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mudraprovoke

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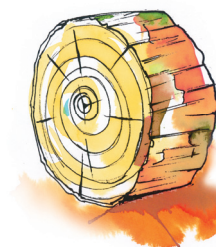
The Editor



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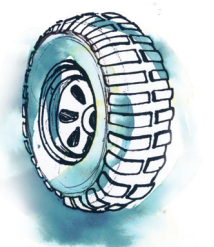
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Every practice, they say “benefits from a clear vision of where it’s been and where it’s going.”

So is the case with building brands. The progression, starts with the brand as a symbol, makes a huge transition to the brand as the message before it enters a new epoch - the brand as an enabler. If one were to choose a symbol that could personify the constantly evolving march of brands, the turning wheel would be just perfect. From a potter’s wheel in Mesopotamia in 3500 BC, to Egyptian chariot wheels, from tiny watch gears to automobiles, to jet engines and computer disk drives...the journey of the wheel has, in a sense, run parallel to that of our momentous achievements as human beings.



In this volume of *Mudra Provoke*, we trace the evolution of some successful brands.

Humour, Marketing and the Internet

Dennis Hurley

Technology has changed the way brands seek to engage consumers today. Brands constantly need to learn newer ways to adopt, upping the challenge. The author points out the one enduring element - humour - which draws consumers to brands and helps build lasting relationships.

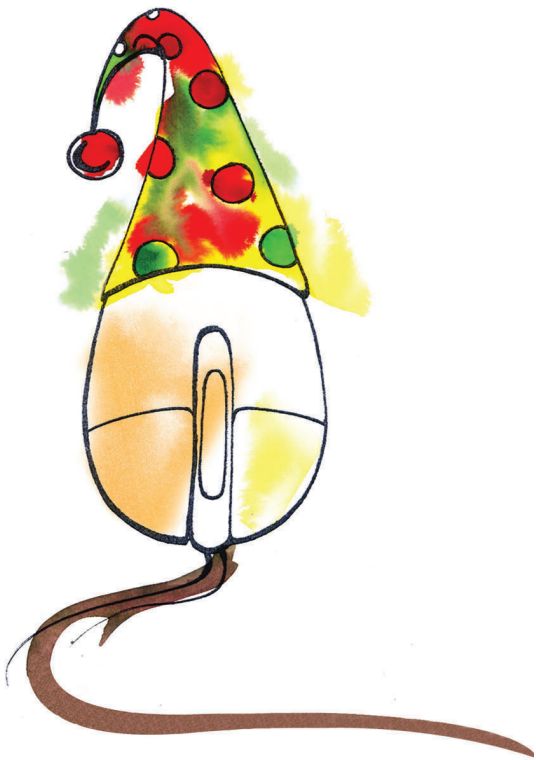
I'm sure you'll agree that it's a very exciting time to be a part of the marketing industry. It seems that each new day ushers in a ground breaking new style of marketing, a new approach or a new technology that just wouldn't have been possible a few years ago. Many of the terms we use to describe, debate and judge the work - 'participatory', 'social', 'interlinked', and 'connective' - were not part of common parlance a few years ago. Everything about digital marketing is new.

But what if the most important attribute of truly great digital work isn't something new, but something retained from the past? Something important that had been lost or forgotten in the midst of all these changes? What if, despite all the change, the true measure of great digital work is its emotive power?

The link between emotive power and business growth is clear. Today science confirms that emotion, not rational thought, is the gatekeeper for consumer behaviour.

This paper is focused on humour alone, the mainstay in our bag of emotive tricks. Most brands feature humour in their brand attributes - perhaps as 'a twinkle in the eye', a 'playful nature' or something similar.

More specifically, what follows is all about humour in the digital age of marketing: its renewed benefits, a glimpse of a brand that manages to be funny on the web; an investigation into how social technologies are impacting the way that we joke; and finally, a few pointers on how to ensure that your brand is in a position to take advantage of humour.



The Benefits of Humour

Humour has been a vital part of marketing for a long time: The memorably witty 'Think Small' print ad that DDB created for Volkswagen was made some five decades ago. However, with the changes in communication technology, humour carries a number of new benefits that have made it even more vital.

Humour Helps Extend Your Reach

The first benefit of humour is the most well known. As we're all aware, everyone on the web has the ability to quickly and easily share content with others. Humour puts your brand in the best position to benefit from that connectivity. It has the ability to earn large audiences through the amplifying effect of social connectivity. If you make your users laugh, your relationship with them will benefit and they will probably pass your creative on to their friends to make them laugh too, causing your message to spread virally.

The link between emotive power and business growth is clear. Science tells us that emotion, not rational thought, is the gatekeeper for consumer behaviour.

Humour Reduces Dependence on Incentives

We're always doing our best to encourage our customers to engage with our brand. We fight tooth and nail to entice them to click here, there, and everywhere. There are many

ways to coax them along, but humour is a great way to get a response without depending on giveaways or sacrificing margins. It's a nice alternative to out-and-out bribery. If you make sure they're enjoying what they're doing and can keep them laughing, you'll have enough of their attention to keep the experience flowing beautifully.

Humour Can Be Used to Avert Potential Detractors

Humour's ability to diffuse annoyance is vital at a time when genuine customer service is scarce yet consumers are able to broadcast their grievances to the planet. Brands are increasingly measuring their worth by what people are saying about them. Fred Reichheld of the Harvard Business Review has touted the Net Promoter Score (NPS), a simple customer satisfaction matrix, as "the one number you need to grow" business. Humour, when used with sensitivity, has a redeeming quality that can help lighten the mood and assuage grievances.

Humour Reduces Dependence on Production Values

Effective digital strategy is more than just moving what you've done from one screen to another. We're entering an era when your brand experience will need to be adapted to suit many different devices - and the experience across these devices will need to be coherently interlinked. Factors such as speed, personalisation and relevance to the user will become increasingly important. We'll be looking for simpler, more direct ways to express brand identity - like with a quip within a text message.

A Brand with a Sense of Humour

One brand that recognises the importance of humour in the digital era is Google. Without humour, Google would be a completely different company. Its mission "to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful" is arguably conducive to quite dry work.

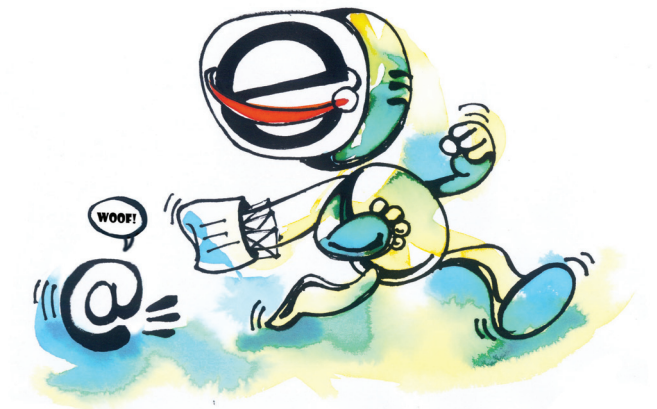
Google has built its empire on being very performance oriented, efficient, fast, technology-based, and reliable - and is facing a whole new set of challenges today. To quote Interbrand's Best Global Brands 2009, "As the brand grows it has to deal with the inevitable mistrust and ugliness ascribed to being a very large, diversified and very profitable company."

But how does it do it?

Google has executed dozens of enormous pranks - like the April Fools' Day 2009 prank, during which YouTube was upside-down. But Google's success isn't about size. In fact,

it's quite the opposite: it's about being granular. It's the way that the Google personality is so closely knitted into its products. A keen sense of humour lurks just beneath the surface.

Knowing that jokes are rarely as funny secondhand as they are firsthand, and that taking one of many tiny jokes in isolation doesn't give a full sense of their inexhaustible sense of humour, let's look at a fairly typical Google prank - a feature hidden in a rarely used part of Google Chrome, a "Goats Teleported" column that appears only when a certain combination of keys are held down.



Google treated this feature as if it were a software bug, announcing its existence by filing a bug report in the official Google Code Forum. Programmer flocked to the forum to play along with the goat teleportation joke - flooding it with concerned comments about the health and safety of the goats, customs fees and quarantine questions, one programmer wondering if it is "possible to wear a goat suit and be teleported," and another feigning annoyance that his bedroom was filling with everyone else's goats.

This example is emblematic of the three attributes that really set Google's approach apart: the humour is unexpectedly pervasive (it seems to be coming from the engineers and designers); the humour is stripped down to its bare bones, so the delivery feels effortless and spontaneous; and the tone of voice toggles between neutral and playful, as needed. These should be the attributes that define a brand with a sense of humour in the Internet age.

Humour is a malleable concept that has been changing form, content and style in response to social, cultural and technological trends since media's very beginnings.

New- Technologies, New Forms of Humour

Humour is a malleable concept that has been changing form, content and style in response to social, cultural and technological trends since media's very beginnings. New communication technologies not only influence humour, they make new styles of humour possible. Every major new communications technology in modern history has ushered in a new genre of humour.

Newspapers, for example, because they are published and distributed rapidly and frequently, made it possible to satirize current world events via cartoons. Television gave us the sitcom. The telephone provided the safe distance from which to make prank calls.

So, what does humour look like in the Internet age?

As it happens, there is literature available on this topic. Back in 2007, Limor Shifman of the University of Oxford published a study in the *International Journal of Communications*. He analysed a huge volume of Internet-based comics and categorised them by topic. With the help of earlier studies, Shifman compiled a list of joke topics and measured the prevalence of each.

The most relevant topics were, unfortunately, off limits to the world of marketing communications: sex (taboo), gender (taboo), and animals (unusable). Shifman's study had a secondary purpose, which is more useful for our interests: to find 'new' forms of humour. He found two that are now enjoying popularity on the web: manipulated photos and interactive humour that "allows users to participate in the joke-telling process."

Technology-Driven Capability	Resultant Behaviour	Real-World Example
Anonymity Opens the door to new forms of identity play	Creating a new identity for yourself	The announcement of fake 'breaking' news stories with the hope that they will be broadcasted before fact-checkers pick up on the hoax.
	Assuming someone else's identity	A fake Twitter account was opened on behalf of Tupac Shakur, a celebrity who died in 1996.
	Regression	Believe it or not, there are people that spend all day trawling forums pretending to be a kitten.
	Oversharing	Some sites allow people to anonymously share outrageous confessions, personal text messages, and so on.
Connectivity Opens the door to styles of humour only made possible by mass participation	Infiltration of situations in real life	Flash mobs.
	Infiltration of online destinations	Greenpeace's competition to name their whale was flooded with visitors from reddit.com who stuffed the poll with votes for "Mister Splash Pants".
	Obscure/absurd common interests	Reddit's competitive obsession with bacon and narwhals.
Wider access to creative tools	Manipulated photos	A photo that probably wasn't intended to be funny is given a harsh caption.
	Memes	The 'Play'em Off, Keyboard Cat!' on YouTube.
	Making the recipient the butt of the joke	Customised videos that make the recipient the butt of the joke.
Interactivity requires the user to perform an activity that is additional to reading watching or hearing	Bait-and-switch pranks	Linkjacking: a link inexplicably leads to a Rick Astley song despite the link text promising something else.
	Hidden features (also known as Easter Eggs)	For some time, Googling "worst band in the world" would return the result "See results for Creed".

Based on the understanding that these new forms of humour are attributable to recent technological advancements (the ability to manipulate photographs, the ability to interact electronically), it seems reasonable to assume that starting with technology-driven product breakthroughs and working backwards to discover comical uses of each would be a way to find new and notable forms of humour.

After observing the social bookmarking site reddit.com over the past few months, we drew up a table of what was discerned: the new capability (i.e. what we can now do because of new technology); the resultant behaviour (i.e. how people take advantage of that capability); and a real-world example.

Conclusion and Action Points

Humour is an enormously important and beneficial aspect of brand marketing that has been used quite successfully on the web by several companies. So, how do we execute it well? In addition to the thought starters provided in the table above, here are a handful of action points to serve as a guide.

Strategic Planning: Be Bold

By now you've grasped that technological change is changing the game, and fast. You might even have seen large organisations, once-vital professions, or indeed, entire industries permanently wiped out by the digital revolution. With all that going on around us, it's only natural that we start taking digital seriously and implement fairly defensive digital strategies. There may even be a whiff of fear.

And it's an easy progression from fear or defensive strategies to 'safe' but uncreative (and unfunny) work. Bear in mind that progress is not possible without failure. Many digital strategists use analogies like 'swinging for a home run' or 'drilling for oil' - the outcome is uncertain until the attempt has been made. Be realistic about the likelihood of a project succeeding and take calculated risks, as opposed to limiting creative.

Test user friendliness. Humour requires you to keep your users sufficiently relaxed to enjoy what they're doing with you.

Briefing and Production:
Understand the Social Context

If they're not doing so already, brands should undertake social media monitoring and trust social media mavens. Ensure that efforts are made to understand the kinds of topics that gain traction. It is much easier to steer an existing conversation in a fresh direction than to generate interest from nothing.

Test user friendliness. Humour requires you to keep your users sufficiently relaxed to enjoy what they're doing with you. Ensure that your products are tested thoroughly to eliminate frustration during the user experience. Keep in mind also that people are most comfortable and relaxed using digital tools that they are most familiar with.

After Launch: Know that statistics are only half the picture

Everything is measurable now, and it is very tempting to manage by statistics. Blinkered adherence to optimisation and best practices could eventually leave your business with a cold and dry online presence. While I would agree that you should capture data wherever possible, and that statistical measures make great KPIs, you need to be watching the right statistics. Depending on your digital strategy you might want to consider something like the aforementioned "Net Promoter Score" or the "Three-factor Model of Enjoyment Experience", a scale measuring the enjoyment of web experiences published in *The Journal of Interactive Marketing*

It's a very exciting time to be in digital marketing. Those brands that embrace change will enjoy new heights of creativity, inspiration, effectiveness and insight. Even our sense of humour, a part of our nature that we don't really question, is moving with the times. We do know that humour is here to stay and that we can expect plenty more of it. Humour, like the Internet, connects us all.



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The Rise of Screenagers

Rajiv Sabnis

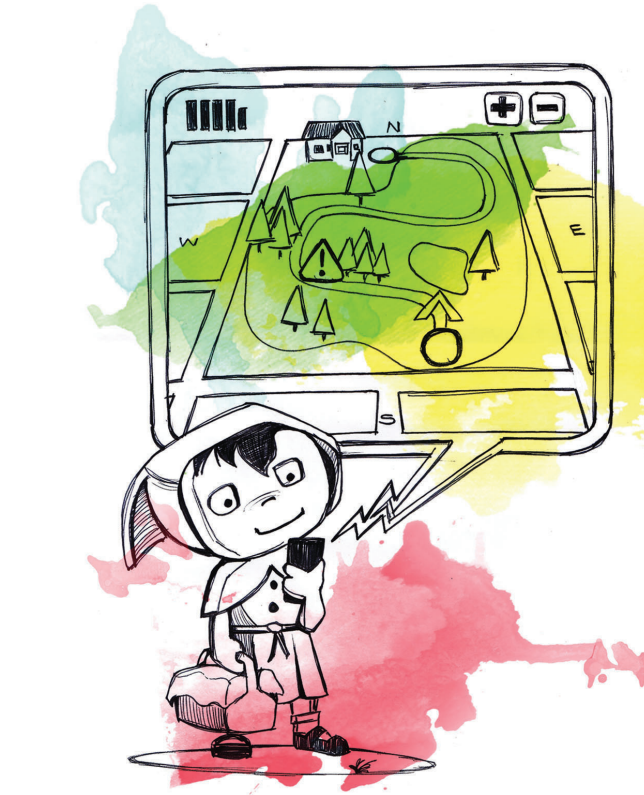
A recent study conducted by market-research firm Gartner, states that by 2015, a majority of kids under 15 years of age will be using computers that feature a touch-screen display. Seeing the growing influence of screens on children, the author talks about how brands need to cater to these Screenagers.

Whatever happened to good ol' childhood games like *gilli-danda*, *pitthu*, *kanchas*, *saamp seedi*, carrom, ludo and *lattoo*? It seems like they have all vanished into thin air. My generation spent most of its time engaged in these engrossing games while snatching a few moments here and there to study. But kids' activities in cities are not the same any more. Ask me, I have two young sons, aged 10 and 13.

Diminishing play spaces, fewer schools with playgrounds and public gardens monopolised by privacy-starved couples are urban realities. Rising rates of crime have also meant that parents are reluctant to let their children wander too far out of sight. Add to this, the inability of many city parents to personally supervise their child's outdoor playtime. In such a scenario, what can the child do but resort to an indoor activity which requires neither supervision, nor company and yet, is fun and exciting? All these factors have ensured that the playground has moved into your home today.

The age of the Screenager

The answer seems to be staring back at us through a variety of screens. Children today seem to have a fixation for screens of all shapes and sizes, from the hi-tech plasma, LCD screens of the latest televisions to the basic, plastic screens on toys. So rather than use bland, much-banded descriptors like 'toonagers' or 'tweens', I propose to call youngsters between the ages of 8-13 'Screenagers'.



Children within this age group are increasingly moving toward becoming 'individuals' at a much younger age, with personal choices and ideologies that often seem alien to someone from an older generation. However, from a marketer's perspective, Screenagers offer a very interesting demographic due to their media consumption habits and ability to influence the family's purchase decisions. For a variety of product categories, 'grooming' these Screenagers now could prove lucrative as they are likely to develop tastes and habits that could dictate their choices in adulthood as well.

Screenagers offer a very interesting demographic due to their media consumption habits and ability to influence the family's purchase decisions

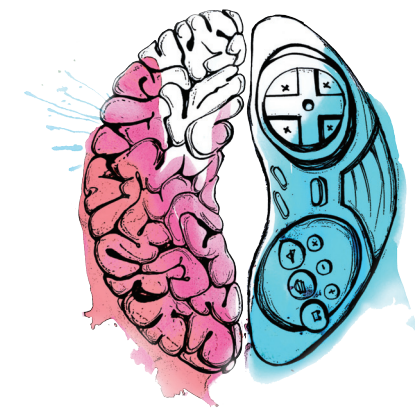
But it would be interesting to understand what it is about the screen that has taken this generation's fancy. From Gameboys to Xbox and PS3, from PCs to TVs and from mobile phones to iPods and iPads, they simply can't take their eyes off screens. They could be on a flight, in a multiplex, in a mall or at home, if they see a screen of any shape and size, they get drawn to it like moths to a flame! As a parent, it can be baffling; but as a marketer, it is critical to understand the underlying mindset of Screenagers and their relationship with brands and consumption.

Home alone, just the Screen for company

With parental absenteeism on the rise, more children are missing out on a traditional upbringing which would involve a significant amount of time spent with family. To overcome the guilt of less time spent with their offspring, parents are also indulging children with luxuries, technological or otherwise, at a much younger age. While it is debatable, this may mean that Screenagers are more pampered than other children.

In all, the phenomenon of the 'lonely child' is on the rise, especially in urban India. And screens seem to be filling the void left by reduced family interaction within the home. In the absence of company, the screen makes an alternate companion for the lonely child. It is a playmate, friend, teacher, competitor and soul mate all at once. It is also as available and as entertaining as the child wishes it to be. Virtual, screen-to-face relationships are as comfortable as face-to-face relationships for the lonely children of this generation.

Brain over Brawn



While the games of my childhood were about physical agility, screens today promote more vigorous mental ability, keen hand-eye co-ordination and concentration. More often than competing with other children on the playground,

Screenagers today compete with some programmed chip to test the limits of their mental endurance.

Is this a portent of things to come? Do brands in the future need to offer as much stimulation to the mind as the body? *Tan ki shakti, Mann ki shakti* like Bournvita? Certainly something to think about.

It is the generation of the mind, more so in India. While parents continue to be obsessed with physical milestones of height, weight and races won, will this generation of Screenagers change the rules of the game? Dilton and Dexter may finally rejoice!

Engaging the otherwise Engaged Screenager

Screens don't just offer passive entertainment anymore. They are all about interactivity. The ability to make real-time interactions to push the limits of connectivity, speed and

competition seems to have Screenagers addicted to their LCDs. Given that a majority of Screenagers would prefer to play a game on the PC than watch a TV programme, this addiction has become a stiff challenge for brands wishing to communicate with this target group.

What does this mean for brands who wish to appeal to this mindset? A much higher degree of interactivity and involvement and offering young consumers challenges to test their limits. 'PlayFood' and the screen toy as interactive plays to influence purchase are going to have much bigger roles to play. Just ask McDonald's about the impact that interactive toys have had on their Happy Meal sales.

When we talk about these Screenagers, how can we not talk about individualism? Most screens cater to the individual. It is an individual's private battle with a virtual persona from another world (Digimon, Pokemon, Dragonball Z, Megaman, Sonic the Hedgehog) or a real competitor from this world. The language is individual, the codes are individual and the challenges are one-on-one. When engaged thus, the child is oblivious to the world and remains in that trance-like state for hours, if screen time is not rationed or otherwise controlled. The focus on individualism and customisation is critical. But how brands measure up to this challenge is yet to be seen.

Being Instantly and Constantly Connected

Screenagers are digital in everything that they do. Televisions use digital technology, the music they listen to is digital (as the CD dies a slow death), their phones are digital, the games they play are digital (who has the time for a board game like Monopoly when you can challenge and play an opponent on another continent in real time?) and they are constantly on the move.

As an advertiser if you are not on the digital highway, get up to speed and target this Screenager phenomenon. They carry an awesome amount of computing power, communication complexity and purchasing clout. While riding the bus, cab or train, or lounging in the back of the family car, they are constantly communicating.

There is something to be said about the short attention spans and fickle-minds of kids.

Their playground will be the Internet and the mobile phone

Screens continuously cater to these with newer versions and difficulty levels, and whet their deep curiosity and spirit of competition.

They are also constantly innovating; either the technology or the content, to ensure that user fatigue does not set in. Screens are smart enough to create obsolescence to ensure that Screenagers feel the need to move on. Fads will always be unpredictable and peer pressure can deal quick and deadly blows. Brands need to adapt and innovate with the speed that Screenagers have gotten used to. Living in the fast lane with this mindset is inevitable.

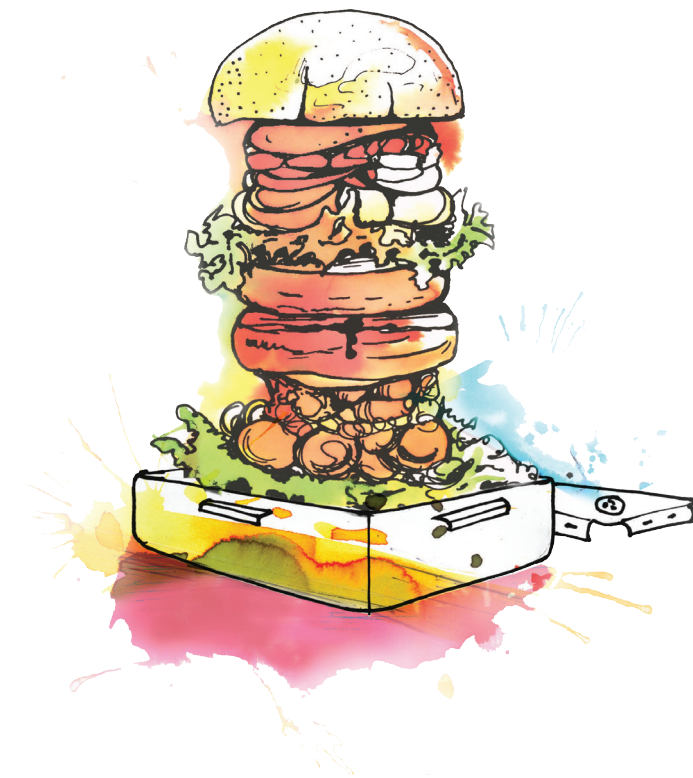
All said and done, Screenagers reflect a psyche that brands must take a note of, because this is a generation that will thrive almost entirely on Facebook, mobile phones, interactive games, iPods, videos and multiplexes in the near future. Their playground will be the internet and the mobile phone. Communicating with these individuals will become more and more of a challenge. Given that there will be more Screenagers to contend with as they grow in age and in their obsession for screens, brands will be well advised to be prepared to cater to them.



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An outdoor person, Rajiv loves travelling and is a keen sportsman.



Culture Signs & Brand Evangelism

Aashish Mishra

Brands have played varied roles in the changing cultural scenario and evolution of societies. A close scrutiny of branding in any society will reveal the most significant branding theme for the period to be a direct resolution of the contradictions of that time. Spanning almost nine decades, this article studies the close relationship between culture signs and brand evangelism.

The History of Branding

From simply being a tool for differentiation, branding over the decades has evolved to become the all-critical pivot of corporate strategies pursuing growth, market domination and higher profits. In the last century, consumption shifted from the paradigm of the product to that of the brand. This shift was a result of the free market becoming the dominant economic reality. As competition, globalisation and technology flattened the world and gave it parity, patents and competitive advantages ceased to be dependable strategic levers. That is the reason why gradually, the brand became sovereign across different markets and geographies.

Brands today are increasingly about opinions, partnerships, communities and heart. Consequently, brand building is less controlled and has evolved into a function of being able to trigger and manage conversations around an advocacy.

Advent of Branding - 'Cultural Authority' - 1920s to 1960s

The original genre of branding started off humbly. From 1920 onwards, influenced by thinkers like Ernesto Calkin

and Lears, the concept of a brand was introduced as a surrogate expression of valued social and moral ideals. Pioneer brand and advertising thinkers such as Leo Burnett and David Ogilvy boldly began focusing on it and began the tradition of referring to the functional benefits of a product only tangentially.

At the same time, the trends in psychology and management theory, notably behaviourism and Taylorism (a scientific system of management), convinced marketers that advertising and branding needed to be based on scientific principles that would coerce the consumer into a predictable stimuli-response system, if not immediately, then in the near future.

What was initially the beginner's enthusiasm for advertising (and through it, branding), catalysed by these developments, soon became a form of cultural authority. In God-like fashion, brands, ads and contemporary gurus of these industries, laid down and romanticised 'the good life' - ideals, values, taste and the kind of choices one should make as a consumer.

Winds of Change

Inevitably, saturation set in and thinkers in the late '50s finally woke up to what was happening. By the '60s the popular consciousness in the developed markets of the West started to deeply resent the tone of voice that corporations were until then typically using to create and communicate brands. Critiques of marketing techniques led to consumers

Post-modern Consumer Culture - the '60s to the present

Strange as it may sound, it was the 'hippie' revolution, symbolising the counter-culture movement that transformed the western world's branding landscape. This revolution, by seeding the notion of anti-establishment and individualism actually began the change in the societal view of brands.

And, with the advent of the expression era that followed, brands suddenly found a new role. They now provided a cultural meaning. It is in this period that the role of personal identity and the brand took shape. Consumers started to use brands to pursue their individualism and 'identity dreams'. This led to an emergence of community identities, consumers began to project their way of doing things by aligning with the many other users of their brand, e.g., Diesel, VW Beetle.

Bill Bernbach was one of the pioneering minds in this era, experimenting with new, workable ways of leveraging and even shaping the post-modern consumer culture. In more ways than one, he created the socio-cultural role for the brands he built, and the notion of culture brands.

The growing genre of Culture Brands

Today, around the world, including the new-to-branding emerging markets, makeovers have become the latest marketing hysteria. And while a lot of fad-driven identity makeovers have been a mere wardrobe change, the successful ones are decidedly exhibiting a strong socio-cultural role and are clearly pointing to the emergence of Culture Brands as the new genre of branding.

This is very much in line with the trend of evangelising a cause to play a socio-cultural role among the pick of the globally acclaimed brands too. Think David Droga's Tap Project and Million. Or, the Cannes '08 winner's work of a black boy running away with the host's glass of water at a TV show to create a buzz about the water shortage in Africa. And, MTV Australia going mainstream by campaigning to overturn the ban on controversial rapper, Snoop Dog. Then again, Suave personal care products targeting young mums, created buzz around their 'ITM' (It's the Motherhood) campaign that gave vent to the mother's frustrations through candid videos,

that it is now being made into a popular TV show on ABC. Volkswagen Golf's 'Night Driving', Coke's 'Happiness Factory' and Nike's 'Human Race' have also made a huge impression.

Not surprising that in the emerging and hyperactive markets of Asia, we are witnessing a clear growth in the culture brand genre. Think India's Tata Tea trying to build a community around 'Jaago Re', a clarion call to wake up against corruption and human rights. Or, Unilever's successful renditions of 'Dirt is good' and 'Real Beauty' assuaging the hyper-parenting and overly cosmetic personal grooming trends in society. And, HDFC Standard Life building its insurance portfolio and experience around 'Retire with Pride' by bridging the lonely lives and financial dependence of the elderly. Finally, think of India's first grand prix winner 'Lead India', a programme trying to co-create good governance by inviting and selecting deserving leaders.

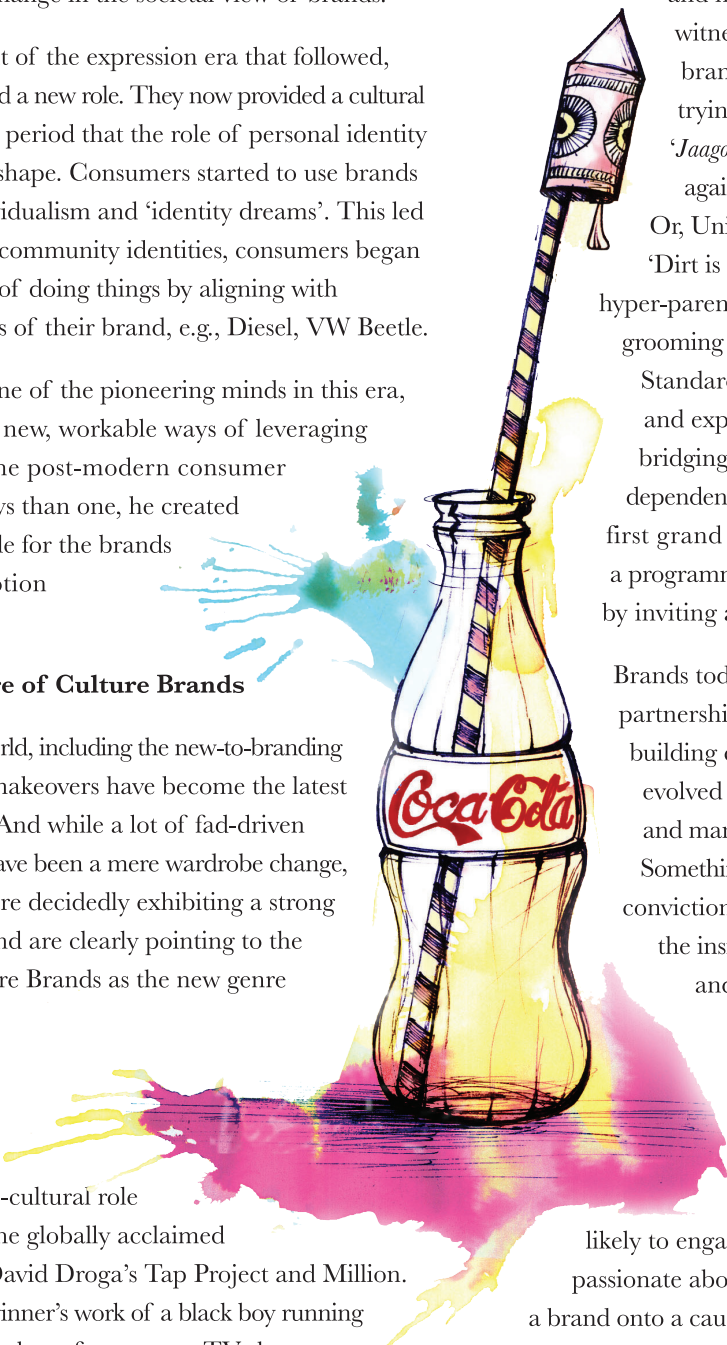
Brands today are increasingly about opinions, partnerships, communities and heart. Brand building consequently is less controlled, having evolved into a function of being able to trigger and manage conversations around an advocacy. Something that warrants strongly resonant brand conviction, process, people and behaviour on the inside and identity, portfolio, environment and experience on the outside.

The pivotal role in all this belongs to conviction. And this is simply because, today it is more important than ever to generate conversations around a brand. And, when are people most likely to engage in conversations? It's when they're passionate about something. So, if one can hook a brand onto a cause, a conviction, an opinion that people really care about, there is a better chance of building a community of shared belief.

Creating an Opinion, a Brand Conviction

Cultural Tensions – the basis of influence and culture brands

In his new book, How Brands Become Icons: The Principles



of Cultural Branding, marketing theorist Douglas B. Holt proposes the new big idea for branding. According to him, “The brands that attain the status of icons in consumer society operate at the cultural level. And more than merely reflecting people and the times in which they live, iconic brands offer myths that help resolve the contradictions of society; they’re channels for expressing desire and relieving anxiety.”

This is particularly true of societies and markets in a state of flux. And, what better example than the emerging Asian markets like India and China to demonstrate this all-pervasive evolution of branding? Both India and China have had an assimilative yet strong culture, and those cultures are witnessing a great deal of change today, owing to their being the cognitive capitals as well as the consumption markets.

Pluralistic societies with strong history and culture, when subjected to a high degree of social change simmer with numerous socio-cultural tensions. Examples abound. Nuclear family parenting in competitive high growth societies has turned hyper and is causing substantial parent-child relationship trauma. Swarthy Indian maleness is suffocating in the borrowed cloak of metro sexuality. Caring and benign mothers are venting the inevitable ‘Mommy Rage’. Addictive communication tools are actually breeding insularity.

Each of these tensions present an opportunity for resolution and creating an iconic connect. For brands, it means espousing a conviction that stands for a point of view and takes on a ‘fight’ that resolves cultural tension. That is when influential culture brands get created - users become the medium and start adding to the brand conversations within their communities. Quite simply, identification of these conflicts and tensions is the very pivot around which strong brand notions can be spawned.

Identifying the key Cultural Tensions that could serve as the basis for creating Culture Brands

Culture Signs - A consumer intelligence model to decode cultural tensions

Culture Signs is a global trends network that aggregates small signs of deviant behaviour to effectively predict cultural and behavioural shifts. It systematically collects and orchestrates numerous signs within a sociological framework, to determine the change that the cyclical and interlinked human society awaits. This change seen against the past and the present provides the basis for appreciating the cultural tensions that society could be faced with. Let’s take a look at Fig. 1.

Postmodern Consumer Culture Contradictions

The Ten Key Culture Signs

- 1. Neo Patriotism vs Internationalism and ‘Region States’
- 2. Implosion of Consumerism, Advent of ‘Maturilism’
- 3. Slowdown: Doing Less. Feeling More
- 4. Winning and Over Expression of Humility
- 5. Corporate Power to Cognitive Era
- 6. Seeking Havens of Authenticity amidst Urban Jungles
- 7. Social Media as a democratic lever for transfer of Brand Control to the Actual Users
- 8. Meaningful Contributors as Heroes
- 9. Revitalisation of Gender Truths
- 10. Hyper Parenting to Happy Schooling

Culture Signs is essentially a global trends network that aggregates small signs of deviant behaviour to effectively predict cultural and behavioural shifts.

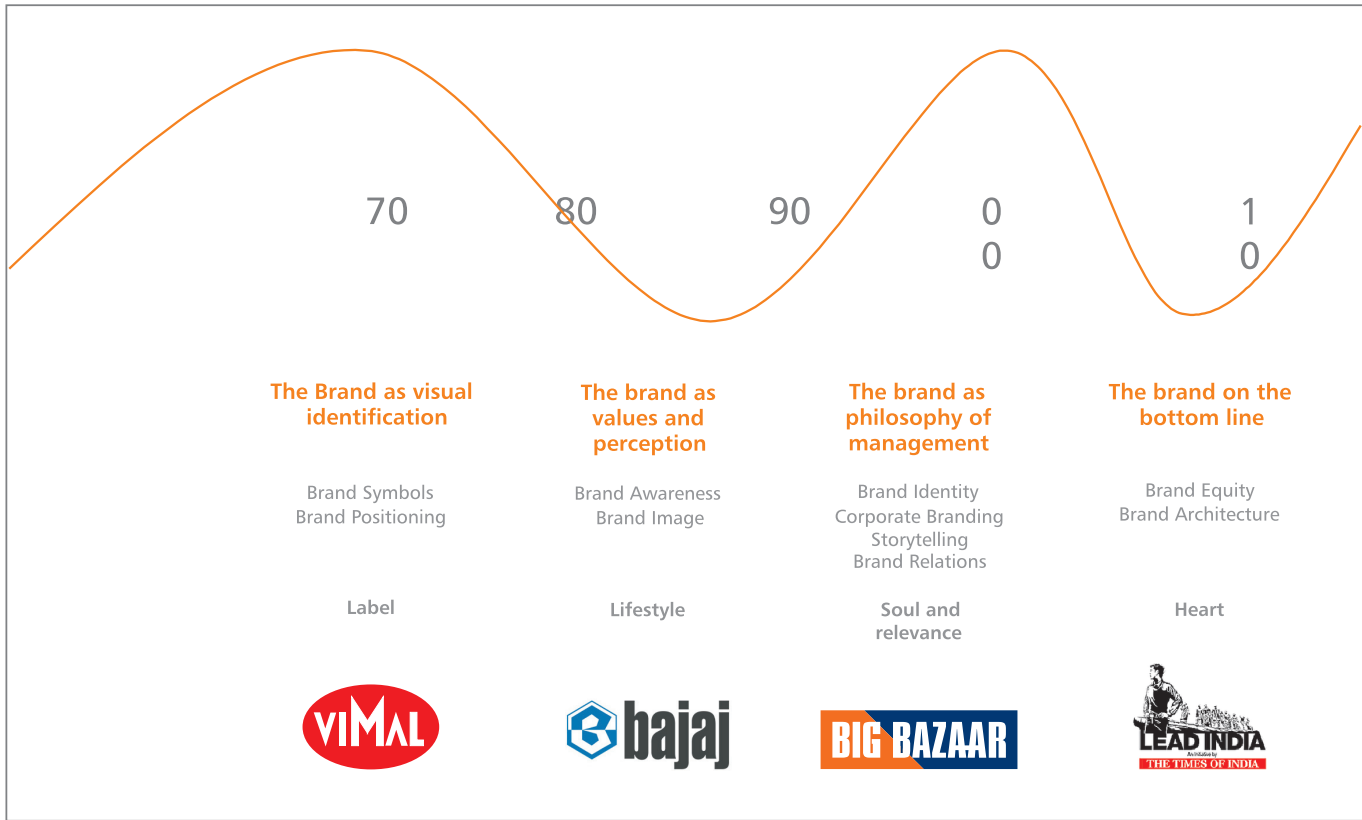
Brands as Evangelists

Going forward in the cognitive era, the importance of the brand as a cultural resource is what will make it accepted and powerful. Trust, corporate citizenry and social influence will be the most important factors. The causes, fights and convictions that brands advocate, very simply, will be the key. Brands will have to espouse ideologies that resolve conflicts and contradictions at a cultural level. These ideological convictions may have to be articulated as myths which will be fuelled and built through social media.

Fig 1: Mapping the cultural and behavioural shifts over time & decoding the likely Culture Sign Themes

	80s	90s	00s	Culture Sign Themes
Big events	Glasnost and Perestroika	IT Boom	9/11, SARS, Dotcom crash, Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, Obama, 26/11	Region states, Internationalism
Economic situation	‘Opening up’ economic reforms	Up and accelerating IT boom and bust, Consumerism	Outsourcing era, China and India emergence, US crisis, Global slowdown	‘Maturilism’, Co-creation of value
Icons	Reformer politicians, Movie stars	IT-millionaires, successful entrepreneurs, Movie and Sports stars	Wealth creators, Global recognition, Movie and Sports stars, Spiritual gurus such as the Dalai Lama	Heroes: People who practice not preach, Meaningful contributors
Role of the genders	Macho men & Coy women	Empowered strong women independent of men	Metro sexuality and masculine chic. “He’s a woman, she’s a man”	Re-vitalisation of the differences between ‘strong men and the sexes, real women’
Home	Cocoon	Showcase	Gated communities, fortress	Multi-village cities, aligned to interest, Belief-based communities
Movies	Action Thrillers, Anti-establishment, Heroes fighting the conventional ‘system’	New Age hero showing the way, winning with ease, Practical, smart and smooth portrayals multiplx urban genre	Big and expensive for the ‘bored with today’ generation - grandiose historicals /adventure /futuristic movies, experimental cinema,	Self-deprecating humour, Celebrating struggle, Social evangelism, Slumdog Millionaire
TV shows	epic serials, mythology based, changing Family dramas	countdown shows: top ten music, movie scenes, news channels	Star for a night, idols, newstainment, extreme reality	interactive and integrated
Authority	government, universities doctors	I, me and myself. anything hindering personal development ignore or removed	corporate power, MNCs, sponsors and venture capitalists	social media and self regulation, leading by example, individual-led cognitive era
Education	Engineering, Medical, Bureaucracy and Knowledge-based	Management, IT – opening up to globalisation 2.0, International case studies	Media, entertainment, design. fashion. prepare to compete for opportunities	interest-led and creativity- based, ‘happy schools’
Job	Career, security	Process-oriented, dynamic working place, change, complexity and chaos, experimenting with new technology tools, specialisations	Result-oriented, bottom-line driven profiles, integration of functions, consolidated companies as desired workplaces	sustainability, responsibility, vision/opinions/integrity, talent-based as against skill-based
Work-life	Division between work and leisure	Work and private life dissolves, Ambition and Growth obsession, Live to work, Competitive frenzy	always accessible, pleasure in focus with salary and success, recognition of success becomes important, quality gain time and wellness quotients ground	division between work and private life, insisting on right to tranquility, dribble slowdown to a ball, single pursuit for happiness

Fig 2: Evolution of dominant branding themes in line with socio-cultural evolution



Trust, corporate citizenry and social influence will be the most important factors.

Brand totems, rituals, slogans will be the future through which user-led experience will define brand building and control. And the world may then be a happier place.



Aashish Mishra is Chief Strategist & Head, Water

With over 13 years of experience in the field of Advertising and Marketing Communications, Ashish leads Mudra Group's brand strategy and design consultancy. Water has won The IAA First Creative Lantern Award for 'Lighting a Billion Lives' and The CPAA Award for designing health warnings for cigarette packs.

He instituted and headed the Strategic Planning function at Mudra India. An Interbrand India Consultant for the Godrej Rebranding Project and a global thought leader, Ashish champions the business forecasting tool CultureSign®. He is also an avid traveller and movie buff.

Dis-content

Michael Follett

We seem to have entered an age where words have turned into unhelpful neologisms. The author takes a sharp look at the bewilderingly dense foliage of jargon that shrouds the world of advertising today. In order to impart meaning to communication, he suggests disconnecting from the current pseudo-scientific terms and returning to simplicity and clarity in language.

Incredible as it may seem, almost half of the American population in the age group of 12-17, is believed to have created content on the web. And this mind you, is certainly not a new development. As early as 2005, the respected 'Pew Internet and American Life Project' found that 57% of American teens were web 'content creators'. Unbelievable, unimaginable even.

Does this mean that at least half of America's youth are poets, writers, designers, artists, film-makers or musicians? Is this evidence of a new 'creative culture' where people will stop being 'consumers' and start becoming 'producers'?

Not really. If you look a bit closer at the data, it means that 57% of American teens have posted some 'content' on the web. But 'content' is defined as 'uploading stuff to the web'. And 'stuff' includes (but is not limited to) Facebook entries, MySpace pages, Flickr photos and YouTube films taken on mobile phones of kids doing wheelies on their bikes. This isn't evidence of an efflorescence of creativity. This is just kids doing what they have always done, but using a new technology to do it.

Whatever happened to the old and familiar?

The problem here is the word 'content'. It's been used in this context to mean 'everything' - a categorical definition that

rises above superficial distinctions between the things that the kids are uploading.

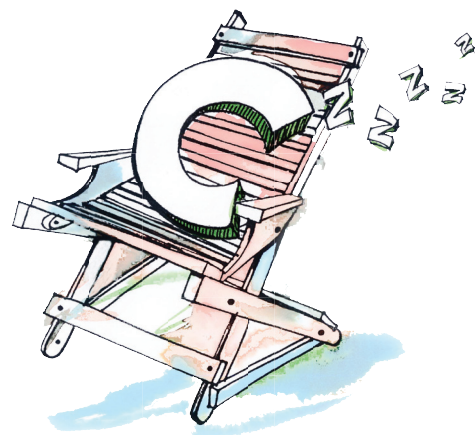
But when a word can mean everything, it really means nothing. 'Content' is an imprecise, lazy word, a formless blanket of a word that is thrown over sentences, obscuring their meaning. It isn't a useful word, yet it gets used all the time. 'Content' isn't alone. Our industry delights in the relentless production of unhelpful neologisms. How did we end up referring to media plans as being 'holistic'? When I was growing up, holism described what mystics in the Himalayas aimed for, not the idea that a brand's print and TV ads should look and feel the same.

But when a word can mean everything, it really means nothing.

When did 'aperture' migrate from meaning 'opening' to meaning 'a time when we can invade someone's personal space with



a commercial message’? Does anyone actually ‘interact’ with their friends and family? Who honestly thought that the phrase ‘media-neutral’ was a good idea? Please, can someone find the man who invented the term ‘media agnostic’ and kick him!



Inaccurate words inhibit good ideas

These words and phrases aren’t bad just because they are inaccurate and inelegant, though, given that we are professional communicators is reason enough to discount them. It’s not just that they convey bad ideas, but also that they inhibit good ideas. The sloppy, stupid phraseology of modern advertising is like a rather mundane echo of ‘newspeak’. When George Orwell invented the idea of newspeak in his novel 1984, the true horror of the idea wasn’t that the state-approved vocabulary promoted one type of idea, but that it prevented people thinking other ideas. It was a language ‘deliberately designed to reduce the range of thought.’ If people didn’t have the words to describe contrary opinions, there would be no ‘thought crime’. But at least Big Brother knew what he was doing.

We seem to be blundering towards a smaller, more stupid world without even realising it. Let’s simply look at the possibilities if we stop using a word like ‘content’ - how rich and exciting our descriptions of the world would be when we just say what we mean! “Our website needs content.” No, it doesn’t. It needs interesting videos that will teach girls how to put on make-up. “We need branded content for TV.” Nonsense. What we need is a TV show in which Shah Rukh Khan does cool things with his mobile phone to show people what’s possible using our product. “Our baby formula needs mobile content, and needs it now.” Calm down. What you really need is a text message that gives mums some helpful advice when they are alone with their child.

The misleading power of pseudo-scientific phraseology

Using a word like ‘content’ not only drains the meaning out of a sentence. It drains the possibility of meaning. It prevents you from seeing the possibilities that might result from a sentence. It’s not just poor communication. It is anti-communication.

But there is wisdom in language, even in stupid language. If we analyze these words, we may not learn much about the world, but we will learn a lot about ourselves, and our insecurities. And we may even learn something that may help us to get better in the future.

The first thing to note is that all these phrases try to sound scientific. Abstract or conceptual words tend to replace ordinary, real descriptors. Communications are described in systematic or structural terms, rather than as a process or a story. Such ‘sophistication’ is not necessarily an improvement. For instance, for some reason, people are now misapplying the word ‘ecosystem’ to describe the way in which the communications that a brand pays for, are mixed in with all the rest of the stuff that gets said about a brand by consumers and commentators.

Abstract or conceptual words tend to replace ordinary, real descriptors. Communications are described in systematic or structural terms, rather than as a process or a story.

This sounds very nuanced, but isn’t actually very helpful. Ecosystems, when they are working properly, don’t change much. But we want things to change. That’s why our clients pay us money - to change things. A better, though less glamorous analogy would be a conversation. Brands talking to their customers, customers talking to their brands, and to each other about their brands and about a whole bunch of other stuff. Conversations can and do change, and more importantly, are changed by their participants. And, they can be changed for the better of everyone involved in the conversation. If a brand starts saying and doing things that get a good response, in their ‘conversation’ with their customers, then everyone wins. When someone or something changes an ‘ecosystem’, we usually have GreenPeace up in arms. But even though the (rather ordinary) conversation metaphor is more useful, we are drawn like moths to a flame by all this talk of ‘ecosystems’.

Avoiding the trap of complexity

Why is this? I think it’s because we assume that in order to be taken seriously, we have to sound serious. This is plain bunkum. If you want to be taken seriously, you have to do serious things. Adopting the trappings of seriousness without actually doing anything worthwhile, is to make us look like a sorcerer’s apprentice - saying the spells, without making the magic.

We should concentrate on making a real difference to our clients’ businesses; when we do that, we will get the respect that we deserve. Secondly, all these words sound very complicated. This is not accidental. Complexity connotes consequence. If it looks very difficult, then it must be very important, and probably very expensive. But I direct you, gentle reader, to the Guinness Book of World Records, a book full of people who have achieved extremely difficult - and extremely useless accomplishments. Just because something is difficult doesn’t make something useful. For that matter, just because something is easy doesn’t make it useful either. Something’s useful when it’s useful. Let’s start by looking at how we can be useful to our clients’ businesses, and we can deal with the relative complexity or simplicity of the solution that results later.

When we do our jobs well, we create simplicity and clarity. If we produce something that’s hard to understand, then we haven’t done our jobs very well.

This urge to over-complicate isn’t just an attempt to bamboozle the market. It helps us build up a rather appealing picture of ourselves. It’s quite reassuring to think that we do a very difficult job, developing involved and intricate solutions to intractable problems. But the problem is that we don’t. When we do our jobs well, we create simplicity and clarity. If we produce something that’s hard to understand, then we haven’t done our jobs very well. The fact that we want to make our jobs sound complicated suggests that we don’t understand what our job is.

Let’s talk about ‘values’ and ‘usefulness’

And that brings us to my final observation. All this pseudo-scientific, obfuscating, convoluted vocabulary describes the various ways that brands send messages to their potential consumers. The underlying assumption of this type of language is that we exist as an industry to convey messages

from brands to their buyers. Hence, the prevalence of terms that describe the form of communication divorced from its meaning. Hence, a vocabulary that describes the delivery of messages without analyzing the result of those messages. Hence, finally, a professional language that describes the ‘ballistics’ of communication rather than the ‘pyrotechnics’ of results. And, I dare say that some people in the advertising industry do think in this way. They’ll tell you that we’re paid to communicate stuff. But I don’t think that’s what our job is about. And more importantly, I don’t think that’s what our clients pay us to do.

We are in the business of developing creative solutions to business problems. What we have to do is understand a client’s brand and business, understand their consumers’ needs, and try and find a way of bringing these two parties together to the advantage of both. TV ads or websites or standees are just some of the communications media we use to do this, but they aren’t the only ones available to us. If we can find a creative way to solve a client’s brief, then that’s great.

And if that’s indeed what we do, then we need to stop talking about ‘content’, ‘apertures’, and ‘interactions’. We need to start talking about ‘value’ and ‘usefulness’ and ‘helpfulness’. We need to stop thinking about how we can reach people and start thinking about how we can attract people. And we need to stop complicating and start simplifying. We have to start saying what we mean.



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Mike as he is popularly known, has nearly a decade’s experience working on a diverse range of categories and international brands. Named as the ‘Face to Watch’ by Campaign Magazine, London; he is a graduate from Oxford University in Modern History.

His other interests include hiking, reading and apologizing for his Yorkie, Max’s antics.

Here's to Captain Jack Sparrow

Sanjay Sharma

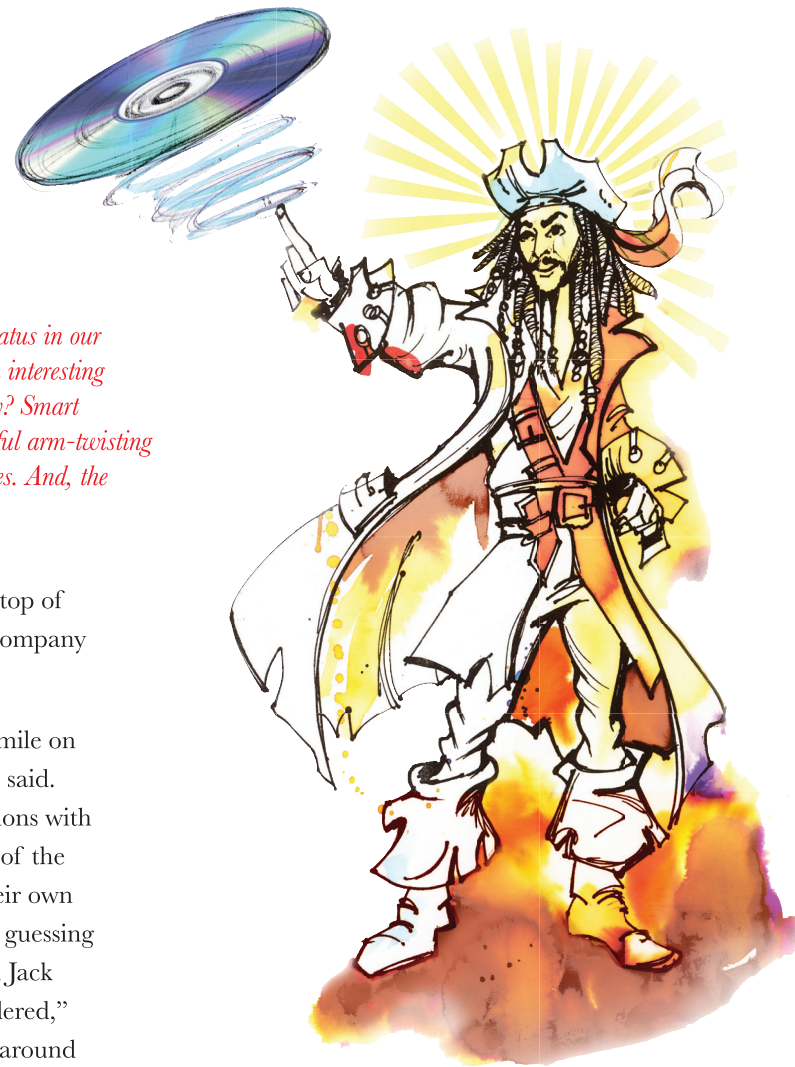
That digital piracy has assumed an almost omnipresent status in our world today is an undeniable fact. This article explores an interesting thought - as consumers, where would we be without piracy? Smart companies, says the author, have fought piracy not by lawful arm-twisting tactics but with clever pricing and revised business strategies. And, the ultimate beneficiary has been the consumer!

Pirates on the Starboard!" yelled the sailor from the top of the mast. Sudden panic erupted on the East India Company vessel which was on her maiden voyage to India.

But, lo and behold, the Master Commander had a smile on his face as he addressed the men. "Not to worry," he said. "This is the first ship equipped with long range cannons with a reload rate of five minutes. We will blast them out of the water much before they are in the firing range of their own guns." A loud cheer greeted his words. No prizes for guessing who won that battle! "If I ever encountered Captain Jack Sparrow on the high seas, I would willingly be plundered," said the buxom lady to her friend on a recent cruise around the Bahamas.

Pirates compel us to reinvent

All through the ages, pirates have been condemned, romanticised or aped. But somehow, their contribution to mankind has always been viewed through a unipolar lens. They have always been seen as the 'bad guys'. I urge you to stop for a moment and think! Most of the progress made by the navy across the ages can be attributed to pirates. Faster and better armed ships, well-trained crews and co-ordinated sea voyages are a direct result of the threat of piracy. In fact, a year or two ago, USA unveiled a New Age warship, the USS Independence, which is smaller, sleeker and swifter, touching speeds in excess of 45 knots or about 52 mph. It can sustain this speed for up to 4 hours. And, undeniably, this would help chase and hopefully capture pirates.



In this day and age of building bigger ships, bigger aircraft carriers and the like, pirates have once again inspired an innovation in design which will be useful for many things apart from chasing intimidating plunderers of the high seas.

Facing a new kind of challenge

But, enough about ships and pirates at sea. What has all this got to do with today's society, and more importantly, today's corporations?

Digital Pirates are changing the way we use information and creating alternate business models.

What is the core issue really? I quote John Perry Barlow, co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation and former lyricist for the Grateful Dead. "Throughout the time I have been groping around cyberspace, an immense, unsolved conundrum has remained at the root of every legal, ethical, governmental and social vexation to be found in the Virtual World. I refer to the problem of digitised property. The riddle is this: If our property can be infinitely reproduced and instantaneously distributed all over the planet without cost, without our knowledge, without it even leaving our possession, how can we protect it? How are we going to get paid for the work we do with our minds? And if we can't get paid, what will ensure the continued creation and distribution of such work? Since we don't have a solution to what is profoundly a new kind of challenge, and are apparently unable to delay the galloping digitisation of everything not obstinately physical, we are sailing into the future on a sinking ship."

How threatened should we feel?

Let's put this piracy in perspective. Picking up a piece of communication (a client's ad) from a site and then distributing it to hundreds of others is fine, but picking up a commercial song and doing the same, amounts to piracy.

Actually all the peer-to-peer channels, web-based sharing platforms and communities, over ground or underground, have been catalysed by the New Age pirates and digital piracy. Pirates are changing the way we use information and challenging us to create alternate business models to cope with piracy. By enabling a free flow of intellectual property beyond anyone's control they are creating an altogether new challenge for society, corporations and even governments.

So, are pirates going to sink us? How threatened should we feel? And how should we react to this challenge?

No easy answers

"When the winds of change blow, some people build shelters, others build windmills" - Chinese proverb.

Actually, intellectual piracy has been around for a very long time. If you go back to the beginning of recorded music, you will discover that Edison, who invented the phonographic record, was branded a pirate by musicians of that age and accused of stealing their work. It was only when a system of royalties was created to pay the musicians that the issue was amicably sorted out and thereafter became standard practice

for recorded music. This is why pirates need to be given their rightful dues for accelerating the development of mankind.

Coming back to the problem of digital piracy, what would be a workable solution to the crisis we are facing today? Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. However, it's obvious that any organisation in this domain, whose business model is based on curbing piracy by using strong arm tactics and the long arm of the law, will not be competitive for very long. You can't possibly win this war by fighting the pirates, but by coming up with new tricks to trump them at their own game.

An emerging business model

Let us take the example of illegal music downloads. No matter how many Napsters the law may shut down, the trend is fairly irreversible now and music companies who are still fighting are doomed to lose. But amidst all this, think of what Apple did with iTunes. By allowing users to download singles at \$0.99, iTunes became the undisputed market leader and is still the No.1 site for music downloads in the US (legal and illegal download sites combined). In fact, it now forms a strong pillar of the Apple entertainment model and as a spin-off, podcasts are the coolest things going, making Apple an even more desirable brand. Microsoft has started giving away free copies of its operating system in China where software piracy is rampant. Bill Gates argues that if Chinese consumers use pirated software anyway, they might as well use the MS version, get addicted and then at some time in the future, Microsoft will figure out how to make money from these consumers. Many other software organisations are figuring out their own strategies to cope with the piracy phenomenon. While the two examples quoted above are very different, the point is that a new business model is emerging and it will be fuelled more by consumer wants and expectations than by the greed of manufacturers to force developed products on choice-deprived consumers. One more brownie point to the pirates!

Organisations compelled to evolve better formats

Most consumers don't support piracy in principle and if there is a viable solution, they will inevitably gravitate to it over time. Consumers go for piracy only when the option is out of sync, that is, it's economically unaffordable or overly wasteful. Some typical examples include the need to buy the full CD when all you need is a song; the original DVD of an English movie costing as much as ₹ 599; original operating systems for PCs that are really expensive. These restrictive practices have given rise to the emergence of new business

models. You can now buy original DVDs of the latest Hindi releases for as low as ₹ 69 (thanks to Moser Baer). More and more organisations now install Linux instead of Windows and incidentally Linux does make money from providing support and applications that sit on the OS. And who do you think inspired ‘Cloud Computing’? As I said earlier, pirates help catalyze a more efficient business model that benefits consumers and society at large. Free upgraded trial periods and the assurance of world-class service have made many consumers pay for a variety of applications that are in popular use. These were initially made available totally free by pirates. Hollywood studios along with entertainment embedded organisations such as Sony, Samsung, etc. keep evolving better formats and delivering better experiences to keep a step ahead of piracy.

Consumers don’t support piracy in principle and if there is a viable solution, they will inevitably gravitate to it over time.

The Blu-Ray format is the best example of technology that has developed very quickly and through a combined effort. Ever thought the Blu-Ray experience was brought to you courtesy your friendly neighborhood pirate? Last I saw, the entire Blu-Ray movie (all of 8 GB) was uploaded on the net and the cost of Blu-Ray movies has been slashed from ₹ 1600 to just around ₹ 1000. Yet another efficient business model in the making. We get to see very high quality and very high definition cinema in our homes and we certainly do not mind paying more for the enhanced experience.

Coming back to Hollywood studio - guess what’s the next wave of engrossing entertainment? 3D of course! Better still, 3D will be difficult to pirate for the next few years at least, with consumers willing to pay more for its immersive reality.

Piracy kills to catalyze a better solution and that’s how it’s always been.

The Sony PSP was launched with a proprietary format, the UMD (Universal Media Disc), which they claimed could not be pirated. Sony was right of course; it was a complicated disc to make efficiently for only one type of gaming console. But Sony forgot that the PSP also had a Flash drive. At Delhi’s Palika Bazaar, it is possible to get a slew of the latest PSP games loaded onto a 4 GB stick for a fraction of the cost! To counter this, Sony has just launched the new PSP



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Sanjay has over 15 years of experience in marketing & advertising and has worked on several leading Indian and international brands.

He loves to cook and is a voracious reader. Besides that, he loves playing with his son and arguing with his wife.



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(Conventional outdoor, ambient & unconventional media, audience research, planning, local buying, web-based monitoring and reporting)

primeretail
Retail Design & Visual Merchandising
(Retail & visual merchandising and strategic visual communication for special environments)

primewayfinding
Navigation Solutions
(Navigation solutions in mass rapid transport systems, healthcare & industrial environments, sezs, universities and places of public congregation)

primeconsult
Outdoor Environment Consulting
(Advising government bodies on planned media development, better city information systems and environmental design)

kidstuff
Promotional Marketing
(promotions, consumer contests, sampling and on ground consumer engagements)

street smart
Ambient Out-of-home Solutions
(Unconventional outdoor and ambient media)

pratham
Field Force Management
(Recruitments, payroll management, training & development and merchandising)

radar
Connecting Brands
& Consumers Through Media

multiplier
Trade Marketing
(Recruitments, training, deployment & development, retail merchandising, consumer and trade loyalty programs)

terra
Bottom of the Pyramid Marketing
(Research, strategic planning and consultancy, creative solutions, consumer and retail activations and BOP mass media solutions)



Partnering Indian Entrepreneurs
(Brand building, marketing, corporate law, funding, organization development and sales & distribution expertise provided in conjunction with a consortium of domain experts)

videotec
Brands + Entertainment
(Co-promotions of brands with films, merchandising, brand placements in films and tv serials, conceiving, producing and airing advertiser funded programs)

10 integrated
Sports Marketing
(Sponsorships, activation - urban and rural, licensing & merchandising, sports retail, television-based sporting properties and consultancy)

celsius
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(Planning, creative and operations expertise)

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