

‘How to sprinkle stardust’

***Vikram Sakhujā’s keynote address at the Brands & Entertainment on June 14, 2023,
Mumbai***

Brands are relatively smaller things in consumers lives than their passions like Music, Movies, Sports, Gaming, or other sources of entertainment. I obsess a little less over my brand of Deo, Soft Drink or Jeans than I do about my IPL Team, Jethro Tull, PubG or what Christopher Nolan will do with Oppenheimer.

Which is why brands look to these larger passions to associate with to improve their brand values. Coca-Cola e.g. has associated with Olympics where logo presence is limited because they activate that right to build their pillar of Authenticity – Real Thing. Or same thing on a smaller scale with Coke Studio. Red Bull through its House of Media and gaming are doing the same thing to build the Gives You Wings / Adrenalin rush.

So, what is it that I can tell you in this keynote that this august gathering doesn’t already know. If I reflect back on the past 20 years, I’ve been trying to play the game of Brands partnering Entertainment and Sports, I find that brand collaborations despite their inherent power is not an easy thing to do. So, I thought I would try and offer some insight on three points:

- 1. The difference between advertising and branded entertainment*
- 2. A framework for branded entertainment*
- 3. How to sell branded entertainment.*

It is good to remember that Branded Entertainment will be the icing but rarely the whole cake. And as is with icing, just the right amount transforms the taste. Advertising is something brand managers spend most effort on. Quite simply it is the brand telling the consumer what the product can do. Branded Entertainment on the other hand is when a brand slips in seamlessly

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into content in a way that legitimizes the product's claim. In advertising the hero is the Brand, in Branded Entertainment, the entertainment is the hero, and the brand is using that environment to legitimize / cement its claim. So e.g., Levi's the legacy jeans brand, made its legacy cool, by collaborating with cult entertainment Stranger Things Team to design an 80s wardrobe.

The first thing to keep in mind is to not try and take the place of advertising. See the challenge advertising is facing and see how entertainment can complement advertising to solve the challenge.

Which takes us to the question on how one could approach branded entertainment. This part you know but it merits a recap. We normally start with our Entertainment Property, be it Music, Movies, Sports, TV/OTT shows or Gaming. We then look for brands who could gain from them. Brands over the years have leveraged it with product integrations, Co-branded tie ups, Vignettes / Properties, Music videos, Podcasts, AFPs (or their own Channel or Movie), Sponsorships, Influencers / ambassadors, and Moment Marketing. These partnerships are mostly activated on platforms like TV, smart devices or Live (especially Music Sports and to an extent Awards) and supported with a Media surround.

So, let's see how this comes to life with this grid:

	TV	OTT	Movies	Gaming	Web Content	Live
Integrations	Bhabhiji ghar pe hain and Ezee	Levi's 80s collection in Stranger Things	Bhoot and several brands	Heinz Hidden Zones in Call of Duty		
Co-branded tie ups		Upside Down Whopper & Stranger Things	Mahindra & Mahindra TUV300 Bahubali promotion			
Vignettes		Bingo Mad Angles HotStar Taaza Khabar Character Flavours				
Music videos	Yamaha Anthem GenZ style - MTV Hustle					
Media Properties	Britannia 50:50 DRS Referral					Ceat Strategic Time Out
AFPs	Coke Studio		The Lego Movie		Asian Paints where the heart is Red Bull House of Media	
Sponsorships	Appy Fizz presents Bigg Boss			Tecno ESL		Bacardi NH7 Weekender
Influencers / Brand Ambassadors		Lakme Moving in with Malaika Zomato Sunday lunch with Bhuvan Bam			Unleash Your Inner Trailblazer with Mercedes Benz AMG and Kaustabh Radkar #Borntoperform	
Moment Marketing		Shark Tank Memes				Red Bull Baumgartner edge of space jump

A grid like this helps me because it serves as a menu. It also gives a clue as to who to tap in the Branded Entertainment ecosystem comprising broadcasters - tv & radio, OTT - video & audio, digital content creators, social media platforms, film studios / producers, music labels, influencers/celebrities, gaming / esports, experiential events, video production and print.

Making the sell. Remember the following 5 points:

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1. *What is the communication problem that Advertising can't solve that Branded entertainment can.*
2. *Focus relatively less on branding salience and more on meaningful association. Your solution should be credible, authentic, and Intrusive.*
3. *Cost is important but Value is the real deal. It is inevitable that agencies will look to put a number to branding salience and measure the CPM versus an ad spot. But the real deal is to put a value to the communication problem you are solving. That said, outlays can't be out of whack. This is where choice of platform becomes key. AFPs a powerful tool, have moved out completely from TV to the Web.*
4. *Principles of Activation: Invite – Experience – Amplify. If you are spending X on acquiring the right, spend another X to activate.*
5. *Importantly it is key to have a social media leg to the activation where you collect the data behind the engagement you have generated.*

Sprinkling stardust:

If you sprinkle too much truffle on a dish the taste is overpowering. If you want to do magic for brands with entertainment, you need to dial up the passion behind the entertainment you represent and find the sweet spot where the brand can tango. Entertainment represents popular culture. Brands want to be part of popular culture. If you make them fit in seamlessly you win, the brand wins...magically.