

PR Helps Build Brands

In today's highly competitive and price sensitive marketplace manufacturers and marketers are realizing that to establish brands innovative marketing strategies need to be evolved and that a well thought out and executed Public Relations plan to publicize these goes a long way in reaching and winning customers.

Marketing PR covers planning, executing and evaluating programmes that help encourage product purchase and customer satisfaction, through credible communication of information. Typical activities that lend themselves to PR include product launches, promotions, product repositioning, social marketing initiatives etc.

Let me demonstrate the power of marketing PR through a few examples.

Product Launch: Video Conferencing at iways (cyber cafés) for Sify.

Sify Ltd., the leading network and e-commerce services company in India was introducing a unique service by offering video conferencing facility branded "iMeet" at its iways across the country for just Rs. 5 per minute. This meant that a person in Mumbai or any other city could talk to and simultaneously see his mother, brother, wife, boss or anyone else in Delhi or any other city for just Rs. 5/- per minute. Video conferencing was being launched as a convenience for businesses for recruitment, marketing feedback and other activities. For individuals, it could keep them in touch with their loved ones.

The PR plan to launch Sify "iMeet" had two components:

- a. Simultaneous Press Conferences at Delhi and Chennai with a video conference between Shri Arun Shourie, Union Minister for Information Technology, Communications and Disinvestment and Mr. George Zacharias, COO Sify in Delhi, with Mr. Vivek Hariharan, IT Secretary of Tamil Nadu and Mr. R. Ramaraj MD & CEO, Sify in Chennai. The Video Conference gave key journalists in Delhi and Chennai simultaneously a first hand experience of Sify's "iMeet" service.
- b. A Press Release and photograph were disseminated to journalists in all cities where the "iMeet" service is being offered.

Both the press conferences and the release resulted in extensive exposure for "iMeet" and we were able to create substantial awareness about "iMeet" in just 10 days.

Promotion: Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazar's "Fish for Gold Contest":

A unique contest was planned for Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazar to increase sales during the lean season. A large attractive fish tank was placed in the jewellery showroom with exotic species of fishes. Also placed in the tank was a glass jar full of

gold coins. Consumers who bought jewellery at the showroom for as little as Rs. 5,000/- could participate in the month long contest and guess the number of coins in the jar. The person who guessed the number correctly would get a Diamond Jewellery set worth Rs. 2 lakhs. The runner up would get a Gold Jewellery set worth Rs. 1 lakh and over 100 consolation prizes were to be given away. The PR challenge was to publicize the contest and drive consumers to the Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazar showroom during the period of the contest. Here is what we did.

Leg I:

Invited Ms. Aditi Govitrikar who had just been crowned Mrs. World and who fitted the profile of TBZ's jewellery customer perfectly, to launch the contest at the show room. Key journalists from consumer media (print and TV) were invited to the launch. Aditi Govitrikar launched the contest by unveiling the curtain on the fish tank, providing an interesting photo opportunity. Immediately after the launch, a Press Release with Aditi's photograph was disseminated to media in Mumbai. Within a week there was extensive coverage with photographs in both English and language media. Even a business paper like The Economic Times carried the photograph prominently on its back page. The contest got an overwhelming response during the month and the winners were selected.

Leg II:

A Prize Distribution event was organized at the CCI at which Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazar's key customers, participants of the contest, winners and media were invited. Sheriff, Mr. Ashok Mehta, was invited as chief guest and presented the prizes.

Photographs of the winners with their prizes were taken. A Press Release was disseminated to the media with these, resulting in the event and winners being extensively featured in consumer media.

Product Repositioning: Aspirin – the “New Wonder Drug”:

According to Thomas L. Harris in his book titled “Value Added Public Relations – The Secret Weapon of Integrated Marketing”, in 1981 several producers of aspirin in America got together to discuss the formation of a trade association to reverse the decline in aspirin's image in the public mind and the market place, caused by health concerns that aspirin was unsafe and the success of competitive products. This led to the formation of the Aspirin Foundation of America (AFA).

The newly formed AFA decided to build credibility by developing contacts in the medical, scientific and healthcare communities and establishing a strong and multifaceted image of aspirin's benefits and safety profile.

The PR agency working on the campaign decided to turn the situation around by repositioning aspirin as “The New Wonder Drug”, while highlighting its long history of safety use. The agency also wanted to prove that new doesn’t necessarily mean better.

The Aspirin Foundation Information Service (AFIS) was created for collecting and distributing credible scientific information to both the medical and health community and the media. The Aspirin Foundation Scientific Advisory Board (AFSAB), made up of health professionals representing different areas of aspirin research, was formed to lend credibility to the message and to act as spokespersons.

The communications campaign was built around the information service, a consumer hotline, seminars and symposia and aggressive media relations.

Seminars and symposia were held in conjunction with a number of credible scientific and public health groups focusing on both traditional and new uses of aspirin, such as its potential help in preventing heart attacks and strokes and in helping augment the immune system. Media tours were conducted in top markets featuring members of the AFSAB and other independent scientists speaking on aspirin’s many benefits.

As a result of the media outreach program, positive stories on “The Miracle in the Medicine Chest” began to appear regularly in newspapers, on network and local television, and in major consumer magazines reaching health-conscious men and women.

The continuous sharing of new research on new renewed benefits of aspirin reported in the media, along with the interest by the medical community effectively repositioned a century old stand by as a miracle drug widely consumed by millions.

All the three above examples amply demonstrate that whether it’s a marketing initiative for a corporate, retail store or an association, PR delivers outstanding results very cost effectively.

PR offers four unique benefits to building brand loyalty and brand equity

Timeliness: A PR campaign can be tied to real time equity-building news coverage. Events like press conferences, openings etc., can be covered and broadcast live.

Adaptability: A PR campaign can work in synergy with advertising, direct mail or sales promotion.

Credibility: Since PR is third-party endorsement, it enjoys a very high credibility. Consumers tend to find messages delivered by journalists more believable than purchased messages.

Cost Efficiency: The cost of a PR campaign is typically far lower than that of an advertising campaign.

Though marketing PR specifically supports marketing objectives, it also serves a corporate purpose, because effective communication of product benefits also enhances overall corporate reputation.

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