

Three things that will make an impact on Marketing in India, on the road to 2010

Just the other day, an insights group gave us a peek into how the consumer is changing. A big point that kept coming back was that consumers today are becoming far more expressive than they were a decade ago. From 'myspace' to 'joost' to 'second life', they all seem to be there trying to define their own worlds - rejecting and accepting things that they like and *not* what we want them to 'own.' I could see nods and awe around the room and the debate veered towards how long will it be before this "mass-minority" takes over the world - more importantly, India as a market.

'There are two India's' is something that we have heard and discussed for the better part of the last decade. But the thought of the 'niche-India' becoming sizeable and in effect mass set me thinking. If these developments go the way they are (and I don't see any reason why they won't) then by 2010 there will be very serious marketing challenges that we will have to face and overcome. When I say this, I am talking about the challenge we will face in getting the consumer hooked and engaged with our brands.

Actually, if we look at it, the seeds of a whole lot of these challenges have already been sown in the past few years. Music companies have already gone through their recessions in the world of on-line sharing and creation of content, traditional travel agencies are trying to fight with the click and mortar dotcoms, Presidential candidates -not just in the United States - but even in India are getting their popularity votes on people-driven SMS polls. Come to think of it, it's not a group of elite intelligentsia but people like you and me who will select the '7 wonders of the world' in a short time from now. Conservative estimates indicate that by 2010 there will be 450 million mobile phone users in India alone - just think what they can unlock with the reach and persuasiveness they can create. One viral and a brand will be made or undone.

Welcome to a world where choices will be made and decisions will be voiced by a click of a thumb. And yes, let me admit, that even sitting today, us marketers are running short of ideas to grapple with this fast emerging consumer. New things are being thrown up at us and there is very little time between introduction - acceptance - and rejection. And we got to be on top of these challenges sitting today - because 2010 is not too far away. There are many challenges that we will face, but there are 3 that definitely come top of mind.

We won't be able to sell. They will buy!

For starters, a considerable challenge that will be posed to us by 2010 will be the *evolving retail formats*. With the proliferation of large format organized retail stores/ hypermarkets/ possible opening of FDI in retail and the world's largest chains in India by 2010 - the retail landscape is set to change drastically. They will force us to redefine the traditional marketing role. As this gets more pronounced,

retail formats will dictate purchase behavior and marketers will have to move beyond just building awareness with consumers to start looking at appealing to "shoppers." Just like multiplexes in the last decade opened the doors to new age cinema makers focusing on a new set of audience (Bheja fry; Mr. & Mrs.Iyer).

Importantly, this army of shoppers, spoilt for choice, will now be maneuvering their shopping carts through store aisles - touching, feeling and spotting value deals - so the brand experience and packaging will need to be sharper and more compelling. This may need "experiential marketing" to take on a larger role. But the logistics, supply chain, distribution and merchandising rules as we understand them today are set to change for ever!

Younger Consumers. Older Marketers.

India, already one of the youngest nations, will have a huge population that will be in their early 20's by 2010. That will mean that a whole lot of categories (that naturally don't look at this population as 'shoppers') will have to start understanding and talking to these guys. Expect to see printers, 4-wheelers etc. talking to this audience. As the *world's largest youth market* (within a nation getting increasingly affluent), this huge segment will act as a magnet for youth brands globally. So marketers across the board will need to stay relevant to the youth and communicate to them in the most effective manner. Brands will therefore closely need to track youth trends - now more than ever before - and be quick to seize new opportunities.

The big challenge will be for us to stay relevant to this 20-something, single, high discretionary income 'household' (and the truth is that a large number of us marketers will be at least two decades away from this generation's sensibility by 2010).

Wither brand manager

And this is where the biggest challenge for us will lie. Traditional marketing has been about 'brand control' - where brand definition and affinity is defined by the marketing department. The new generation, flushed with self-expression and technology that lends credence to their 'voice', will reverse the 'power equation.' By 2010, *brands increasingly will be defined by consumers and not by marketers*. In this world, marketers will be challenged to let go - and more importantly become more "imaginative" for consumers to create brands in their own spaces and with their own meanings. Basically, the brand custodian's primary role will evolve into helping define his brand sharply while leaving room for consumer expression.

2010 is not far away. The sooner marketers start viewing these challenges as opportunities, the better it will be for a lot of us to stay relevant.



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