



The three things that will create an impact in the Branding Industry, on the road to 2010

The Future of the Future of Branding

The future is not for you to see. Well almost. The future of marketing lies in the future of branding. Three things then that will impact on the future of the future... as I see it.

1. Impact ONE: The Amoeba and I

Human beings are not static state entities. We change. Our minds change. The thoughts in our minds change. We are change animals. We actually morph all the while. Our bodies change. Our minds change as well. Our bodies change with time. Right upto the age of 18 we are on the growth path. From then on we are on the death path. Our cells grow all the while and then start dying all the while. The body is therefore all about change.

The mind similarly is all about change. Change that is even more dynamic. While the body and its changes are all about a relationship with time, the mind and its change is not about time at all. It is about the diverse sets of experiences we go through. It is all about experience and exposure.

When our minds (where thoughts live) are forever on a morph mode, how dare brands remain static and expect to thrive?

Brands need to reinvent themselves on the format of an amoeba that is forever changing. Amoebic Branding is it! Change with dominant sets of consumers. A brand can't be static anymore. Brands need to have *avatars* that change all the while. And for this, for a start, brands need to know the minds of their consumers the way they are and the way they will be next month. Brands need to Scenario plan all the way ahead.

Brand appeal needs to be inconsistent. Consistency is old hat. Consistency is the old paradigm of the branding process. One needs to break through the walls of this very rigid edifice brand folks have built over the last several decades. A brand needs to be inconsistent. Inconsistent in sync with the consumer.

Consumers are changing faster than brands. And that possibly is one of the reasons brands are being left behind and consumers are sprinting ahead. Running away from brands! Amoebic branding is all about keeping pace with the mind and mood of the consumer and morphing brand offerings both in terms of imagery and more radically so, in terms of product as well! The product can't be static anymore as well! Wake up to new branding! Wake up to the new DNA of a brand!

2. Impact TWO: Watch out! Inclusive branding ahead!

The very base paradigm of branding is exclusivity. In the beginning, there was the commodity. The commodity was pretty much unrecognizable one from the other. Brand folk caused for distinction. The commodity morphed to a quasi-brand status of some recognition. Brand folk kept getting exclusive in their approach. The quasi-brand moved on to become a brand. The brand was exclusive space. And then came the super-brand! Very exclusive space!

If the brand is exclusive space, it excludes a whole lot of society from it.

As society evolves, the language of the day will move on to get more and more inclusive. Do brands today include the masses or do they exclude them? Do brands in India include the needs, wants, aspirations, desires and affordability parameters of the have-nots?

If they don't, and if all they cause is a hunger for higher

end products that just can't be satisfied, time then to get going and get onto the bandwagon of what I call Inclusive Branding. Branding that involves every segment of the masses there is to please, feed, clothe and shelter!

Inclusive branding is therefore all about an offering that embraces all. In some way or the other. In an extreme manner of speaking, brands will aspire not to alienate but embrace. Brands will cause hunger amongst only the relevant groups of people they aspire to satisfy. Mass advertising will therefore need to get very sensitive. If you are a Skoda Auto, you will get very sensitive and stop using mass media altogether that reaches the recesses of the dispossessed in your country. You will remember that even people below the poverty line in your country watch television, and you will not want to create unnecessary hunger and saliva appeal amongst those who can't afford what you peddle.

And this is not about being benign. It is all about avoiding social discontent. All about avoiding those negative cues and strokes your brand gives to a whole set of people who can't afford to be within its consumption set.

One step further then. Brands just might have other offers for those who can't afford what you advertise to the masses. A branded tea that retails at Rs.300 a Kilogram just might have a variant that retails at Rs.2 per 5 grams! The quality of the offering will of course be different, but the brand name might be the same!

Can a brand with the same name swim upstream and downstream in an economy at the same time? The paradigm might just have to be broken!

Inclusive Branding will be about embracing all whom you advertise to. The strategies of Inclusive Branding are many, but the goal is the same. Newer and newer routes will be discovered! Inclusive Branding is the new DNA of a truly successful brand ahead!

Impact THREE: People!

Brand people are getting more and more difficult to get. Good branding people. There are a limited number of well-trained (read: pedigree trained) branding people in the country. You can count them on a 100-page book, one page representing one trained brand soul.

A sub-set of these well-trained people are people from this set who understand the realities of the day and are completely contemporary in their approach to branding. Branding is an art, a science and philosophy that is changing at a furious pace.

The killer combination is the true-blue trained branding person who is completely attuned to changing realities on the consumer front. A forty year-old who reads the market like a 12-year old on the verge of his teenage years.

The search for these kinds of people is a tough one. This is going to impact branding and its practice tremendously. Companies will spend a lot of money down the chute, experimenting with people. This search is the one search to get right.

The search is certainly as elusive as the mostly futile search launched by many a woman in the past hundred years with the buzz-phrase: Wanted! A good husband!



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