

B S RATHOR'S VIEWS ON BUILDING BRANDS IN THE COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

Understanding the consumer... The key to building the brand is firstly to get into the consumer's mind. Insight is the route to understanding the consumer – going beyond mere demographics into the psychographics. What makes the customer tick, his interests, aspirations, and hobbies.

Ford's focus in Europe... Europe was on the verge of forming the European Union. Individuals were threatened, their individuality questioned, and there was uncertainty about their future. During the same period Ford was seeking to change its identity and brand image. A very radical non-Ford approach was used for the Ford focus. Ford capitalised on the consumer insight. A tough market and brand new styling were two issues that connected with the consumers. The Ford commercial did not talk about the product. It celebrated individualism - *Expect More, Expect More from Life, Expect More from Ford*

Ikon... In India, a similar derivative was used to launch the Ikon where the company went beyond mere demographics, not just the affluent metro dweller but the *full of life* person. An exhaustive quantitative and qualitative study was done on 1200 respondents to yield six broad psychographic segments.

The Full of Life segment respondents comprised driving enthusiasts and accounted for 20 per cent of the population. Not only the largest, but a well-defined and differentiated segment.

What do we expect from the brand? What does it mean to the consumer, what are the key strengths, and what is the core? These are key questions when introducing a new brand.

What makes a brand tick...

Every company and brand must represent its own unique positioning. Body Shop for e.g. had its USP - **environmental conscience**. Harley Davidson had - **the bike for the outlaw** even though 40 per cent of their buyers are lawyers. Hence Body Shop will never use plastic bags in their store and Harley will never produce/acquire fast sleek bikes. Remaining true to the core is the one factor, which is an essential ingredient in the communication process of building the brand.

The Indian consumer ...

In the case of India, the consumer was gregarious, worked hard and played hard, was an adventurous, expansive, large-hearted person who admired the **can do, will do**,

must do spirit in others. Ford as a company with its US origins could talk this language and adopt this tone. Ford also believed in the *can do spirit* and their meeting point was Zinda Dil. The key characteristics of Zinda Dil are exuberance, living life king size, gregarious, large hearted.

Having achieved the brand vision, the difficult task was to find the most effective way of communicating this with Ford's audiences-internal, external and all types of stakeholders. It required a very essential ingredient, which was **remaining true to the vision**. Consistency of communication results has a multiplier effect by virtue of the synergy achieved through integrated press, television, and public relations all coming together to give maximum impact.

Zinda dil...Ikon..the attitude conveyed to consumers...

Ford India was perceived as a very laid back company and the Ford Escort which was its entry model in India was not very successful. Thus, when Ford came up with the vision of **Zinda dil**, it required a radical change in the communication strategy and the way Ford thought. The run up to the launch began with the naming of the car, which was called Ikon. At the press conference in trying to create the Zinda Dil attitude we used bar stools instead of the normal podium and chairs and tables. The formal attire was done away with and the attitude of Zinda Dil with electric yellow ties was sported. These events took place in early 1999 while the car was launched in October 99.

Sustaining visibility of the new product...

With a gap of 7-8 months, the company realised the need to sustain the visibility of the Ikon till it was launched at the end of the year - hence the importance of internal audiences. Zinda Dil workshops were organised for several weeks to inform the people about the brand vision. Stakeholders such as employees who built the car, dealers who sold the car and suppliers who provided the equipment and components were involved.

Branding idea expressing what a brand stands for...

From the branding vision one can arrive a branding idea. An idea which is a short hand for the brand, expresses all that the brand stands for in about every medium of communication. The branding idea can be stumbled upon or created by design - it is the effective catalyst for the communication strategy, which in the case of Ford was '**josh**'. Youthful, enthusiastic, passionate, energetic spontaneous, emotionally high - Josh encompassed all these. Hence launch events had to be full of josh, lively and the strategy was to reflect the attitude that would make people sit up and take notice. Even when Ford celebrated the first anniversary of the Ikon it created a music video - the first by an auto company.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Brand wars B S Rathor added that at Ford, the company forms a brand matrix based on the brand strategy, describing the vision of the company and all communication revolves only around this vision. Unless there is some news to be shared the company prefers to be silent rather than make news with nothing in hand.

Ford Ikon has been positioned on an attitude called josh. What is the way forward for Josh? Would a second product on a different platform create confusion? B S Rathor replied that when the product was launched the attitude was used to describe the machine as one with josh. But now the company is creating josh in the people and are transferring the feeling to the individual. As far as Ikon is considered there is no other maxim other than josh. All new Ikon models will be based on josh. But for new products other than Ikon other attributes will have to be found. Different brands will have different attitudes attributed with it and this will not create any confusion. There will be different promotions with clearly defined brand vision.

Managing bad publicity BS Rathor replied that when Ford was launching in India the choice was to launch either the Fiesta or the Escort. The company chose the latter. What went wrong here was that the car was a large vehicle and the advertising campaign spoke of the car setting the pulse racing. The fundamental mistake was over promise and under deliverance. However, as the model was being shelved worldwide, Ford decided not to retain a model in India that was not going to be a part of the Ford stables abroad.

This has been rectified with the Ikon and the company has gone in for a change in the image. Ikon is among the top in the charts in brand recall and is high up in the corporate image.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by B S Rathor, VP External Affairs, Ford India Ltd., at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on June 14, 2001)