

VIJAYA GHOSE'S VIEWS ON MOVING SPONSORSHIPS INTO ACCOUNTABLE PROFITABLE INVESTMENTS

Limca Book of Records (LBR), which is considered the next best chronicle of records after the Guinness Book of Records catalogues Indian achievements from across the world.

The 80's was a decade of cynicism among the populace at large when brand 'India' was taking a beating and nothing Indian was good enough for people while everything foreign was great.

The big idea...

Ramesh Chauhan, the then head of Parle did not believe that to be the case and as a small step towards making Indians proud of being themselves, mooted the idea of cataloguing Indian achievements. Five years of research was undertaken before the first edition was published in 1990. The book was launched in Mumbai amidst much fanfare, and as a result, the book received tremendous publicity and had a huge print run.

In those days, Limca was also a popular zippy zany drink for young people and an aspirational product for the younger generation. The book therefore was written in crisp and racy prose, which could be picked up anytime (like Limca) and used to refresh the mind through a quick read.

The book is a welcome read for all age groups (from 8 – 80), as it contains lots of information pertaining to several sectors. Hence students, schools, external affairs ministry, corporations, etc. evince keen interest in it.

The Limca brand was bought over by Coca-Cola India in 1993. At that time LBR was neither making any great financial contribution nor taking away anything significant from Coca-Cola India's coffers, and hence Coca-Cola India's PR department persuaded the management to stay on with the book. Their argument was that the book is a great brand property, as this unique effort had not been undertaken in India before.

LBR survives the transitions...

The book was left to survive on its own for some time with the LBR team undertaking research and sales.

In this period LBR experimented with some advertising and related promotions. The chosen advertising theme was, 'Excellence in every field.' Their innovative car stickers 'Proud to be Indian' became a great hit. The initial quest for

survival was then followed by the dilemma of whether the book should be made into a self-sustaining venture? While there was complete support from the CEO's office, the brand managers felt that the money invested was not generating sufficient returns on investment. One of the main positives that worked in favour of the book, and had the strong support of the external affairs department, was the complete 'Indian' image LBR provided to a multinational product.

Coca-Cola India therefore decided that to survive, the book had to be self-sustaining which the book by then had become to a large extent though it always falls short by small margins.

The public relations effort to endear the brand to audiences have included:

Generation of publicity...

- Quizzes organised by quiz professionals - Siddhartha Basu and Barry O' Brien
- People of The Year award – An annual honour given to the winners in several categories in schools also generates publicity for the book and the brand
- Excerpts from LBR as editorial inputs for leading papers like Indian Express and Rajasthan Patrika
- LBR was given as awards for academic excellence to school children, used by corporations like McDonald's and Britannia as part of their children's programmes

Dilemma faced...

Commercialisation goes against the basic ethics of the book. Hence the constant debate on whether advertisements should be accepted and let the book continue giving Indians a platform of exhibiting skills or not to accept advertisements and allow the book to die a quiet death?

Survival has won the debate and advertisements have been accepted. LBR team has received a very encouraging response this year and hopes to make a small maiden profit.

But I must comment that advertising hasn't got LBR the same mileage that PR managed. The learning is that PR is a slow process and affects mindsets by working slowly and gradually.

COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Comment on Nestle's cookery

The Nestlé Cook Book was devised because lots of customers wanted recipes. The book was presented in a very user-friendly manner, with a plastic jacket to avoid being

book...

stained, complete with plastic clips for hanging from the wall, etc. The recipes were also written simply and used Nestlé products as its main ingredients. This was the third in a series, the first two being Milkmaid and Maggi cookbooks.

However, this was an intrinsic part of promotional and PR strategy of Nestle and never meant as a self-sustaining venture.

*Comment on
Amex shopping
guides and
Connaught Place
shopping festival*

Shopping Guide as an initiative has been discontinued long ago but the shopping festival is done with the aim of rewarding the merchants – who form an integral part of the credit card business, and consumers, for spending more on The American Express cards.

American Express's sponsorship of Business Today corporate golf is also a good fit for Amex's corporate and platinum card products.

*Comment on
DuPont's
sponsored
activities
promoting
science
education*

DuPont has done a safety manual for schools, which is being promoted through ICSE. This activity has been extremely well received and also builds in with the core values of the company.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Vijaya Ghose, Editor, Limca Book of Records, at PR Pundit's Seventh PR Workshop held in New Delhi on December 10, 2002)