

SUNIL LULLA'S VIEWS on BUILDING BRAND IDENTITIES

We often talk of PR in the sense of corporate relationship or reputation management of corporates; one remembers PR when the chips are down, or when times are good. Very rarely is the PR team involved with the brand and marketing team. Probably last four to five years one has seen this involvement more often in some sectors, which have been more evangelist about marketing their brands and understanding consumers.

Does the DDT controversy force a change in defining the 'Brand Identity' for the cola industry?

One wonders if Coca-Cola or Pepsi ever thought that they needed to inform people that "It's safe to drink" their products? It definitely was not there in their brand identity manual. Does the recent DDT controversy faced by the cola companies make other manufacturers think about what provisions to make for in their brand identity and what new messages to devise? My point is not about how the cola issue was managed or mismanaged, my point is that how an incidence like this can stop people from consuming a beverage that they never thought before about in this manner; leading to a negative impact to the bottom line of the cola companies.

Brand Reputation bottom line, because it impacts what the consumer thinks of the brand...

One way to define a brand identity is how Warren Buffet (he invests in reputed companies like Coca-Cola, ***impacts*** Microsoft, McDonalds, and Gillette among others) defined it in a letter to his employees in which he wrote, "If you lose dollars for the firm, I will be understanding. If you lose reputation for the firm, I will be ruthless." If one was to look at the above definition from a brand reputation perspective and think of names like Infosys, TATA, Reliance, Microsoft, Linux, LG, Coke, O & M, J & J, Lakme, Sony, one would realise that these names are like brands for these corporates and their reputation is important to them. Even the reputations of brand names like Airtel, Crocin, Horlicks, Tide, Santro, Lifebuoy are exceedingly important for the respective corporations who own these brands. When it comes to managing brand identities the starting points can be to look at how can you protect, preserve, grow, enrich, manage and build your brand reputation by using PR.

The ways to define PR...

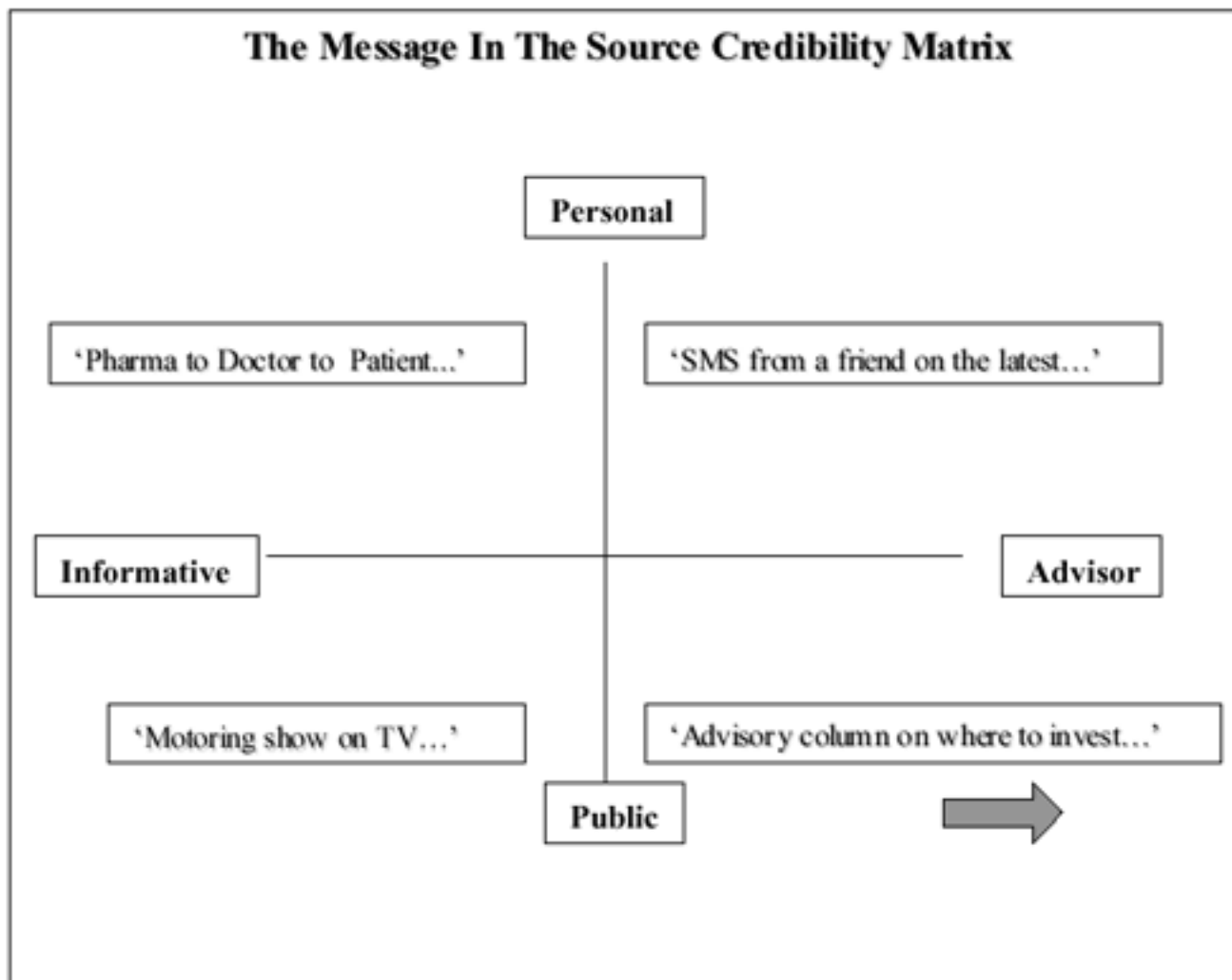
Philip Kotler used the term publicity for PR and defined it as, "Publicity is a *non personal stimulation of demand* for a product, service or business unit by *planting commercially significant news* about it in a published

medium or obtaining favorable presentation of it upon radio, television or stage that is *not paid for* by the sponsor." The three things that stand out are:

- *non personal stimulation of demand* – get someone else to do it for you
- *planting commercially significant news* – I believe that all news need not be commercially significant, it is all about the right messaging
- *not paid for* – this gets us to the current issue of editorial spaces getting commercial. We live in changing times and we should realise that and accept that life is commercial; it's a competitive game. What we need to do therefore is to rethink as to what PR means in this context of managing brand identities. Contemporary marketers believe PR is, "*Influencing opinion* and shaping perception core to the brand, by leveraging the power of any 'source credible' medium."

PR can be used to manage brand identity

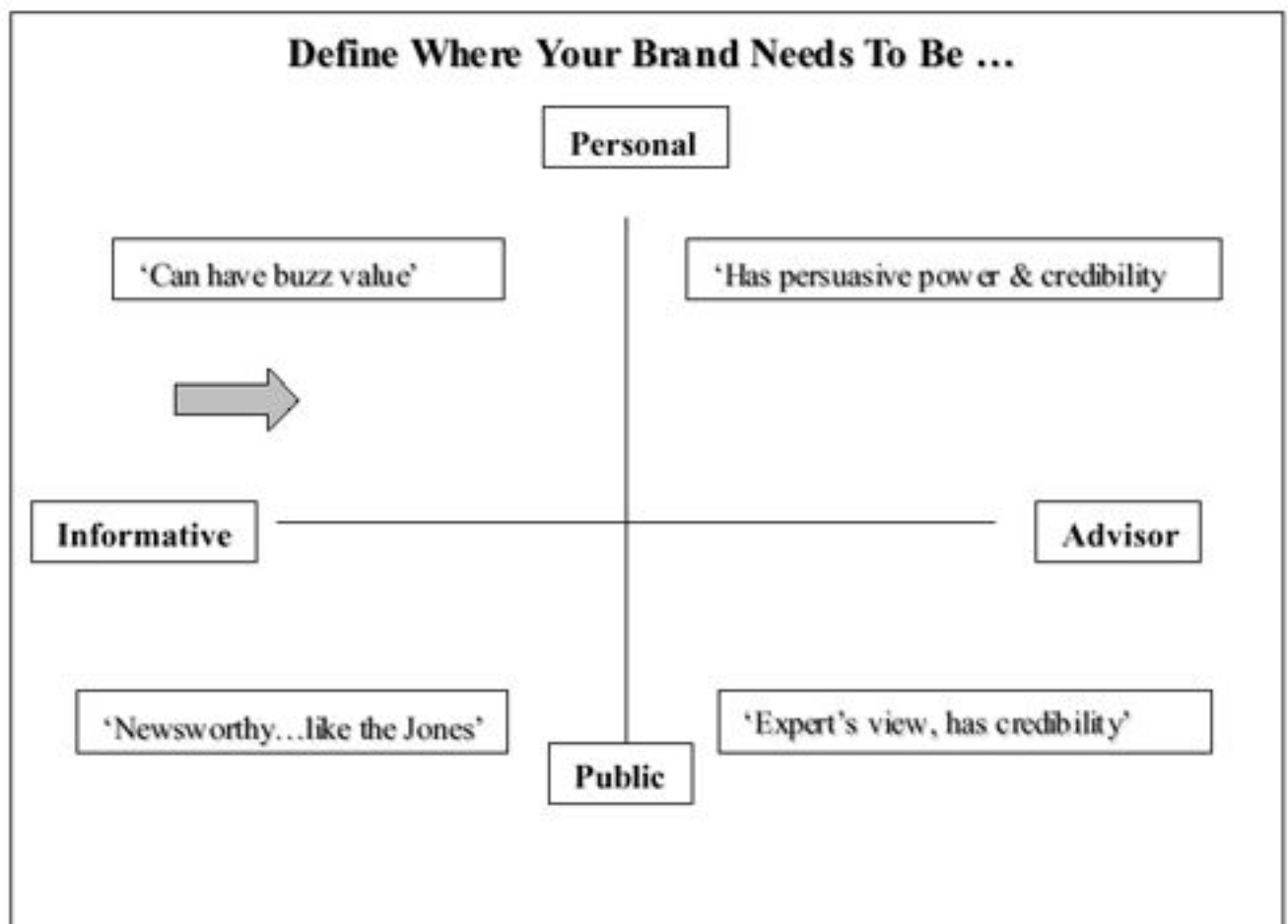
If one has a brand that one needs to influence people on, then at the outset one should list the attributes or image parameters that one would like to influence people on. It could be trustworthiness, convenience, cheaper cost, better performer etc. Once this parameter is identified then one should evaluate and see if it is possible to influence the consumer and if the opportunity exists then it is possible to write a PR programme for it. However, should there be persuasion required for that saliency then one would need to use the advertising route. When one uses advertising or sales promotions then one attempts to persuade the consumer, whereas one uses PR to influence the consumer. Though there is a thin line between persuasion and influencing, it is this line that differentiates PR or communications from others.



**Sunsilk
Advisory
Services...**

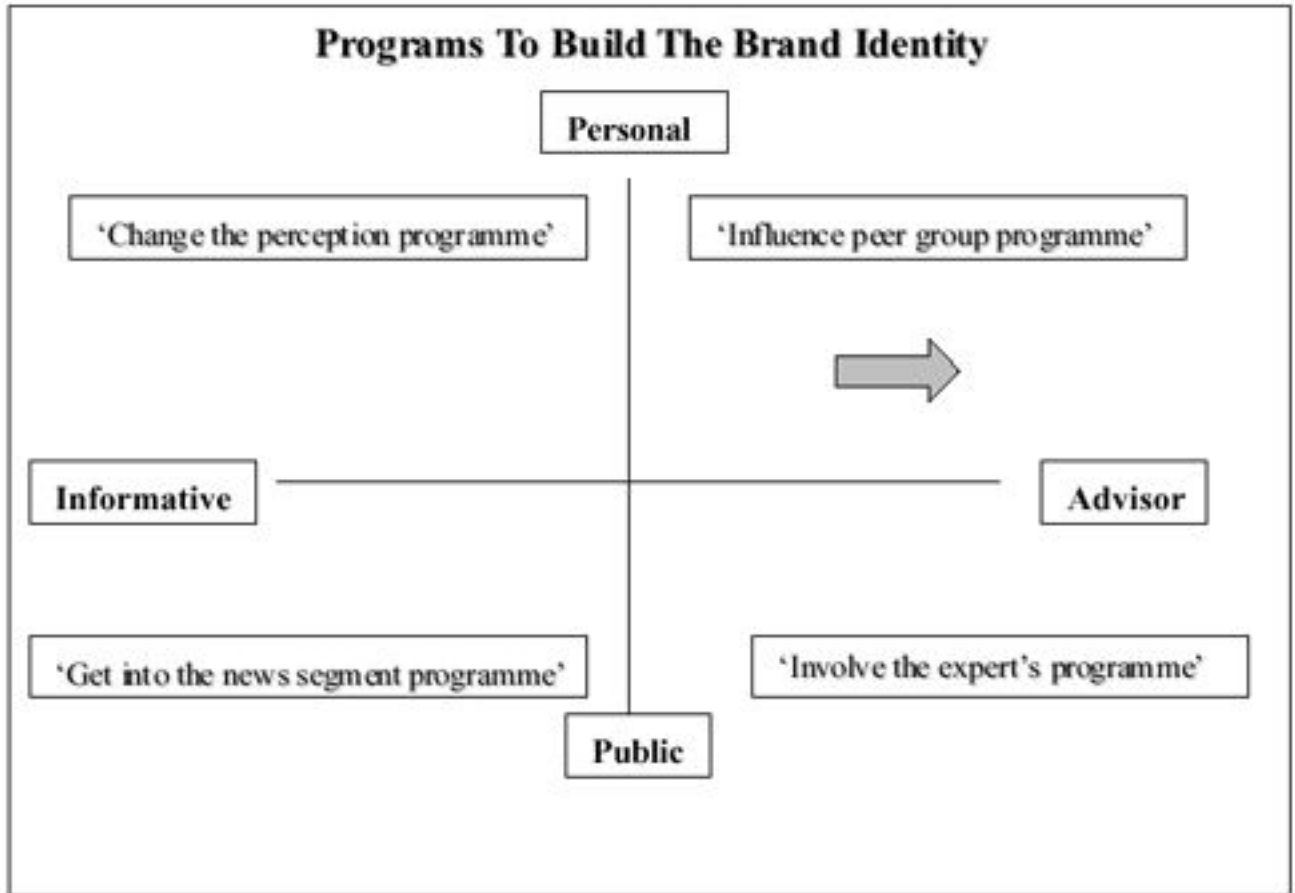
About 15 years ago Sunsilk was attempting to grow the usage of shampoo in India. Research showed that the most aspirational quality in women regarding hair was long black beautiful hair. Sunsilk identified this as the key brand attribute to influence people’s minds on. They employed Naina Balsavar, a hairdresser to answer questions and give tips on ‘long black beautiful hair’. Even though she was not a practicing beauty expert, but an aura and image was created around her for this exercise. The programme created a column each in one leading publication in each major Indian language. These publications were all women oriented publications in which Naina wrote about long beautiful black hair and how to create it and

answered related questions. This was done with very minimalist branding, subtle interplay of the product in the content. This drew a response of about 20,000 queries a month from each publication. Nobody was prepared at the backend to handle such great volumes of queries. Thus the programme grew bigger and went into a portfolio where responses were handled, a booklet was created and mailed out to the respondents. This was a successful PR programme which was an activity away from the mainstay activity, using an approach which was source credible, using an advisor, using a public basis and placing a prompt in the public domain – “Do you want long black beautiful hair?” This is an example of PR blending with conventional marketing and I see this line blurring very often and very fast.



Flash Mobs For Jassi...

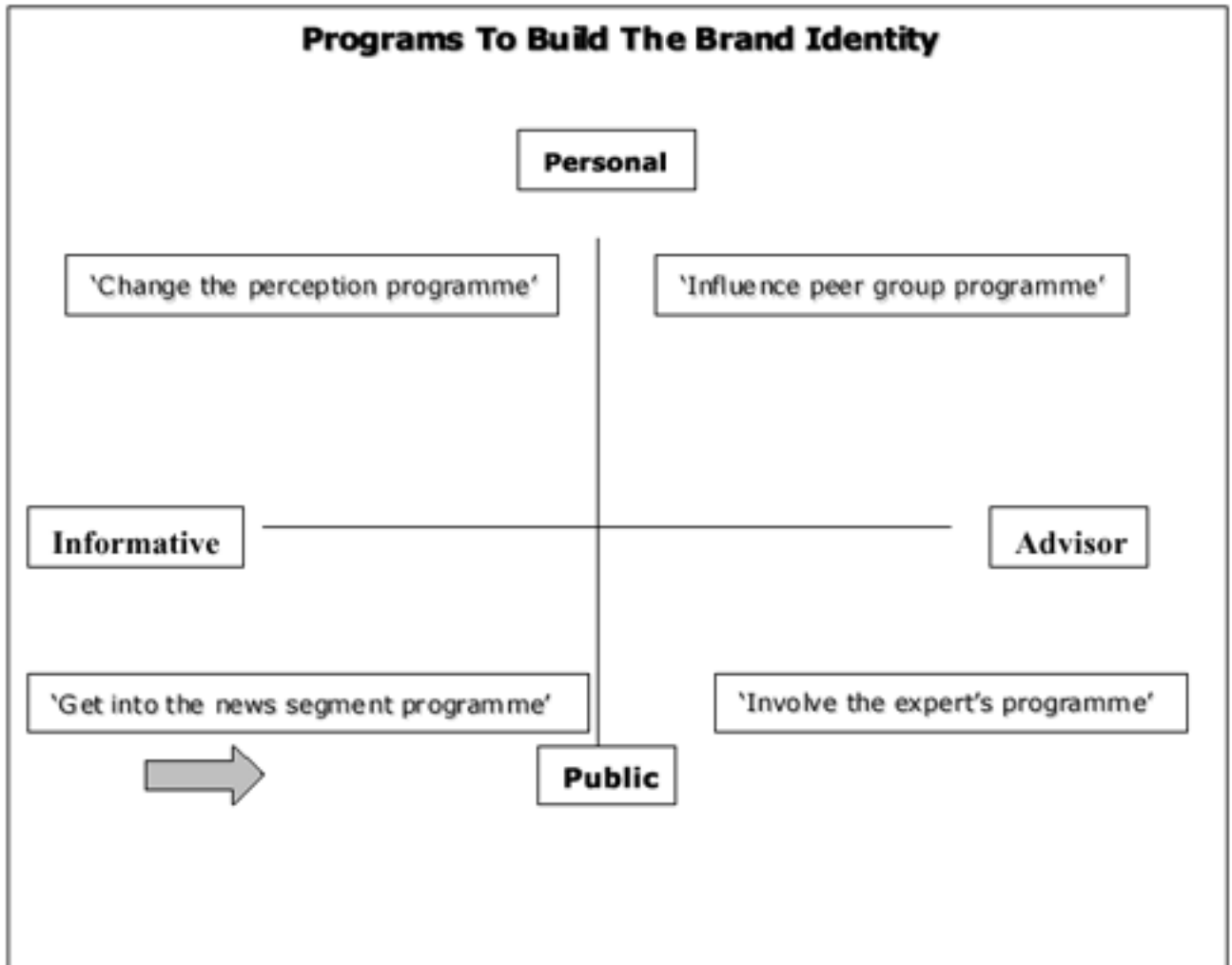
from the advertiser's point of view is that the channel is seen as hip and cool to be associated with and of course more viewers have gotten to know of Jassi...



Smirnoff Mixing Nights...

Smirnoff is a high quality vodka brand. Most people in India think vodka is a ladies drink and contains very little alcohol and therefore refrain from drinking it. The task for the company was to change the way in which the brand was perceived. Smirnoff gathered from research that people of a younger age did not want to be seen with a glass of rum or whisky, as it was not considered hip and cool. Vodka was perceived to be a gender bender by this target group as it is easy for both genders to consume it by mixing it with beverages like orange juice, lemon water etc. The company decided to build on the attribute of 'social mixability' and yet keep it very modern and cutting edge. Thus the marketing association with re-mix music, dance & nights was formed, which

has now run for many years. Smirnoff has released music albums about re-mixes, sponsored 'War of the DJ's', for the last three years, organised exclusive DJ nights and special parties. All these activities generated much interest with the media, the events have got coverage, and the music compilations have been a great hit, the DJ's have been profiled in page 3; leading to a great hype around the brand Smirnoff.



Youth Marketing Program For MTV...

MTV wanted to target young marketers and thus created the 'MTV Youth Marketing Forum', which is now a well-established platform in the country. MTV invited experts to talk about how they market to young people and share the best practices. The invitation was sent to younger marketers rather than older marketers; the rationale being those younger marketers were more open to change, whereas the older marketers were prone to cynicism. The media began to follow the trend and started

profiling the best practices adopted by companies in terms of advertising and reaching to the youth segment. This programme was not aimed at consumers but at advertisers, however, it helped re-enforce MTV's authority on youth via research and experts that it showcased at these forums. A pertinent issue raised by the management experts is whether, "more powerful the media messages, the more powerful the brand." This is best answered by Emile Zola's philosophy, "If you ask me what I have come to do in this world...I will reply: I'm here to live my life out loud"

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How much does CSR lend to the brand building process? Does

A social community task works only if a company does it consistently. Britannia did a good job of 'Save the Tiger Project' and it tied in well with their brand of 'Tiger' biscuits. There are a lot community projects, which are closely related to brand

the consumer attribute any value to it?

objectives. For e.g. paint companies in the rural area help paint parts of the town / village. Such activities help influence people and approaching them. However, I must stress that you need to be dedicated to these programmes and the cause must be important to your brand and be able to dovetail into a marketing programme to build and capitalise value.

Comment From Participants

IFFCO

IFFCO for the last one year has taken the initiative of building community development centres. It has completed 350 such centres till now with an expenditure of approximately Rs. 400,000/- per village. This initiative has helped influence people positively about IFFCO and created brand equity with its core target audience.

L'Oreal

L'Oreal worldwide has a CSR programme which is integrated with its values and beliefs. This programme encourages women to take up careers in science and is backed by the logic that women are the companies target consumers and the products are research driven. Since this programme is run in conjunction with UNESCO, it has source credibility and brings with it a lot of conviction too.

Mastek

Mastek found that the majority of its employees viewed the company as being socially responsible (validated by an independent Hewitt study). Besides being an external audience influencer, a CSR programme also ramps up on the brand in the eyes of the employees. The clear

mandate of Mastek's MD to its PR team has been that the CSR programme should not be used as a PR tool. The Company should initiate a CSR programme only because it believes in it. We have a 'Voluntary' concept, which works well because it involves participation of the employees and benefits the organisation too.

**Sunil Lulla's
comment on
Mastek's
example...**

Most businesses face tremendous competitive pressure and every column centimetre counts. Efforts need to gain and garner this . CSR programmes certainly have altruistic values, however if it can benefit the business at the end of the day then one must leverage the opportunity. The pre-requisite for such programmes to be successful is consistency. I do not believe that corporates can only afford to be altruistic, they must get some benefit out of the CSR programmes. A Bill Gates Foundation can afford to be altruistic but it is an exception. At the end of the day a social objective should be achieved but one must derive a value for the brand. Therefore when HLL goes deep into the rural parts of India and repairs and paints water pumps, it writes Lifebuoy soap on the pump to drive home the message that when you wash your hands use Lifebuoy soap. The key question to ask when a company embarks on to any CSR programme is "whether you would have done it even if not a single word was written on it?" If the answer to this question is in the affirmative then the company should go ahead with the programme and if in the course of the programme you are able to leverage PR opportunities then it is incidental. **Rio Tinto** *Rio Tinto* believes that CSR programmes are typically planned by an organisation without any consultation or involvement from the community, but it should ideally be a mutual activity. Rio Tinto is a mining company and has its presence in the most rural parts of India and works in close proximity with the people of those regions. The company plays a consultative role with them, understands their problems and then devises appropriate community programmes for them. This is a holistic approach as both the company and its public constituents together decide on the best programme.

**Comments
from
participants
regarding PR
programmes**

Cha Bar in Mumbai did a promotion that involved a tie-up with a movie called 'Let's Talk'. The movie was about the relationship between a husband and wife seen from different perspectives. The movie cast was invited to come and enact a scene from the film depicting a fight

***that used the
buzz value ...***

with each other. This enactment was so real that it got a tremendous response by way of guests present during that time appealing to the management to stop the couple from fighting! This also generated interest with MTV who decided to shoot an episode of 'MTV Bakra' at the Cha Bar resulting in great PR mileage for the property. Most mobile phone companies have run promotions where they have given the latest handset to a select few people and got them to sample their service. In the process converting many new customers.

Sunil Lulla made a point here that PR professionals should realize that their roles have changed from being involved in only corporate affairs to being a part of brands too. Many marketing people do not realise the need of involving PR in their activities.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Sunil Lulla, Executive Vice President, Sony Entertainment Television, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on September 10, 2003)

