple communication means, which do away with the mystery factor around technology and make it user friendly. All these contents resonate well with consumers and they can relate to them.

Thus the message delivered is:

- A PC can easily fit into your lifestyle and see how it can change your life.
- To enjoy all these and be able to replicate what you learnt you need a powerful computer equipped with an Intel processor. It's a very subliminal message but gets through to the consumer.

2,500 people attend every single PC party. Media, who are also consumers, enjoy these sessions, which in turn have translated into excellent coverage.

School programmes – Positioning computer as an education tool targeted at children. Recognising that children have huge pester power, Intel took the cue to boost it further through the school outreach programmes.

Result..Captive audience...

This is an ongoing programme taken to all schools both English and non-English medium. It entails convincing the Principal that the programme is not a sales pitch but only a means to convey the benefits of technology. Children are taken through a slide show at the auditorium and at the end of it they are given direct mailers, which encompasses the theme behind the school programmes. These mailers reach the parents and are accompanied by a coupon informing them about purchase options.

The school programme has been very successful and Intel

has reached over 1.1 million school children across the country.

Shatabdi programme – Devised to reach more consumers especially the fathers.

Traveling in a train from point A to point B is always boring. So Intel created a PC Party atmosphere in these trains (couple of bogies). This engages the passengers and gives them an opportunity to learn and also spend their time without getting bored.

A pilot run of this programme has just been concluded and has received overwhelming response. It basically served two purposes

- a. Helped commuters utilise their time usefully and
- b. Enabled Intel to showcase their wireless technology

A mature market experience...

In a mature market like Taiwan where PC literacy is not only high but a whopping 30% of the consumers prefer buying PC parts and assembling their own computers, Intel was confronted with a challenge while considering how to launch a new processor called hypo-threading processor. Unlike India where educating consumers is the foundation what does one do with a matured market?

A cleverly designed initiative was undertaken which was bound to excite even the geeks. A PC Moding contest was held. (*Moding is the short form of modifying or modernizing*). Consumers were challenged to create a PC, which will not look like a computer but yet be a PC. The contest received innumerable entries and some very creative designs are illustrated below

Outcome of the contest...



The press loved it and the contest received good publicity apart from connecting with the consumers!!

Summary...

apart from connecting with the consumers!!

Lesson learnt...

Challenge is to think out of the box, especially at Intel where we face unique challenges and then develop tools from the PR standpoint, which will translate into coverage too. It is important to marry content with context

At Intel marketing programmes are key to creating awareness among consumers. To a large extent the press release and conference route has been eliminated, until and unless it's a big announcement. The marketing programmes act as a double whammy, gets the consumer interested, press interested and creates a ripple effect...gets the entire eco-system excited.

Initially Intel created innovative programmes for the sake of being innovative, to be seen as cool but they all backfired. Both consumers and press showed the thumbs down. So it is important to be innovative within the context, which will be relevant to the consumer's lifestyle.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Are you open to partnerships with other children brands when you are doing your school programmes?

Many companies have approached us and we too have approached a few but during these school programmes one has to be extremely careful not to cross over the thin line between messaging and selling. The moment the schools feel the company is trying to sell a product as opposed to communicating benefits they will disallow the programme. Some brands want to do that and thus we have to be careful. We have very strong equity with all the schools and will be happy if any company approaches us with the same philosophy as ours.

Where are the PC parties being held?

The PC Parties are mostly targeted at tier three towns and not metros. In these towns the parties are held every weekend.

How do you measure the success rate of these programmes?

We utilise different parameters to measure our success. PR Sales and Impact. Each one has various variables under them.

PR

How many print translations did it materialise into?

How many journalists attended the party?

How many short stories did it result into?

Sales

Tracking every single consumer who attended the parties till they make a purchase.

Impact

Post PC party research. When consumers are exiting they are asked simple questions on what they learnt how they felt etc Through a formal questionnaire.

The advantage in India is there are no laws regarding filling up feedback forms by consumers. But in Korea, Taiwan, China its against the law to do so and thus its tough to get post research feedback.

How do you handle the issue of ethics (using children as influencers for purchase) when you are doing your school programme? End of the day you are there to sell and influence a purchase decision. How do tread the delicate balance?

Before launching the school programme Sales and Marketing were at loggerheads. Sales said it was not a good programme as at the end of the programme it is not translating into cash rings for the company but we marketers see it differently. It's a definitely a very fine balance. But when we are communicating in these school auditoriums we show around 40 odd slides and only half a slide is on Intel. The flier that goes home to parents talks about what the child has learnt in school and the coupon in the end informs the parents that if they ever want to buy a PC where to go (list of dealer names) since at these places they can take advantage of special finance options. We are not communicating anything about Sales or the company within the school premises. And the flier to parents, there is a little call to action, which makes them think where to buy a PC.

With the current debate being children used as influencers. Don't you think you have an issue there probably somewhere down the line if not right now as this debate grows?

Yes and no both. A MP is not a candy, a sharpener or a pencil where the consumer awareness is high. This is a complex category and education is the key. It's the foundation and step one. We are also running programmes in universities, Business schools, Engineering colleges which are sales led. A college going student is aware about a PC. In these programmes the messaging is about which processor is better and what cost they come at. The key foundation is education. One cannot skip that and go to sales. The school programmes are right now relevant which probably down the years may become irrelevant at some point.

Do you have a socially responsible programme

At Intel we have a different division called "Intel Teach programme" where the charter has nothing to do with the end consumers. The charter is to make school teachers embrace and understand the goodness of PC. The aim is to get every school teacher in India become a PC literate teacher. This programme was started four years back.

Are you saying that you have totally dispensed the press release route per se?

No it continues. But we are not making much progress with it. We did try to make them interesting but still we had the press calling us and enquiring, "so what's new", "what do you want us to write". With these initiatives we were able to cut the ice. A media person witnessing a PC party and himself being able to experience it made all the difference.

An Intel employee in US quit the company and decided to write a book called, PC Dads. The book is all about simplifying technology. He totally demystifies technology for the everyday reader by giving examples of everyday situations, from getting up in the morning to brushing your teeth to getting back to sleep how a PC can make your life richer is all the book talks about. Our PR team uses excerpts from the book extensively and use it as bylined articles with small alterations Indianising the content.

Can you share some of the mistakes you made?

PC Parties - We started PC parties in Mumbai and Delhi. Spent a lot of money but realized the concept did not cut through in big cities. The same idea was a hit in smaller towns. Not much of a mistake but definitely an evolution. The learning here is that same context and content may not be relevant across the country.

Does a team from your organization handle the school programmes?

We have only five people in our marketing team here. Moreover the company has an operating principle of outsourcing. All our agencies engaged in the projects go through extensive training and get completely 'Intelised' before they go out in the field. Presently our school programme is completely outsourced but we do keep contacts with the Principals, which we prefer to do it ourselves.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Bidisha Nagaraj, Asia Pacific Retail Marketing Manager, Intel, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Delhi on March 23, 2004)