

## VIKRAM RAIZADA'S VIEWS ON THE POWER OF PR IN BUILDING BRANDS

*The MTV India story...* MTV, the brand, can actually be credited with the launch of an entire generation and the fall of western civilisation in India. A brand that has actually given birth to an art form and has been vilified as a corrupter of youth.

MTV began operations in India in January 1996 with the mission to be India's number one youth music channel and a game plan to launch the MTV cult. Like a good American Multinational MTV tried to import and sell the original product in India with little or no localisation. The product was a very westernised English music channel. The music was alternative, punk, rock, and rap. The VJs were too westernised and ultra cool – Danny and Noni. The reaction - negligible viewership, distribution and sales. A year after launch there was no change, a year and half after launch still no change. The majority of Indian Youth had completely rejected the channel. It was actually a matter of survival.

*Brand health checks....* So it was back to the drawing board. Brand health checks were carried out, market mapping and attitude life style studies were conducted. These revealed that the values associated with MTV were bizarre, weird, daring, western and alienating. Those with the market leader (Channel V) in the same genre were funloving, bold, young, spontaneous and Indian. The other competitor - Music Asia was considered conservative, old, boring and unfashionable.

*The five typologies that best describe Indian youth....* Through research we identified five typologies that best described the diverse Indian youth. The '*I am me*', the '*cool guys*', the '*wannabes*', the '*nice guys*' and the '*home bodies*'. The research further revealed that MTV connected with the '*I am me's*.' Channel V with the '*cool guys*', '*the wannabes*' and the '*nice guys*', which was pretty much middle of the road. Music Asia with the '*home bodies*'.

*Indian youth though westernised strongly believe in traditional Indian values...* Qualitative research revealed that despite western orientation, Indian youth strongly believed in traditional Indian values. This was reflected in their respect for parents and family. Contrary to popular belief, pre-marital sex was a no-no and so was living in. They did not really live at discos and pubs but preferred to hang out at friends' homes, at restaurants and college campuses.

*The need to understand the audience....* One very interesting insight was their attitude towards life. It was this easygoing, positive attitude - almost the '*don't worry be happy*' approach. So if MTV had to connect and

survive, the product and brand had to be completely re-engineered.

*The creative route of desi cool....*

The standard model used for change was on the premise that only if we understood a target group could we reflect them accurately. If we could reflect them we could affect them. Hence we focussed on their basic Indianness, through the creative route of '*desi cool*'. We celebrated their Indian values, hence the whole '*enjoy*' concept. We allowed the youth to identify with the brand by showing them people, issues and symbols they relate to and connect with. We provided them access to the channel by giving them a chance to touch, feel and interact with the brand, both on-air and off-air. We made them laugh through our genuinely funny, wacky, irreverent, self-deprecatory humour. We internally refer to the style as *WQ* - *our wackiness quotient*.

*The MTV wackiness quotient...*

This paradigm shift meant each and all levels of business operations were going to be affected. On-air programming, which was 100 per cent English, moved to 70 per cent Hindi and 30 per cent English. 'Slice of Life' and Hindi movie spoof promos were created and interactive contests and promotions were developed both on-air and off-air.

*Our audiences...*

Beside our primary youth focus, there were other consumers that we needed to look at. Trade, the advertising and marketing fraternity, music labels, film industry, cable and affiliate trade and also influencers such as media, opinion leaders and the '*beautiful people*'. A whole lot of activity was designed to reach a wide variety of consumers groups.

*A spate of activities targeted across all consumer segments...*

For *consumers* we instituted 'talent search' and 'concerts', the 'VJ Hunt', the 'World's Longest Dance Party' and 'Video Gaga'. For *opinion leaders* we had the 'Aids Awareness Campaign', 'Rock the Vote', 'The Leprosy Week', and 'The Anti-Corruption Contest'. For the *trade* we had the 'Youth Marketing Forum', 'The Youth Marketing Awards', 'The Music Forum' and 'What's up with the Boss'.

*The MTV VJ hunt...*

The objective of the MTV VJ Hunt was to provide the viewer involvement, interaction, excitement and a platform to become MTV VJs. The thrust was on making our VJs youth icons and positioning Veejaying as a serious career option. We placed advertisements across media channels - print advertisements, outdoors, poster and flyers at youth hang out joints. We also have an extensive partnership programme with establishments such as bookshops.

*...The VJ hunt in progress...*

Our VJ Hunter makes an appearance at some of these places to enthruse consumers to participate - The Odyssey Books, Chennai; Snowballing, Bangalore; Music Station, Mumbai; and he/she also appears on the net. These were five mini

events across India that ended with a grand finale in Bombay.

Independent consumer research done by Colgate (the sponsor) revealed that the decibel levels of the MTV VJ hunt campaign was second only to the Cricket World Cup. We received over eight thousand valid entries from all over the country. Besides the metros and mini metros, we received entries from Nagpur, Nasik, Cochin, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Kanpur, Amritsar, Guwahati, Shillong, etc. and from the most unexpected candidates - army officers, housewives, Montessori teachers, creative directors, and even the vice president of a large PR Agency.

*The MTV VJ is today a youth icon...*

We attempted to position Veejaying as a serious career option through stories in the media with our executive producer being quoted on the requirements of being an MTV VJ and the career benefits. Today VJs have become youth icons. This is reflected in the use of VJs in commercials to promote brands such as Cadburys, Coke, Pepsi, Philips, Titan, Elle 18, etc.

*Creating distinct images for each VJ...*

To connect to the consumer in the five typologies listed earlier, we created distant unique images for each VJ. *Cyrus the Raja of Rubbish*, *Nikhil the Cool Dude*, *Mallaika the Hot Babe*, *Maria the Bubbly*, *Vivacious Dance Queen* and *Rageshwari the Sweet Girl Next Door*. The whole strategy here was to link different VJs with different groups, for example, Cyrus with the 'I am me's', Nikhil with the 'cool dudes', Mallaika with the 'wannabes', Maria with the 'nice guys', Rageshwari with the 'home bodies'.

*The MTV Youth Marketing Forum...*

The thrust was to position MTV as the youth marketing expert and use that as the ideal medium to connect to the youth. This forum was actually a unique platform for advertisers and marketers to learn about the youth and youth marketing. We invited experts from different fields of youth marketing to speak on the areas of expertise. Speakers at the New Delhi meeting this year will include the International Head of Pepsi, the Asia-Pacific Head of Nokia and a senior representative of Swatch amongst others.

*The MTV youth awards have successfully reunified MTV's youth marketing expert position...*

The forum has very successfully reunified MTV's youth marketing expert positioning, as is evident from the kind of advertisers on board. We have brands such as Ford, Maruti, Fiat, Videocon, Kenwood, Castrol and BPCL advertising on the channel. And significantly, the forum has allowed us to extend our franchise by instituting the youth marketing awards. These awards recognise and reward outstanding marketing campaigns aimed at the youth. This year, industries stalwarts such as Vibha Rishi, Sunil Alagh, Mohammed Khan, Ranjan Kapoor, Ashok Kurien and a host

of others have come on board, which further endorses MTV's leadership position.

*What has all this really done for MTV...*

Ongoing qualitative research conducted in 1999 revealed that the values now associated with MTV are funloving, bold, young, spontaneous and Indian. Those associated with Channel V have become bizarre, daring, western, alienating and Music Asia remains conservative, old, boring, unfashionable. Our distribution figures went up from 5 million to 12 million households in this period, viewership rose from 8 percent to 36 percent, and revenues were up 120 percent. We have ten time the sponsors than we had then and 15 times the brands. Most importantly, perception is equal to reality today. MTV is seen and is the number one Youth Music Channel.

*(Excerpted from the presentation made by Vikram Raizada, Marketing Director, MTV India Pvt Ltd., at PR Pundit's workshop – Pillars of Corporate Reputation, held in Mumbai on March 29, 2000)*