


Traditional is passé and unconventional is in, so far as marketing communication in the contemporary cut-throat market goes. It is the out-of-box thinkers and innovators in not just the 'medium' but also the 'message' that walk away with all the glory.

By Jayanta Chakraborti



ReDeFINING
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"I know that 50% of my advertising is wasted. I just don't know which half."

– John Wanamaker

If you thought you had a winner up your sleeves as you had just signed up Big B as your brand endorser, think again! A decade or even five years ago maybe you had a chance. But with just about everyone and anyone joining the Bachchan bandwagon, there's not much value that he may be contributing to your brand.

Tune in to Star News. There's your friend Amitabh Bachchan trying to convince you to invest in ICICI Bank. Switch over to Zee News, Mr Bachchan again. This time trying to palm off a Reid & Taylor suit to you. Perplexed, you switch over to ESPN and there's your megastar hip-twisting with Sachin Tendulkar and indicating to you: *Yeh Pyaas hai Badi* (urging you to chill with Pepsi). Desperate, you blindly press the remote key - Ditto! There's the Big B again admonishing your boss for not carrying a Parker Pen while taking off on a flight.

And if that's not enough, he's even there on Cartoon Network for your kids – Amitabh Uncle shouting with joy: 'Pappu Paas ho Gaaya' and inviting everyone to celebrate with a Cadbury's chocolate. He doesn't leave your wife either – there he is on Star Plus (in between the *Saas-Bahu* serial) advising her that Rin is the best detergent that gives maximum *dhulai & safedi...* and the list continues.

Advertisers are in for trying times. Tune in to any channel on the boob tube and consumers are sure to find the same 'celebrity faces' animatedly endorsing one product or the other. In between the plethora of brand promotions and star endorsers, the essential message is perhaps getting lost. The Reid & Taylor

suit that Mr Bachchan wears could just as well be a Raymond, Gravier or Digjam, in the minds of the consumers.

And it's not that we have anything against the megastar, the same holds true for the Tendulkars, the Sehwargs and the Shahruks of the world. People now remember the celebrities and the punch lines but fail to recollect which brand was being endorsed. *Shwag ki Maa* lives on in the hearts of millions, but the association with Reliance Infocomm has been conveniently forgotten.

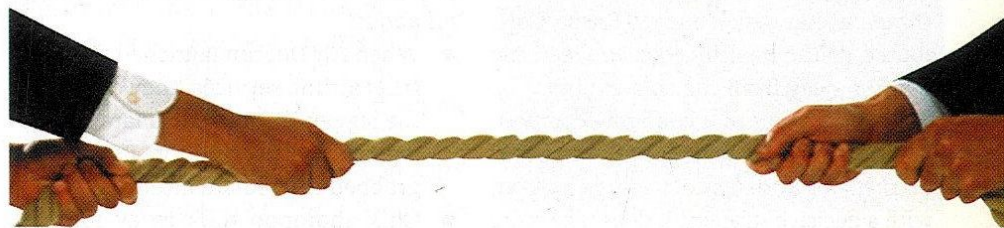
In sharp contrast, the utterly-butterfly Amul girl has withstood the sands of time with her quick witted humour and reminds us of the delicious Amul brand every time we look at the billboards. But maybe marketing was simpler at the time of Amul. Marketing guru Philip Kotler told you that all it took was to rely on the 4Ps: Product, Price, Promotion and Physical Distribution. He believed that one needed to develop an attractive product, offer rock-bottom prices, devise a good promotional strategy, ensure a super-efficient supply chain and the whole market was within your grasp. Amul created a good product, priced it competitively, jazzed it up with subtle and humorous communication and hit the bull's eye. So, how do you create a marketing campaign

that doesn't cost you the earth but delivers the bang-for-your-bucks? Welcome to the world of Unconventional Marketing. Just like alternative medicines that try to cure the toughest of diseases using the cheapest of methods that defy all rules of modern medicine, this is a set of tools that has delivered amazing results for companies who have managed to use them effectively.

The Tug-of-war: Traditional Vs Unconventional

In the contemporary market place, all that is created is noise. Every brand is jostling for space in the mind of the consumer – if one spot features Amitabh Bachchan, the other promptly brings in a Shahrukh or Aamir Khan. If one brand slashes its prices, the others jump into the fray with super cuts. Products change their skin almost everyday to stay ahead in the race. Tomorrow it's going to be 'refreshing ice' day, and the day after tomorrow it conveniently camouflages into 'golden mint'!

The icing on the cake comes with retailers being hustled, jostled and wooed by almost every other brand like never before – while some brands entice retailers by giving them hefty margins, others promise them foreign vacations



with family if their targets are achieved. The competition starts hotting up with numerous free offers doing the rounds if you buy three soap cakes, you get a bucket free, if you buy a writing pen you get a Mercedes car free (all you need to do is scratch a card), if you buy a bottle of Coke there's Aishwarya Rai waiting to whisk you away to dreamland and if you buy an Airtel connection, Sachin and Shahrukh are just round the corner, craving for a game with you.

It appears that advertising and other marketing communication tools are today more about the 'push' effect rather than the 'pull' effect. "Push! Push! Push!" seems to be the buzzword with most marketers today.

It takes more than 4Ps to propel the consumer to compulsively buy the product

However, the million dollar question, is – are these strategies cutting any ice with the consumer? The answer, unfortunately, is a resounding NO.

Despite a massive marketing budget, Hindustan Lever is on a sticky wicket while defending its turf against regional brands like Nirma, Cavinkare and Ghadi. The clout of Indian Airlines, Jet Airways and Sahara combined has not been strong enough to prevent Air Deccan from snatching away a 10% market share. Amul has always been a winner while competing against Nestle and Britannia. And Dabur has taken on the mighty cola giants by the horns with its fruit-juice brand Real. And if that was not enough, cashing in on the pesticide-controversy in the cola market, Rasna, a home-grown soft drink concentrate company, has now launched Rasna-Cola, touted as the healthy cola, to wean the market away from the cola majors.

It is apparent that changing competition, discerning consumers and saturated markets today demand a new game plan with a decisive strategy. It does take more

than just the 4Ps to capture the imagination of the consumer and propel him to compulsively buy the product. Below are discussed the various unconventional marketing techniques that are popular with Gen-Next marketers.

Guerilla Marketing

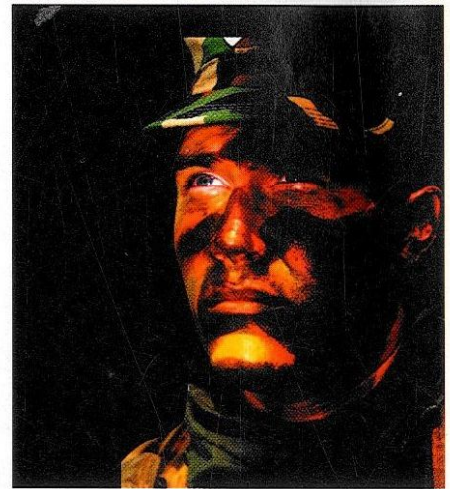
The term Guerilla Marketing was coined by Jay Conrad Levinson. Guerilla marketing is as different from traditional marketing as guerilla warfare is from traditional warfare. It is an unconventional marketing strategy intended to show maximum results from minimal resources. This marketing technique is more about matching wits than matching budgets. Rather than marching their marketing resources like infantry divisions, guerilla marketers launch sniper attacks to gain maximum impact.

Guerilla marketers do not believe in seeking refuge in huge ad campaigns, constant publicity programmes and deploying a huge sales force. They focus sharp and keep their operations nimble. This gives them the advantage of moving fast, thinking on the run, and the flexibility of employing a broad range of marketing tools. The foremost advantage they have is razor-sharp focus and an attention to detail. Marketers of such brands clearly see their target market and go all out to get them. The brand itself would normally reach out to an untapped market within a well-known product category.

Innovations in price, product, marketing, advertising, promotion, category and of course, innovation in positioning as well as appeal are the various guerilla marketing techniques that are used in this marketing genre.

The examples below will give a clearer picture of what guerilla marketing is all about:

- When Air Deccan launched their no-frills airline services, they outwitted the biggies IA, Jet and Sahara by pricing tickets at rock-bottom Rs 500 that grabbed immediate attention.
- Chik shampoo took away market-



share from big brother HLL by introducing their product in small sachets that instantly expanded their reach.

- When all cars were proclaiming that they would become bigger and bigger, Beetle surprised everyone with the advertising campaign 'Think Small'.
- Anchor toothpaste broke the hegemony of Colgate and HLL by creating an altogether different category – the vegetarian toothpaste.
- Dandi Namak became a nightmare for Tata Salt as well as Annapurna Namak with their aggressive launch, taking the product to the untapped rural and semi-urban markets.

Guerilla marketing is a sure fire way to success for small businesses around the world. It works because it is simple to understand, easy to implement and inexpensive.

Niche Marketing

A niche market is a sub-segment with distinctive traits and common characteristics, which require a special combination of benefits for which the customer is willing to pay.

The strategies adopted by Paras Pharmaceuticals to grow their brands are an excellent case study. When they realised that housewives had a problem with cracked heels, but no specific medication was available, they launched Krack cream, which took the first mover advantage and has been a leader in that

category since then. Prickly heat powder *Dermi Cool*, another brand of *Paras*, observed that market leader *Nycil* was harping on its medicinal plank, but what consumers were looking for was instant relief and not a cure. *Dermi Cool* was positioned as a powder that offered a perceptible cooling sensation, thanks to its mentholated formulation, and immediately became a big hit.

Similarly, *Boroline* and *Boroplus* had a dominant share in the antiseptic cream market till *Borosoft* gave them a rude wake-up call. Research showed that both *Boroline* and *Boroplus* had a sticky formulation, which deterred regular usage. *Borosoft* used that as an entry point to pick up volumes and is today giving the two market leaders – *Boroline* and *Boroplus* – a run for their money.

Recently, *Paras* has jumped in with another innovative brand called *Freshia*. This was in response to the need of consumers for a cream to be used after bath that could take care of their skin. None of the existing creams promised freshness as a proposition and *Freshia* is all set to make an interesting start. Similarly, their other brands *Moov*, *D'Cold*, and *Itch Guard* have been able to exploit various niche segments effectively and enjoy instant brand recognition.

There are several types of niches that can be exploited: a niche may be geographic, it may be based on unique customer needs, quality or price. A few examples may be summed up as below:

- There were no banks who were interested in lending to the poor people of Bangladesh. *Gramin Bank* seized on this opportunity and came up with the idea of micro-credits and gained easy entry into the market.
- Tennis players (and those of sundry other games) had a problem of where they could safely keep their loose change, car keys and other paraphernalia while playing. *Kangaroos shoes* solved this problem by introducing shoes with zipper pockets.
- During the IT boom there was an acute shortage of trained software

professionals as engineering colleges and universities in India were ill equipped to churn out the requisite numbers. *NIIT* and *Aptech* capitalised on this opportunity and set up training centres to provide short term courses in different programming languages.

The take home: Look for untapped markets, focus keenly, strategise selectively and before you can say *Kotler*... you have a winner up your sleeve!

Buzz Marketing

Buzz marketing plays on the inherently inquisitive and talkative aspects of the human nature. It is the art of making potential customers discuss excitedly about a new product or service and thus, through word-of-mouth inform others about the product and create an inquisitive hype about the product. This may also be referred to as viral marketing because the message spreads like a virus infecting everyone with it. Of late, it has proved to be an effective tool for brand promotion and boosting sales.

Buzz marketing stands in direct contrast to traditional television or radio advertising, which is the classic mass marketing approach based on the premise of broadcasting a message as widely as possible, assuming that this is the best way to reach the largest possible number of interested consumers.

Buzzing assumes that a person-to-person marketing message is much more powerful because it is so personal and that it could potentially reach more people than a broadcast message, if only it is buzzed about in great quantity by people who have very long contact lists and no qualms about promoting products to anyone who will listen. Buzz marketing has created several legendary brands. Prominent among these are the *Harry Potter* books, *Pokemon* cards and the horror movie *Blair Witch Project*.

In India, *Digen Varma* and *Balbir Pasha* are two well known brand icons created by *Frooti* and the national AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), respec-

tively, using buzz marketing. Last year, when *Sony* wanted to regain lost TRPs from *Star* and *Zee*, they splashed the media with the *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* campaign. *Brainchild* of *Sunil Lulla*, executive vice-president of *SET India*, the *Jassi* campaign had flash mobs converging at malls, restaurants, railway stations and other public places chanting 'Jassi Jassi' and carrying out animated discussions.

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No wonder *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin* gained a TRP of 8.2 points right from the beginning and has been a very popular TV soap since then. The *Jassi* campaign has also brought in several awards for *Sunil Lulla* and the *Sony TV* team.

Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing is a tool that treats marketing as a process over time rather than as single unconnected events. By customising the marketing message and activities to the lifecycle of the customer, the relationship marketing approach achieves very high customer satisfaction and is highly profitable.

The relationship marketing process is usually defined as a series of stages, working from the beginning of the relationship to the end and then to the



re-beginning. These stages could be Interaction-Communication-Valuation-Termination, or Awareness-Comparison-Transaction- Reinforcement-Advocacy or Suspect-Prospect-Customer-Partner-Advocate. Using the relationship marketing approach, the company can customise promotions and offers for individual consumer groups and the stage of the process they are going through. The stage in the customer lifecycle determines the marketing approach to be used.

For example, when a customer opens a new bank account, he is offered a welcome kit and debit card. On a later date, based on his transactional value, he is offered other products like credit cards, car loans, home loans, personal loans and insurance.

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Suppose, the customer keeps on accepting new products, he needs to be offered a set of incentives like discounts, free equity research newsletters and other valuable propositions. If he declines to upgrade himself, he needs to be enticed with a different set of lucrative promotions. Depending on the type of customer, the bank needs to offer personalised and customised services and products. The relationship with the customer can be reinforced by providing loyalty points, privilege cards, club memberships and honouring them from time to time for repeat purchases. In this way, the companies can convert the customer from prospects and suspects to advocates of the brand.

Relationship marketing eliminates a lot of wasted marketing spending, and creates very high Return on Investment (ROI) in marketing campaigns. The companies end up spending less money overall, and the money that is spent is much more effective in getting increased sales

and better market share.

Ambush Marketing

In the 1996 cricket World Cup, a great upheaval happened when Pepsi, who failed to get the sponsorship, stole the limelight from the official sponsor Coke with its 'Nothing official about it' tagline. That instance was a classic example of the phenomena of ambush marketing.

In marketing terminology, ambush marketing refers to an effort by a rival entity to benefit from an event at the expense of their competitor's association with the event. Though the term is most commonly used for rivals, in certain circumstances it may be used for non-competing companies also. Ambush marketing also occurs when the event is hijacked by a party (whose event it is not), though the specific rules vary from event to event.

Though the term is used most often in the context of sporting events, it is not restricted to sports alone. Pop star Michael Jackson, who had a multi-million dollar contract with Pepsi, was supposed to perform at a concert in Thailand, but postponed the concert pleading illness and dehydration from the heat. Rival Coca-Cola almost instantly took a shot at Jackson by running a print ad in Bangkok which said, "Dehydrated? There's always Coke."

In India, ambush marketing is very much prevalent in films. Thums Up had aggressively promoted Bollywood action flick *Kaante* using the film's footage, which featured Amitabh Bachchan, who, incidentally is a brand ambassador for rival brand Pepsi.

Recently, Sprite has been aggressively ambushing brands from the Pepsi stable while Mountain Dew is seen retaliating against Coke brands. Sprite ridiculed Amitabh Bachchan and Sachin Tendulkar-clones to show that only their brand quenches *pyaas*, while other brands were *bakwas*. Similarly, while Akshay Kumar



tried to promote the Thums Up Everest Challenge, Mountain Dew depicted their adventurers frolicking on snow clad mountain ranges and making fun of an Akshay Kumar clone.

Ambush marketing tends to bring out the best in creativity. It also helps to break the clutter of conventional advertising. However, ambush marketing is very tactical and short term in nature. It results in quick recall, but people forget it very quickly too.

In order to make ambush marketing successful, one needs to fire a series of campaigns to upset the opponent's apple-cart. Increasingly, marketers who are adopting flexible and innovative unconventional marketing strategies are winning the race.

In today's competitive world of brand building and advertising, what one needs is creativity and bright ideas to break through the clutter and noise and make their message reach the customers effectively. What's needed more is to be innovative rather than over-exaggerate.

While mega-bucks would always be welcome, companies need to consistently monitor whether their marketing spend is getting converted into higher sales, increased market share and greater brand recall in the consumer's mind. And for that, reliance on unconventional marketing strategies like guerilla marketing, niche marketing, buzz marketing, relationship marketing and ambush marketing are definitely better options. ■

Either deliver or change your promise



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Service marketers must understand that in a downturn rather than price wars it's living up to customer expectations, which will work wonders

Sharon looked at the stage. Her boss, Arjun Singhania, the CMD of FastFly, was making a presentation on the company's performance during the last quarter and financial year. Journalists, stock analysts and, of course, all concerned investors were already seated in the best positions that they could find for themselves in that big hall.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you very much for your patience and I express my pleasure for your presence in this august gathering. This is not the best of times and we represent here the airlines industry that has probably been hurt the most by the onslaught of the lingering recession!!!"

"We entered the airlines business with a clear objective in mind – FastFly would be the carrier for the corporate executives who needed to reach their destination in the quickest possible time at a competitive price. We positioned ourselves as a niche segment, somewhere between the full service carriers (FSC) and the low cost carriers (LCC). So, although we charge airfares closer to the LCC rates, we offer amenities and comfort as good as the FSC. The going was good till now, but this year we have been hit by a double whammy – high ATF (*air turbine fuel*) rates in the first half of the year and then plunging demand due to recessionary effects in the second half."

As the whole hall hushed into an eerie silence, Arjun continued in his rich

baritone voice, "So here are the numbers, the losses stand at 8% year-on-year and 16% quarter-on-quarter. Sales have declined 25% year-on-year and 33% quarter-on-quarter!" After a pause he resumed, "And here are the details of the balance sheet and P&L statement ...". As Arjun took them through the dismal set of numbers, the eeriness of the hall increased in magnitude. Finally he finished with a customary bow of head and looked at the

“The question that's keeping the aviation players busy these days is, 'Should they start a price war?'”

audience, "Any questions, please?"

A young lady rose from among the crowd. "Sir, you have just said that your average load factor has declined to below 70%, and you have also lost substantial market share to your competitors. Why don't you try to regain the same with predatory pricing? I mean, you could cut your prices below that of the LCC, take away the market share from them and in the process ensure healthy volumes?"

With a dry smile on his face, Arjun replied, "Should I start a price war? Well, I think you have hit the nail on the head. That's the analysis that we are currently doing and I'm sure I'll be able to provide some concrete answers within a few days."

Once the press meet got over, Arjun dashed off towards the Mercedes that was waiting for him. Once inside the car, he asked Sharon, "Are we late for the meeting with Professor Ram?"

"No Sir," replied Sharon. "We shall be reaching his office within fifteen minutes."

Professor Ramamurthy was his usual self when Arjun and Sharon entered his office. He smiled at them, asked them to be seated, and offered some filter coffee. But that was not enough to soothe the nerves of Arjun. "Prof, I have got just a simple question for you – should I go for predatory pricing and start a price war? I might get some market share and improve the seat load factor, but the big boys are surely going to retaliate in a brutal manner."

"It hurts, my friend, it really hurts a lot when you start a price war." Prof. Ram put a hand on Arjun's shoulder. "Both HUL and P&G did it with detergents, both of them got singed. Captain Gopinath started offering Re.1, Rs.5 and Rs.99 tickets, he couldn't save Air Deccan from getting acquired. The Indian aviation industry has lost Rs.4,000 crore in 2007-08, mainly because of the price war."



"Then sir, what do we do? We can't just stand there and get beaten up?"

"Ask yourself some questions, my friend, ask yourself a few questions!!!" Prof. Ram looked straight into Arjun's eyes. "Who exactly is your customer? What is the value proposition you offered? And has it been delivered in exactly the manner it was promised?"

"But the price..." Arjun looked puzzled. "Price war should happen only when your brand has been commoditised; when the customer comes and says, please give a FastFly ticket. But before that you must ask yourself – What is your USP (*unique selling proposition*)? Why should a customer pay you more and come back to you again for the second time?" the professor kept explaining to him as he was getting engrossed with the discussion.

"Well, we actually say that we make you travel fast at competitive price..." Arjun was about to explain further when he heard, "Wait a minute!!!" Prof Ramamurthy stopped him with a gesture of his hand questioning, "Does that actually happen? I am sorry Arjun, but the other day I took one of your flights from Mumbai to Delhi and reached there forty-five minutes late!"

"I know it's all those congestion in the airspace. Our aerodromes do not have the proper infrastructure – so unnecessarily our planes have to keep on

“Service marketing is about giving customers an experience, which makes them say, “Wow!”

roving in the sky burning the expensive ATF before they get the clearance to land," replied Arjun defending himself. "And then, to make matters worse, we bill the passenger an air traffic congestion charge," quipped Sharon.

"Exactly that!!! Now do you understand, Arjun – the USP that you are claiming has actually turned into a liability – you can no longer bank upon the claim that you make the passenger travel fast at competitive prices?"

"Then, what do I do? Should I cut fares and start a price war?" Arjun repeated his earlier question feeling like standing at the beginning of the discussion once again.

"No!!!" Professor explained to him, "If your old USP is not working, then create new USPs. Understand that service marketing is all about giving the customer a great experience. An

experience which will make her say, "Wow!!! I have got more than what I expected." Don't try just to satisfy the customer – try to delight her so that she comes back to you."

He further added, "I will share with you an example – recently many of the companies have issued instructions to their executives to travel by LCC in order to save cost. The executives loathe that directive because they don't get good food and free air miles in LCC. But here comes Kingfisher which says we will give you both good food and bonus points even if you travel by Kingfisher Red. And there you have a customer whose heart is all yours."

"Understand this, my friend, these are tough times and you really need to ask yourself a lot of hard questions, as also your customers and your organisation. Do market research, read the customer feedback forms, have a one-to-one session with your flight attendants, talk to your customers – and I am sure you won't have to cut prices. And if things still remain bad, maybe then you should go for a price war."

It was quite late in the evening when the discussion with the erudite professor came to an end. As he was returning, Arjun pondered whether the discussion had riddled him with more questions than answers! **HP**