

# The power of marketing PR

Which is more effective — PR or advertising? Here are few examples that show how PR is more effective



Mr Arun Shourie, Minister for Information Technology, along with Mr George Zacharia, President & CEO, Sify iWays, during the launch of countryside video conferencing services at iWays in the Capital on Saturday. He is seen in conversation with Mr Dink Natharwan, IT Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu, and Mr R. Ramani, Managing Director and CEO, Sify. South in the picture who participated from Chennai. (Anur Kalyan)

## Video conferencing comes to Sify iWays

By Anur Kalyan

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Sify Ltd recently launched a highly advanced video conferencing service through its iWay platform based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, without the need for going to four corners of the nation's capital, in Chennai.

But that Sify did not want to wait for the government to get the green signal - it's a branded video conferencing service as a specified time and the government was conducting an

open-ended, but it did not. "The response was good. The largest number of users were those who had 'high requirement' services," says Mr R. Ramani, Managing Director and CEO, Sify Ltd.

It is in this response that prompted Sify to launch the video conferencing facility at its Chennai iWays across the country. As for the response, Sify expects a good response for the service as it has introduced at 128 of its iWay iWays. By the end of the year, it

expects to have a total of 128 iWay iWays in different locations, and those waiting to be launched in other places. It will expect to have a good response to the service through a video conference. The service is not to be launched only because of the nature of the service, but also because

of the service, the service is available only to those who are using iWay to access, or those who provide the Sify iWay iWay iWays and those who are using the service.

Mr Arun Shourie

The video conferencing facility was inaugurated with a video conference between the Chief Communications Minister, Arun Shourie, and Mr George Zacharia, Chief Operating Officer, Sify, in Delhi, and Mr Ramani and Mr Dink Natharwan, IT Secretary, Tamil Nadu, in Chennai.

Mr Ramani said a good conference with the government would be useful in a government

**I**N A COMPETITIVE and price-sensitive marketplace manufacturers and marketers realise that innovative marketing strategies must be evolved to establish brands and that a well thought out and executed public relations plan to publicise the brands goes a long way in reaching and winning customers.

Marketing public relations covers planning, executing and evaluating programmes that help to encourage

product buying and customer satisfaction through credible communication of information. Typical activities that lend themselves to PR include product launches, promotions, product repositioning and social marketing initiatives.

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

#### **VIDEO CONFERENCING AT IWAYS**

Sify Ltd., a leading network and e-commerce services company in India was introducing a unique service by offering video conferencing facility branded "iMeet" at its iways (cyber cafes) across India for just Rs 5 per minute. This meant a person in Mumbai or any other city could talk with and simultaneously see his mother, brother, wife, boss or anyone else in Delhi or any other city for just Rs5 per minute. Video conferencing was being launched as a convenience for businesses for recruitment, marketing feedback and other activities. It could keep individuals in touch with their loved ones.

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

- a. Simultaneous media conferences in Delhi and Chennai with a video conference between Arun Shourie, union minister for information technology, communications and disinvestment and George Zacharias, COO Sify in Delhi, with Vivek Hariharan, IT secretary of Tamil Nadu and R. Ramaraj managing director & CEO of Sify in Chennai. The videoconference gave journalists in Delhi and Chennai simultaneously a first-hand experience of Sify's "iMeet" service.
- b. A media release and photograph were disseminated to journalists in all cities where the "iMeet" service is offered.

Both the media conferences and the media release resulted in extensive exposure for "iMeet".

#### **FISH FOR GOLD**

A unique contest was planned for Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazar, Mumbai to boost sales during the lean season. A large attractive fish tank, with exotic species of fishes, was placed in a jewellery showroom. Also placed in the tank was a glass jar full of gold coins. Consumers who bought jewellery for as little as Rs 5,000 could participate in a month-long contest and guess the number of coins in the jar. The person who guessed the number correctly would get diamond jewellery worth Rs 2 lakh. The runner-up would get gold jewellery worth Rs 1

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lakh. Besides, there were more than 100 consolation prizes.

The PR challenge was to publicise the contest and drive consumers to the TBZ showroom during the period of the contest. Here is what we did.

During the first leg of the exercise we invited model Aditi Govitrikar, who at the time had just been crowned Mrs World and who fitted the profile of TBZ's jewellery customer perfectly, to launch the contest at the showroom. Key journalists from consumer media (print and television) were invited to the launch. Govitrikar launched the contest by unveiling the curtain on the fish tank, providing an interesting photo opportunity. Immediately after the launch a media release with her 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.

During the second leg of the exercise, a prize distribution event was organised at the Cricket Club of India (CCI) at which Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazar's key customers, participants of the contest, winners and media were invited. Photographs of the winners along with media release was sent to various publications and some of them gave good coverage.

**ASPIRIN - THE NEW WONDER DRUG**

According to Thomas L. Harris' book Value Added Public Relations - The Secret Weapon Of Integrated Marketing, published in 1981, several manufacturers of aspirin in the US came together to form a trade association following health concerns that aspirin was unsafe and the success of competitive products. This producers wanted to reverse the negative image in the public mind about aspirin. This led to the formation of the Aspirin Foundation of America (AFA).



## The PR challenge was to publicise the contest and drive consumers to the TBZ showroom during the period of the contest

The AFA decided to build credibility by developing contacts in the medical, scientific and healthcare communities and establishing a strong and multi-faceted 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. 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), comprising 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 several credible scientific and public health groups focusing on traditional and new uses of aspirin, such as its potential help in preventing heart attacks and strokes and in helping to bolster 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 programme, positive





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stories on "the miracle in the medicine chest" began to appear regularly in newspapers, on local television networks, and in major consumer magazines that catered to health-conscious men and women.

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

All the three examples mentioned here show that whether it's a marketing initiative for a corporate, retail store or an association, PR delivers results at a very effective cost.

### FOUR KEY BENEFITS

PR offers four unique benefits to building brand loyalty and brand equity. They are as follows:

**Timeliness:** A PR campaign can be tied to real-time equity-building news coverage. Events such as media conferences and openings 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 a third-party endorsement it enjoys very high credibility. Consumers tend to find messages delivered by journalists more believable than advertised messages.

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

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

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