

RANJANA SMETACEK'S VIEWS ON RURAL PR

This presentation aims to provide a snapshot of what the rural markets look like, how people can be targeted in these markets and also how we can draw the attention of the media in the rural sector.

The rural Indian market...

According to the last NCAER study, the rural Indian market has a potential market of 742m people, which is bigger than the urban market and accounts for 53 per cent of FMCGs and 59 per cent Durables sales. The estimated annual market size of rural India alone is Rs. 108,000 crore. This market extends beyond agriculture where 24 per cent of employment and 47 per cent of rural income comes from the non-farm sector.

The future of rural markets ...

The potential of the rural market can be gauged by the following:

- Flow of institutional credit to agriculture is estimated at Rs.736,570 crore in the tenth plan (2002- 07)
- The target numbers of Kisan credit cards are expected to touch 50 million by 2004- 05
- 190,000 or 70 per cent of Indian villages will be accessible as per the road construction plan of the 10th five-year plan
- Technology will play a key role in connecting to the rural customer as is evident by the STD and cellular telephone revolution

Reaching rural audiences

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The one question that is foremost is – how do we reach this very vast and dispersed audience?

There is the media: In rural India, an average adult is exposed to media for six hours a week as compared to 13 hours for his urban counterpart

And then there are:

-Post Offices	1,34,000
-Haats	47,000
-Melas	25,000
-Mandis	7,000
-Public Distribution Shops	3,50,000

Even though six lakh villages house 62.6 per cent of our literate population it accounts for just 48 per cent of media's readership base. The rural print media enjoys very high credibility with readers and its important to note that this media is easier to connect with and build relationships, for e.g. an editor of a rural publication is very accessible. Lack of

Rural print media...

news opportunities in rural India makes it easier to interest these media in field visits and promotions, unlike in cities. The possibility of leveraging relationships is also considerably higher with rural media because very often, publication houses are also printing houses, which could be handling your printing business. A point to keep in mind while communicating with the rural print media is that they prefer local language communications. Though communication in English is accepted but it is considered thoughtful to provide information in local languages depending on the target region of communication.

Monsanto's India experience and the challenge faced by it...

Monsanto has a consumer base of 3-4 million farmers in India, spread across 485 districts of 20 states, who use Monsanto's products on over 10 million acres. The company has a network of 1400 dealers and distributors over and above its partner's network. Monsanto meets close to half its consumers face-to-face, during some 40,000 farmer meetings conducted annually, across the two planting seasons.

Monsanto is an agricultural company and therefore it is easier for it to access rural markets. Non-agri business companies who do not have a face-to-face opportunity with its customers can partner with a company that does.

Some of the communication tactics adopted by Monsanto to reach out to its rural target audience on a continuous basis are as follows:

Reaching rural target audience on a continuous basis....

- ♣ **Farmer meetings:** This is a great opportunity for dialogue using audio-visuals, examples, testimonials, demonstrations, pass-arounds and giveaways. Earlier agricultural companies always partnered companies in the same sector, but now they have realised that it is a good opportunity in partnering other industries, which need to reach out to the same audience.
- ♣ **Farmer projects:** These are direct contact programmes and unlike the farmer meetings, which are carried out during the season only, these programmes allow the company to partner the farmer throughout the entire crop cycle.

Humsafar is one such programme initiated by Monsanto to convert maize variety growers to maize hybrids in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, which account for half of the maize produced in India. Most farmers in these regions used variety maize and Monsanto realised that in order to sell its hybrid maize, it would need to first dispel the misconceptions of hybrid maize. The company adopted a few villages and placed its people through a season in these villages. Selected

farmers were tutored in agronomic practices to get the best out of hybrid seeds. The company monitored the planting, tending and the harvest. For good measure, Monsanto even tied up the sale of their produce with big buyers thereafter. Testimonials from these villages talking about the unprecedented yields, phenomenal incomes were used to convert other farmers to hybrid seeds. The success of this project is reflected in the Company's sales of hybrid maize.

Captive audience...

Collaboration with Development of Women and Children Rural Areas or DWCRA (a group working with women and children, specifically in Andhra Pradesh) to support women. Monsanto believed that women are great opinion makers and it would influence them about its products. Hence the company helped women in tending to kitchen gardens adopting and other agricultural practices that they could use on a smaller scale.

- ♣ **Melas:** Entire families visit Village fairs and they are great forums for demonstrations (stall exhibits), showcasing brands (cut-outs and inflatables), competitions (highest decibels), product related games and coupon handouts
- ♣ **Mandis and Haats:** Farmers stream in through the harvest season or every week to sell their produce and with ample time on their hands. Ideal opportunity for direct promotions, quizzes, raffles etc. that also help expand data bases

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How successful was Monsanto's association with DWCRA in mobilising women power in a male dominated society like Andhra Pradesh?

Ranjana Smetacek replied that Monsanto deliberately worked with an NGO like DWCRA, since it was reputed to be successful in such projects. Also, the success was measured by means of conducting surveys to check difference in perceptions and feedback from the NGO, which were both positive. Though the process of change is slow it is a more abiding change.

How do you work with established structures like

Ranjana Smetacek replied that apart from projects with DWCRA, Monsanto has also undertaken social initiatives in the field of education and nutrition. These projects are funded from an independent fund called the Monsanto Fund

*government
agencies or
NGO's?*

with clear guidelines on the kind of people the company can partner and stresses on the importance of verifying their credentials. Monsanto prefers to work with experienced, highly credible agencies or individuals like Schoolnet, and Mohan Dharia (former Cabinet Minister and President, Vanarai Trust, India).

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Ranjana Smetacek, Director Public Affairs, Monsanto India, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on September 10, 2003)