

ISHAN RAINA'S VIEWS ON FINDING A VOICE IN THE CROWDED MARKETPLACE

What identifies a person or a brand....

Let me begin with a game – when I say “Humko dekhna hai”.... what do you think of? Yes...Rajiv Gandhi. We still remember this even though he has been dead for quite a while. Or if I ask, “who is bald and has a prominent birthmark on his forehead – the answer is obviously Mikhail Gorbachov. I call it shorthand for politicians, their gestures, a look, makes you remember them for so long. Every brand aspires and strives for this type of recognition.

What are we struggling for? Obviously to find a voice in the crowded market place. If a company is asked what they stand for, the typical reply is that they will send their company brochure, CD-ROM, etc. They might also talk about their last advertising campaign as well as reports about them in the media.

What stands out...gets saliency

Laloo Prasad Yadav, was present at a party that I was once invited to. I wanted to spend 10 minutes with him but my host asked me why I wanted to meet with just Laloo and not with other public figures like Arun Jaitly or Arun Shourie who were also present. My reason – **to me, he represents the only different politician in India today. I consider him as a concept.** Where for example would find a Chief Minister who on being placed in jail for corruption ensuring that his wife becomes the next Chief Minister in his absence?

Simple but effective...

When discussing concepts with the planning team it is necessary to be different. If one does not want to be another face in the crowd, then it is important to remember that something simple can be effective. Very often people feel that they need to put together several documents for a particular task so that it looks voluminous and hence impressive. As corporate communicators, our aim is to make complex issues simple and not the other way round.

Complicating issues....

For reasons to justify agency commission – there is the tendency to say that a particular issue is so complex and hence needs to be expressed in many different ways. We complicate every issue, we try to say that this message is so complex that we are going to divide it into 10 different delivery mechanism across 10 different media at 10 different points of time and then think that our document is going to make sense to our consumer.

The silver streak in the hair reminds us of one person instantly - Indira Gandhi - the simplicity of that look is what she will be remembered for.

It all comes back to what I call shorthand. For example, there is nothing called new media, it is only a new distribution point or a new touch point for the consumer. The same consumer gets touched by new, old, alternate or different media.

Simplicity of ideas to get across a message....

The future will belong to people who say, "I have an idea - it's a very simple idea". We need to create a business idea - an idea that is going to impact our business. Keep it in simple terms and then communicate it through different media, be it a press release or an advertisement. An issue can never be media dependent, it is always idea dependent. Translation of this idea can be done across various forms at different times. Tomorrow if we see Indira Gandhi without the white streak in her hair or Gorbachov minus the birthmark, or if Laloo Prasad Yadav started talking sense - there would be some confusion.

People when they talk about concepts, want a certain amount of predictability or a context.

Predictability of positioning....

Why is it logical to accept an announcement at a CII forum that Narayan Murthy will be in charge of corporate governance in the country - why not a Tata, Birla or Ambani? It is simply because Infosys besides standing for growth has also stood for integrity. So when people read the announcement on Narayan Murthy they tend to agree that he is the right person for the job. It is all about a voice in a crowded market place. It is all about predictability of positioning. Tomorrow, if we hear about Narayana Murthy being involved in a stock scam, we would all be shocked.

What brands stand for in the crowded market place...

When we think of a 'mega' company in India - what immediately comes to mind is Reliance - why not Infosys? In this crowded market place there is no confusion in understanding the difference. When Narayana Murthy speaks - he speaks values, when Reliance speaks they speak mega projects. If there was a corporate campaign for both these organisations, Reliance would be about big, world class investments while Infosys would be about corporate values, integrity, and what it takes to build a global company. They both talk size and leadership - they are both global and they both speak the McKinsey language but they speak it differently. And yet, they both compete for the same market capital. That then is a voice in the crowded market place.

Another way to ensure that you too have a voice in the crowded market place is to arrive at a creative business idea - the one that defines the way you do work, what it is about you that makes you be in business - then it can stretch across whichever medium you choose to communicate in but it says the same thing.

The need for consistency...

People have a clear opinion of what a person or an organisation stands for. If they all by and large have almost the same opinion to voice, it means that the person or the organisation is consistent. However, there are differing views then it is time to take stock and repair the image created in the minds of the public.

Simplicity lends credence....

Some years back both Larsen & Toubro as well as Tisco wanted to raise money, they both had the same merchant banker. The banker contacted me and said that we would have to explain to everybody the complexity of L & T. My reply to him was to explain to everybody the simplicity of L & T. Because, when you want money from people, it is better explaining the simplicity of the organisation rather than its complexity.

Euro RSCG came up with a one liner – '*We make the things that make India proud*'. At the opening of L&T's software park in Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu announced that L&T were starting yet another project – something that will make India proud!!!!

It is after all just an idea – you can say it's a direct marketing, advertising or a public relations idea – it is just a shorthand way of communicating.

Impact of effective communication S....

The next challenge is staying true to the idea. We do an incomplete job as communicators, because we tend to think that media should determine what we do or say ...media is just a channel. When you are talking to someone you love whether it is over the internet, phone, in person or in a letter – are you going to say what you have to say to your loved ones differently just because the media is different? People will express each emotion, be it surprise, information, anger or frustration in a similar manner whatever the mode of medium might be.

Traditionally these communication functions have competed with one another. And the brands/products or the companies have suffered – but hopefully this will soon change. The new form of communication is going to be interdependence, collaboration, networking and information sharing.

Proper application of data....

Companies themselves do not know what data they have – they share data differently. By and large all organisations do not manage their data effectively. While the technology is in place, sensitivity is not. Proper management of the relevant data will enhance an organisation's communication to its publics and the insight of the company. The insight gained will help employees gain a better understanding of their company and their customers and help them to come back

with 'creative business ideas'.

Communication should be simple...

"*Symbols, simplicity, shorthand*" – when you communicate say what you have to in very few words and leave a legacy. The more you complicate an issue, the harder it is for people to remember what it was that you were really trying to convey in the first instance.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How do you manage communication of a global brand in different countries?

Ishan Raina replied that Intel has a global product and a global consumer whereas Philips on the other hand has a different consumer in every country but the same global product. Both wanted similar communication across the world - one size fits all. When Intel briefed Euro RSCG, the company agreed on similar communication as the consumer is similar but the company disagreed on the Philips' briefing saying that although the consumer is different in every country – the Phillips product for these consumers will be different in different parts of the world. The key here is data, research, insight and this insight will tell you if the same brand should mean various things to various people.

Airtel reaches out to the people of Seychelles – a social act that made it the brand leader in that country

Bharti Cellular launched the brand 'Airtel' in Seychelles. During the launch it was found that the Seychelles had a singular problem of too many broken marriages – more than 50% of marriages in the country ended in divorce within a year.

Airtel is in the business of talking and listening – through our interaction with the local populace, we discovered that these divorces happen because people did not communicate enough. Bharti worked closely with the government creating a fund – for every Airtel sold –we were going to help a broken marriage. This effort we hoped would help the women and children. In no time we bonded very quickly with our customers. This social act helped us grab the market share and take the brand forward.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Ishan Raina, CEO, Euro RSCG, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on June 14, 2001)