

Brands, Blues & Change-Points

Nimal Gunewardena, Managing Director of Bates Asia Strategic Alliance, 141 Integrated Communications and Rowland Public Relations speaks about a innovative new edutainment experience providing insight into managing 'change' and other creative dysfunctions ... Harin Fernando consumes ...



Given the constant pace and the manner 'change' has had an effect on consumers and the advertising and marketing world, Gunewardena has developed an interactive edutainment experience that highlights the issues relating to the subject of 'change' and other mission critical elements that form the advertising and marketing function. Originally developed for the benefit of clients and staff, the event covers changes in consumer values, lifestyles and habits. Also put under the microscope is the impact of new media options, and how global and local media influences and changes are making marketers and advertisers re-think their approach.

This is something I conceptualised and developed locally, based on the Bates Asia group's 'change point planning model' focusing on planning communications based on all the changes taking place around us. I was supported by my agency staff, who helped me a great deal with their creative and research inputs and musical talent to bring this production to life. "Across Asia, Bates Asia has recognised that change is the driving factor affecting consumers, their lifestyles and the media. Marketers and we as communicators, have to really understand and respond to that. "I was thinking of how I could develop something innovative and interesting, and I began to question if the marketing and advertising fraternity had lagged on to this concept of 'change' or whether the industry was still in the last century in terms of our approach and work. I personally think, we have not moved forward enough in identifying that 'change,' we haven't understood and responded to it. "I wanted to bring the topic up among the agency, our clients and maybe even a wider public through this production. I talk about branding, change, how the world has changed, how the media scene has changed, how consumers are changing their habits, their lifestyles, how they access the media and what media they access. I also look at trends. "I raise questions about marketing, because most marketers are still in what I called the old marketing mode stuck with the 4P's mantra, feature and benefits selling and hit on the head communications, in their heads. We really have to figure out how marketers and advertisers have to talk to consumers in a changed world, where product parity and vast choice is the order of the day and the consumer is in control, inattentive and actively information seeking rather than passively ad-absorbing.

As the saying goes, many marketers and advertisers know that 50% of their ad-spend is being wasted, but don't know which half. According to research done among leading multinational companies, the new book 'What Sticks' reveals that it is 37% of all ad-spend that is being wasted. These same concerns are found among

Sri Lankan clients.

All of us have to be more accountable. We have to ask, are we talking to the consumer in a relevant way? Or are we just bombarding them with 30-second commercials? Today we are talking about a world where a consumer seeks information; they are not waiting for marketers to talk them through the TV. They will go to the internet.

There are complaints about advertising being intrusive, bombarding, repetitive and annoying to the audience.

Also other issues at hand include 'truthfulness in advertising,' gender stereotyping and scaremongering. These are all issues that we need to address. There is also an emerging question on the credibility and effectiveness of advertising and marketing. "I also talk about Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) or marcom. We are merely paying lip service to these concepts, as we have not really understood what IMC is, or how we use marcom tools and put together IMC campaigns. One reason is that a lot of marketers are still in an advertising mode, and they are yet to understand what marcom tools like public relations, direct marketing and internet marketing can do for them and begin to use them. "The recent split of agencies between creative and media outlets has made the integration of IMC even harder. For effective IMC implementation, you have to study how the consumer makes decisions about buying products, you have to really analyse their decision making process and touch points; and see where can we interface with them and how we influence them at these points. For this project Gunewardena has resurrected the 'Bates Blues Band' and they perform original songs composed and written by him. 'Ads, ads, ads!' is one such track; about a consumer who is fed up and irritated by the constant bombarding of advertisements into his life. Taking inspiration from Kevin Roberts who compares brands to love marks and William Shakespeare who once wrote 'What is a rose by any other name? 'Brands and roses' is a brand treatise turned into a love song. Another David Ogilvy inspired composition is titled 'She's no moron, she's your wife' and provides advice on talking to the consumer. "Brands have to generate emotion and feeling. Take a look at Apple; people who buy Apple products are fans of the brand. A Martin Lindstrom book 'Brand Sense' cites research about consumers who would go to the extent of branding themselves with their favourite brand. According to the survey, Harley Davidson comes on top, as the number one brand consumers prefer to have emblazoned on their person; it is the ultimate in brand loyalty. "The session also showcases some real footage of consumers, off the street, talking about 'change.'

These include trishaw drivers, housewives and bank managers talking about how they experience change." The evening ends with a 'marketing whiz quiz,' consisting of four rounds. The audience is asked to make up teams and respond with ideas to some of the change trends raised during the event, "there is no right answer as such, but an eminent judging panel will adjudicate." In an attempt to practice what they preach, the team at Bates Asia have also launched a blog that gives the visitor an idea of the experience, along with downloadable clips of the songs and an online version of the quiz. www.bmndsbluesandchangepoints.net ®



Clockwise from top left, Ranen Francis - Guitar; Jehan Rajapakse - Drums; Recording Engineer and Guitarist Suresh de Silva; Asiri Gunawardena - Bass; Nishantha Shantha Dewa - Research & Filming; Harendra Pushpakumara and Prasanna Dabare - Art Direction; Rumesh Devanantham - Video Editor; Nalin Desa and Thushara Karunaratne - Photography; Nirmala Arsecularatne - Production Co-ordinator; Rezani Aziz - MC and Quizmaster

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Nimal Gunewardena and Surith de Silva



Krishan Jayaratnam, Dishan Coilparampil and Mahesh Anuradha - Bates Blues Band singers