

HARISH BIJOOR'S VIEWS ON BUILDING BRAND IDENTITIES

Definition of a brand ...

While a brand may be defined as a name, a slogan, an identity, a symbol; my definition of a brand is - "A brand is a thought that occupies a soft spot in the head of the consumer." A brand is not about the marketer, the advertiser, the PR person, the brand manager or CEO; it is about the consumer. Therefore, I believe that the best way to approach any subject is to be very consumer centric because a consumer is the end all and be all of all our endeavours.

How PR can interface with branding...

Believing in consumer and consumer insight is important but we normally do not know what consumer insight can achieve for us and how it can impact the lives of people.

PR is of two types...

PR is a term that reads right but its meaning has got completely hijacked somewhere in transit. Just as a brand is about consumers, even PR is about consumers. Whether it be Enron faced with a corporate governance issue or Fair & Lovely advertising being politically incorrect, or Kama Sutra condom facing innumerable litigation cases about condom failure cases, they are all about the consumers. We must understand that PR must tackle the end consumers.

The first type of PR is the **tactical PR** or the skin deep PR. This PR is just a campaign without understanding the category issues very well. It is about handling a crisis and giving knee-jerk reactions to it. The latest pesticide-cola controversy is a classic example of skin deep PR or incidence management.

The second type of PR is **strategic PR**. This is a deeper type of PR and is a programme, which is strategic and goes beyond the skin of what is to be done. An important point to note is that sustainable PR is a long-term PR campaign that goes on in the future and is not dependent on the people or agency driving it. The future is about PR that is broad based in its audience sweep, a communication programme that has depth.

There are several layers to PR:

Layer 1

Peeling the onion of the PR at play...

The Decision-maker PR – Addressed to the governments, regulatory and administrative bodies like TRAI etc. Most PR agencies and PR Professionals are very good at this type of PR. Managing government relations was very important in the old days of the licence Raj in India, but is no longer an important component of the PR profession.

Layer 2

The Pink Paper PR – PR programmes aimed at readers of pink papers or business papers like The Economic Times, Business Standard etc. benefits the likes of an IPO entrant. These papers are usually read by a different set of people who are possibly defined as tertiary consumers and are not so important. I have conducted a study of approximately 620 companies across India, Singapore and Hong Kong and concluded that 82 per cent of the companies cater to this type of PR, which is essentially skin deep PR.

Layer 3

The White Paper PR – this caters to the readers of publications as diverse as The Times of India, Indian Express, Dainik Jagran, Sakal, etc. Even though this communication reaches out to the literate mass it is limiting in itself.

Layer 4

The All-Mass-Media PR – This includes television, which as a medium defies the definition of literacy as defined by the Indian census. 355 million Indians are illiterate as per the Indian census, which is not true according to me. I have a concept called “new literacy”, which states that anybody who can see and hear is literate. The television medium has mass percolation and does not require its viewers to know how to read or write.

Layer 5

Consumer Touch PR – This is a PR programme that takes you into the market place and makes you handle PR like brand communications. Advertising attacks everybody at a mass bombardment level but promotions attack everybody individually. This programme is tailored to reach out to every single consumer within the target segment today and within the non-target segment as well, because those may become the target segment in the future.

My worry is that Indian PR mostly stops at layer two or three but does not go to layer four or five. The future of this industry is about reaching layer four and five, which is credible, long-standing and sustainable PR. The ultimate goal of PR must touch the life of the end consumer in a meaningful and memorable way, which is lasting and in which value is discovered and partaken as well.

From Lip-service to Zip-Service

This case study illustrates how Zip Telecom adapted a communication programme, which reached both internal and external audiences right up to the grassroots level of the end consumer. It is about building brands through a cusp approach of PR where both marketing and HR was at play; a

*A case study on
Zip Telecom...*

mass based PR exercise that focuses on internal as well as the external PR process.

About Zip Telecom...

Zip Telecom is a unique Telecom Service Provider and is the first and only Payphone company in India. Funded by AIG and Anderson Weinroth LLC, it is a profit-making company with a turnover of 900 Million Plus and is very front-ended in operations. It has three revenue streams – Telephony, Media and Value-added services. Zip Telecom has a large number of customer relationships: 18000, and growing by the day; and has plans of going international in four countries by exit 2002 and plans to target 1,00,000 Phones in 18 months time. Each ZipFone is an individually addressable Internet device

The key issue faced by Zip Telecom is that it manages 18,000 Franchisee relationships, which offer Customer Service at Level 1, Customer Delight at Level 2, Customer Ecstasy at Level 3 and beyond.

This is faced across 17 offices, with 400 employees (direct and indirect). The company has a call centre, many customer service executives, CRM systems and processes and is on the way to ERP.

The existing approach to customer service was to use all the systems in place, use the tools of RM out of the CRM process, solve problems as they arise and solve problems as they are reported.

Need for consumer PR...

CRM is a much-touted 'Gyan', which is seen to be the panacea to all the ills of Customer Management process. We need to understand that systems alone don't deliver. The "C" i.e. the consumer, in the CRM and e-CRM is the normal missing link. If one were to think about one's personal life, one would realise that as a consumer one does face problems, for e.g., with the credit card company, mobile telephony company, hotel loyalty programme etc., despite the best of systems these can give one problems. How does one solve this problem? The consumer connect is missing in organisations. People might man companies, but these very people forget that they are dealing with people and their feelings and that customers need to be understood and respected. The problem lies in the fact that we get overtly dependent on systems and processes. Even PR programmes are aimed at the primary audience of the media and not the consumers. Depending on who you are, a customer is usually viewed as:

- largely an ID number
- an account number
- a statistic
- a pain
- a job to be handled

<i>The ZAT Approach...</i>	The Zip Adopt Ten or the ZAT approach is a long-term customer delight programme that harnesses the potential of every employee of the organisation towards customer orientation. It not only is different, but also involves all employees in the company and leverages on the "human-edge" of organization. It harnesses scarce customer-oriented resources and uses the tool of PR in a more broad-based manner.
<i>How ZAT works...</i>	Every employee is a ZAT Evangelist and adopts ten ZipFone franchisees, which involves an initial visit and then follow-up calls. ZAT follows a build-a-friend approach. It employs covert PR and helps solve the existing problems, trapping and solving the new problem as it emerges, with the belief that God is in the details. The "friend-philosopher-guide" approach, not only documents trust, but also creates a zero-hierarchy effort within the organization.
<i>What ZAT does...</i>	ZAT operates at the base level of human psychology and gives positive interaction and purpose to both employee and franchisee by focusing on the internal-customer as well as the external. It translates the "mechanical" into the "real" and provides for two-way satisfaction by solving problems in real-time. The ZAT hierarchy follows the zero-hierarchy solution front, where the CEO is the chief ZAT Evangelist and every employee from the office peon to the big boss is a ZAT Evangelist.
<i>Achievements of the ZAT programme...</i>	The ZAT programme has been successful and has thrown up 49,656 problems to date and solved 42,389 of these completely. It has also helped moved satisfaction index from even the levels of three to eight. Large numbers of issues have been solved even as they are being discovered. The programme has sensitized both the franchisee and the employee to minute problems and making them realize that no problem is too small. In conclusion, the ZAT programme has been a binding force within the organisation and also between the organisation and its consumers. It is a PR-Marketing-HR initiative that has brought life into the Customer Management Process.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

<i>Evaluation is a constant issue that all of us face internally. One of the</i>	Evaluation is one of the big things in PR today. If the PR profession has to gain in credence it should be seen as something that is completely measurable. Unfortunately there are some realms in our lives which are not measurable but despite that we are getting away with murder. Advertising is certainly one of them. But PR for one can be
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reasons this profession has not been able to earn a seat on the board. A comment please.

measured, whether you measure the efficacy of PR by the number of news clips that one gets or the column cms achieved or the depth of coverage by the type of publication etc. I think these measurement devices remain easy to conform to but when it comes to consumer PR it gets that much more complicated. Brand evaluation for instance is a typical process. I am sure PR can use some of the methods from brand evaluation. In fact PR agencies have a fantastic opportunity today to provide their client's with better measurement / evaluation tools and therefore provide better bang for the buck. All of us are going to get very dependent on PR in the long run but PR has to morph itself and move away from its level one and level two PR approaches.

How would you define PR?

Fundamentally its about creating an impression in the mind of the consumer. For any brand, the brand equity is a function of many things, PR is but one of those items which impact the brand equity, as one needs to create a positive impression about the brand among its target audience. In my opinion the end goal is the consumer and I want consumer related PR, where a consumer touches and feels and sees my appeal. The problem lies in the fact that one can not measure PR as there are no devices offered for it. Also the credibility of mediums is getting questionable now. Today if you can buy PR in a newspaper, where is the credibility value of the editorial? I believe that media is killing itself. It is meant to be a content centric entity but unfortunately due to commercial reasons its becoming more and more advertising centric. If I can buy a front-page anchor story, there is no credibility left for that medium.

We have seen trends in terms of organisations moving from a sales driven culture to a marketing driven culture. There is sole dependence on advertising to push itself and its products, now PR plays a very critical role and slowly brand management

Everything is cyclical in life and there are two processes in play, one is push and the other is pull. The push process is right up to the selling process. In the early days we were very push centric, when media was weak. Today media is powerful and therefore marketers are realising the fact that you need to create a pull for your product, which is dramatic. Advertising is one way of creating a pull and PR and branding certainly other ways. I believe that currently in society we are more dependent on the pull strategy but there will come a time when pull strategies will lose its credence with people losing confidence in the medium. When that happens we will go back to the push strategy. In the '50s and '60s the production manager was the big boss of the organisation because there was a production scarcity and demand was big. In the '70s it was the cost manager because the demand- supply ratio had evened out and low cost manufacturing was what counted. '80's and '90s were sales lead times when too much supply and we had to push things down people's throats. We are currently in the 2000 series of years, which are the magnet years when we are going to create magnetic attraction to our brand and going to use PR much more than it was before. Advertising monies

too is becoming important. How do you see this role moving from PR to brand management and what does that entail?

will now be spent in the following manner:

- Advertising which is an above the line activity and an easy route to take
- Promotion which is a below the line activity and a difficult route to take
- PR

There was a time when we used to spend 95 per cent of monies on advertising and 5 per cent on promotions and nanno percentage on PR. But things are changed today, there is 60 per cent on advertising, 40 per cent on promotions and still a nanno percentage on PR, but it is growing. During the dotcom days we saw the role of PR, we saw the kind of retainerships that PR agencies could command during those days, but not anymore.

Is PR below the line?

Typically the paradigm of PR is seen as above the line. But I want to break that paradigm and make it below the line. The PR that I am talking about is below the line PR, above the line PR is the easy thing to do whereas below the line PR is more difficult. What is easily measurable is below the line PR and what is less easily measurable is above the line PR.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Harish Bijoor, CEO, Harish Bijoor Consults Inc, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on September 10, 2003)