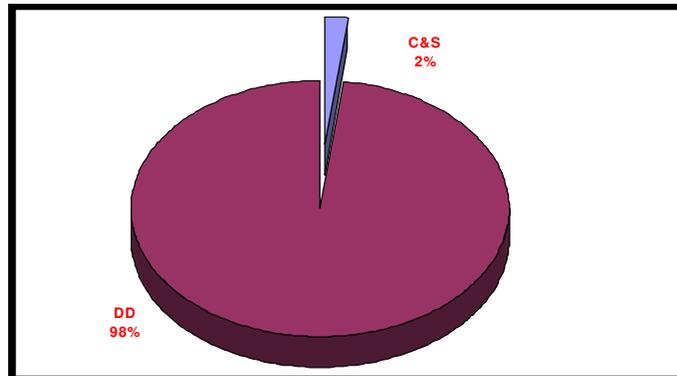


YASHPAL KHANNA'S VIEWS ON BUILDING BRANDS IN THE COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

Pioneers of satellite TV in India...

STAR TV pioneered satellite television in India in 1991. It had quality English programming catering to the elite Indian audience redefined Indian television viewing habits in India with Santa Barbara and Bold and Beautiful.

COMPETITION IN 1991



The early days...

But at that time cable and satellite television had just 2 per cent of the pie while Doordarshan held 98 per cent. Over the years things changed, local players catering to the masses introduced channels, mass entertainment channels like Zee and Sony were launched. In the south, regional channels like Sun, Jaya, Vijaya, and Gemini gained prominence. Niche channels tapped the genres of education, music and sports.

Where was STAR?

In 1999, STAR was not in the consideration set of Hindi viewer. Although Star Plus was available in 80 per cent of all cable and satellite homes only 30 per cent tuned in. It appealed to a niche English speaking audience because of certain programmes like *Bold and Beautiful*, *Saans*, *English News*, *Baywatch* and *A Mouth Full of Sky*. It was an international, premium channel. People considered the channel, as '*phirangi*' especially in the Hindi heartland where no one was watching it and that was where the major television viewing ratings came from.

Ratings....1999

STAR had 30%, Zee had 11% and Sony 6% while Sun TV was at 7%. Star had lost the first mover advantage that it had earlier. Furthermore, out of the top ten programmes, seven belonged to Zee and three to Sony. STAR's leading *Saans* was ranked 42nd. In a full day channel share, Zee had 15% share, Sony had 12% and Star had a negligible 3%, the remaining being a combination of other channels.

So where did Star want to position itself?

The company wanted to establish Star Plus as the number one Hindi entertainment channel in terms of ratings, in terms of revenues and in terms of image. Competition at this point was all from the Hindi channels - Zee and Sony. This, it was decided that STAR Plus should be relaunched as a 24-hour Hindi only channel. STAR News at 9 p.m., which was very successful, was taken off air. There was lot of criticism regarding this but as the plan was to launch Star in a new manner, all necessary steps had to be taken.

The PR objectives...

- To get people to tune in to the channel. Get them to see what programmes were being offered
- Make STAR Plus the household name and the '*channel of choice*'

The options ahead...

There were two options in front of STAR. On 3rd July STAR planned to launch a whole new set of programmes, which included *Kyonki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, among others.

One option was to use all energies to promote all the shows under the new Hindi programmes avatar. It could be announced that Star Plus had gone completely Hindi, talk about the channel as for Indians and so on. The second option would focus on putting all marketing and PR activities behind one path breaking show and let popularity breed success for the channel.

Kaun Banega Crorepati

STAR decided on the latter and the show selected was **Kaun Banega Crorepati**. The gameshow had the biggest prize money being offered in Indian television, with an international set design. It was a proven success in 26 countries and of course the biggest anchor – Amitabh Bacchan.

But what were the PR issues?

- Negative reactions to Amitabh Bacchan. His success was doubtful, as his latest films had not been doing well at the box office
- Negative reactions to the game show being scheduled at prime time.
- It was an international format and adapting it to the Indian scenario was looked at with cynicism
- Cultural barriers - gambling, greed

How where the issues addressed?

- **Negative reaction to Amitabh Bachan**
 - He is still the most popular figure in the country and attracted publicity
 - Pictures of the star with money in his hands were used as promotion material and were circulated among the media

- Interviews unlike the norm were not arranged, keeping him away from the limelight
- **Negative reaction to prime time**
 - This was ignored as it did not have any impact on the programming
- **Adaptation of International format for a game show**
 - Interviews with the set designer were scheduled. The peg used was the set management; the replication of the popular game show in UK "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?"
 - The grandness of the show was stressed upon
- **Cultural background**
 - Stress was laid on the general knowledge aspect of the show How viewers were watching a programme that was intelligent
 - Media were invited to the sets to watch the proceedings, interviews were set up for them with the winners and participants.

Story lines used...

The basics of a good PR plan is to find different hooks for the same story. We had one story, and we needed the hooks. Some story lines used were:

- Telephone lines - There were 1.5 lakh calls that came in everyday and the phones are still ringing
- Promotions on the first day of the show
- A bus was stationed at Nariman Point and other busy locations in all major cities with banners asking people to get home before 9 p.m.
- A buzz was created, people with Amitabh Bacchhan cut outs and the pictures moved around busy areas drawing attention

Instead of Amitabh Bacchhan, senior people involved with the show such as Sameer Nair, Head of Programming, the advertising agency, and Peter Mukerjea, CEO, were interviewed. The campaign - 'A date with Amitabh Bacchhan at 9' - received publicity abroad as well.

Sustaining interest....

To sustain interest in the show, Television Rating Points (TRP) were fed constantly to the public, special episodes were aired inviting movie stars, and soap opera star-to-be participants. Innovative specials like *couple specials* were included on the show. Region-wise promotions of the winners were undertaken. Interviews were set up for the winners in their region. Contestants were used as well to promote the show. In the first three months the show received over 3,000 press stories in over 25 languages

including the cover story in India Today to name a few. Coverage also appeared on radio, in foreign publications like Business Week, Washington Post and LA Times.

Promotion of other shows...

Apart from the constant promotion of KBC, other shows were also promoted. Today STAR Plus is the number one Hindi entertainment channel. 40 out of the top 50 shows are from STAR; it has the highest TRP ratings and a cult following. Once viewers started tuning in, other shows were also acknowledged.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

From a viewer's point of view-KBC has been overtaken by the other two programmes. How does it figure internally?

Yashpal Khanna replied that KBC has served the purpose of increasing viewership for STAR - which was the strategy. All the while other programmes were also promoted on KBC.

Though KBC is not at the top at present it is still there in the top ten. Internally there is no problem regarding the number game among Once viewers started tuning in, other shows were also acknowledged. Plus shows.

Brand wars

Yashpal Khanna replied that the TRPs and statistics are available to all channels and they talk about the same thing but just put it differently.

It is necessary to educate the people and one must probe into details before publishing the information.

Social issues

Yashpal Khanna replied that issues like greed and gambling have been tackled using the stance of education and promotion of general knowledge.

STAR undertook research and shared statistics on sales of general knowledge books and so on. These showed that people were reading more and that more books were being published post KBC. It was also found that the show brought families together as never before to watch a programme of common interest.

As regards Junior KBC, the prize money is kept in a fund, which the winner can access only after he/she turns 18 years of age. The show is the first of its kind in the world and is a result of the demand from children for an educational gameshow for themselves.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Yashpal Khanna, Sr. VP Corporate Communications, STAR India, at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Mumbai on June 14, 2001)