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Mr. Namit Bajoria

Chairman ICC Retail & Marketing Committee

FROM THE DESK OF CHAIRMAN:

Using Public Relations (PR) as a marketing tool

We know that Sales is driven by Marketing. The most important bridge between Sales and Marketing is Public Relations or “PR”.

Marketing turns to the public relations department for assistance because that is where it finds the talent to write, manage media relations, arrange special events, create product publicity, handle sales promotion, manage consumer relations, and train spokespersons.

Public relations is extremely capable of sending 'interpreted' information directly to key targeted public segments and their influencers. Public relations, when used properly, can build, regain, and reinforce a distinctive position in the long term memory of customers (current, past, potential) and important influencers and observers for the products and services of a business. Public relations practitioners handle product or service introductions, work to positively affect the various stages of product life cycle, reinforce or create a new image for the organization and its products and services, and help increase sales across the board.

Some interesting case studies on effects of PR that you may read in detail in your leisure:

- a) ***Pepsi Brings Augmented Reality to the Movie Theatre Bathroom*** - Pepsi used augmented reality with facial tracking technology for this horrifying Halloween goof. When people went to the bathroom, they were surprised to see their own faces change into scary clowns and other terrifying creatures.
- b) ***Jet Blue and Crying Babies*** - Babies cry on airplanes. JetBlue sympathizes. It's not fun for the passengers, or the mothers who often get unfriendly stares. So they came up with an idea to make such a baby-crying flight a win-win for everyone involved. Piggybacking on Mother's Day, JetBlue decided to offer passengers a 25 percent discount on a flight from JFK to Long Beach whenever they witnessed a baby cry.
- c) ***Intuit Gives a Super Bowl Spot to a Small Business*** - Intuit, the developer of QuickBooks, created the Small Business Big Game Competition, giving one lucky small business the opportunity to air a \$4 million ad during the Super Bowl. With slogans like “Big business no longer owns the big game. You do.”, the small business finally received the admiration it deserves.
- d) ***Google Joins the Fight Against Ebola*** - Google announced it would pledge \$2 for every dollar donated through its website. They set up a specific URL, onetoday.google.com/fightebola, to explain this social initiative and invite people across the world to contribute. After the launch, when typing “Google ebola campaign” into a search engine, over 22 million results were returned, including news, articles, and mentions of the fundraising campaign, which raised over \$7 million to fight Ebola.

- e) *Paramount Brings The Ring Girl to Life* - The last PR example is another scary one. With the launch of the third installment in the trilogy, Rings, Paramount Pictures, created this stunt where the girl from the Ring crawls out from a TV and horrifies shoppers. Time magazine, Mirror and MTV, all covered the story. If you remember the last scene from the first movie, you can imagine just how scary this must have been for these poor people just trying to buy a TV. The video is up to 316 million views on Facebook, and over 8.1 million on YouTube, another strong showing for two key distribution channels.



Mrs. Swati Jalan

Owner of Communications 2.0

To understand this absolutely interesting phenomenon better, **Mr. Rohit Surana**, Chartered Accountant and Co-Chair of ICC retail and marketing Committee got into touch with **Mrs. Swati Jalan**, a PR Veteran of more than two decades, Owner of Communications 2.0, a PR Firm with a chequered record of over 16 years and inimitable set of brands.

RS – How does PR work?

SJ – PR is what gives credibility to marketing of brands, products and corporates. Compare a situation between you advertising your own product vs third parties giving a thumbs up to your product in the same media. What will sell more? Obviously when people are standing for your product rather than you blowing your own trumpet.

PR works in a similar fashion when your products are tried, tested and then appreciated by Bloggers, Influencers, Celebrities in various media. PR does not stop there. Other aspects like Journalists writing about the fantastic financial numbers you have achieved, your standing in the Industry vis-à-vis competition. PR also creates a lot of stories around product launches, restaurant launches etc in a manner which is bound to attract the attention of the consumer. For example, story around 3 restaurants selling the best desserts in the Kolkata not only invites attention to the desserts and the restaurants per se but also paves the way for travellers outside Kolkata to come looking for these desserts. And these are done by Independent Food Connoisseurs which adds so much credibility to it. You must have read, heard a lot of celebrities craving for Misthi Doi or Rossogolla from a particular Store in Kolkata is all a handiwork of PR.

RS – Give me an interesting case study from your experience of how PR helped a brand/Product/Corporate Resurgence?

SJ – We were working with a pen manufacturing brand. Pens used to be mightier than sword but never a “lifestyle” item. Either you buy very expensive pens which gave you status symbols or you use the same dull boring pens which apart from writing did not have any glamour. So our brief was to make a lifestyle product out of pens. We took it as a challenge. We almost spent 2 months on research, finding about which categories use pen more, where is pen kept on the table, uses of pen apart from mere signature etc. We came

out with specific TGs based on which the pen was re-designed from a mere plastic container of a refill to startling designs, colours and textures. Once the product was ready, we started preparing the communication deck. For example, Pen used to be bought in pen boxes but we designed personalised and customised gift boxes to keep pens in. It was sent to Bloggers, Influencers, Celebrities who would write and showcase the product with much gusto. For example, a gift box to an extremely successful women entrepreneur had “Boss Lady” written on it which was greatly appreciated. We curated product launch events and even invited celebrities to endorse pens which had never happened earlier and this caught the attention of the masses very fast. Even the print ads, hoardings and TV ads were synchronised with the communication deck. The store look and display counter of the pens were also harmonised. In a short span of time people were happy to use and flaunt pens as a fashion accessory/Preferred Symbol and not just merely a writing tool.

RS –How has Covid changed PR?

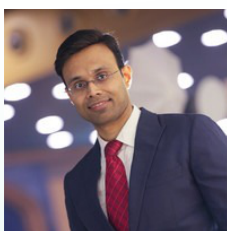
SJ – I would say it has reshaped PR. Digital PR has been added onto the basket. The use of social media has increased aggressively and now we have online PR as well. Launch events are happening online and even in hybrid mode. The reach to customers has increased rapidly and to places which are mind boggling. Apple launch events are happening online and are even watched in Tier II/III cities leading to recasting product basket suiting to these consumers. Media Universe has expanded manifold.

RS – In Corporate lifecycle when and how much one should use PR?

SJ – Ideally PR should start when your product is visibly placed across the supply chain system. However there are exceptions such as when you want to generate curiosity, mystery and buzz before its launch. However I would still say that distribution should be strong enough to sustain the pull generated by PR. Around 10% to 15% of your marketing budget must be spent on PR.

RS – How would you balance Personal PR vs Product PR?

SJ – Product PR should be done round the year and Personal PR should be done intermittently and when it becomes important to communicate the face behind the Product or resurgence in Industry. If the face behind a new product is very strong than Personal PR must be done simultaneously as it lends a lot of credibility to the product itself. Case in point being PR around a new start up supported by Ratan Tata. All in all, communication about the Product, Brand or the Person has to be done in a manner which lends a lot of credibility around it to all the stakeholders in the eco system, that is what PR is all about.



Mr. Rohit Surana
Chartered Accountant