Creating Effective Communications

Sarva Integrated walks the talk by creating one of Sri Lanka’s most loved television commercials.

One of the youngest advertising agencies in Sri Lanka recently won double awards at the SLIM/AC Nielsen Power of the People (POP) Awards. Sarva Integrated won the two top awards: ‘POP Advertisement of the Year’ and the ‘POP Teen Advertisement of the Year’ for the “Stella” campaign created for Lanka Bell. The Stella campaign as well as the “karadara-less” campaign, both by Sarva Integrated for Lanka Bell, have captured local imaginations and become part of popular culture. It has also been effective for the client, increasing sales by over 800% in the first 12 months alone. This mix of tangible results for the client and creativity that captivates the audience is the balance that Sarva Integrated strives to maintain, reports Manori Wijesekera.



“We don’t consider ourselves merely an agent providing a service. We like to think that we are a part of our client’s team, and we work with them to develop solutions and strategies to grow and develop their business,” said Chrishantha Jayasinghe, Managing Director of Sarva Integrated. Launched in May 2005, Sarva Integrated is part of the Triad group, itself a leader in the advertising arena. “Being part of the Triad group is a considerable advantage, it gives us a tremendous strength and support. But we have our own identity and we’re independent in developing strategies, creatives and solutions for our clients. While we may access some of the resources of the group, such as research and media buying, we are able to forge ahead with our own specific focus areas.” As the advertising industry reaches

saturation levels, with a mushrooming of new agencies and specific service agencies, Sarva Integrated is keen to establish itself as something more than the standard “full service” agency.

“The very term ‘agency’ implies an agent providing a service for a fee. And when you approach this work with an attitude of being an agent for your client, you become detached, you can easily slip into considering it just another brief, another job,” said Jayasinghe. In most instances this would result in work which is not effective. But when you integrate yourself into the client’s team, when you research and understand the client’s business, his vision, his values, then you start thinking from within, as an integral part of the client’s business.” ‘Thinking from within’ has helped Sarva develop strategies and solutions to specific business growth targets of their clients. These targets vary from introducing a new feature or service to increasing sales growth of a specific brand, to the widest scope of building a brand image. As the quantum of advertising increases, with the ‘noise levels’ escalating in all media, it’s a growing challenge to producers of creative material to develop communications products which cuts through the noise and gets through to the intended audience. “Communication products which are merely creati,·e and not effective, are simply beautiful pictures or concepts. The communication material needs to be effective to make an impact-and that’s what we focus on,” said Jayasinghe. “Creating effective communications is not easy. Firstly you need to understand the culture then you need to understand the client’s business and what the client is selling. And finally you need to understand the consumer. This understanding of local market dynamics is what we at Sarva offer our clients and is greatly appreciated by our clients “Effective communications is a specialised service, and it’s the need of the day. When you are integrated with your client’s business, you are able to identify communication needs even before the client does – and at times direct product development into avenues it would not have ventured. Communications is more than publicity, it’s more than advertising a service or product. Understanding the full scope of communications and what it can achieve when it’s integrated into every sphere of a client’s company – that’s essential for effective business communications,” said Jayasinghe.

Steve Jobs is a guru for Jayasinghe, and a quote from jobs is on the wall of Sarva’s reception area: “Playing it safe is the most dangerous thing we can do.” Keeping this mantra in mind, Jayasinghe has been very focused on not playing it safe, and not trying to follow the crowd. “If you start thinking in terms of playing it safe, you’re lost. But if you become radical or different merely for the sake of being

radical, then you’re lost too. You stand apart only when you keep your eye firmly on the goal of achieving your client’s communications targets and goals. How you get here then becomes a vehicle and a means, it’s not the all-in-all of your campaign.” Starting with a team of four, Sarva has grown to having over two dozen employees. Is big then better? “Not at all, we don’t plan to grow very big. With our focus on providing a specific, value added service to our clients, we want to stay lean and small.” Jayasinghe has been successful in drawing professionals with varying skills, expertise and experience into his dynamic team. “It’s somewhat hackneyed to talk about team work, because everyone is saying it. But the truth is that we do work as a team in every aspect, there’s input from more than one person. It’s the combined feedback, the minor adjustments and improvements by many minds working together that achieves results. You can’t work in a vacuum.” Their client base too has been growing steadily since they first opened, with a diverse portfolio of clients from varying service and product industries. With each new incoming client, the Sarva team spends time and research resources understanding both the overall industry the client works in, as well as the ins and outs of the client’s business process, the company values and the company mind.

Maintaining a balance between creative concepts and strategic interventions to achieve a specific objective can be very difficult. “It’s very appealing to develop creatives that are so brilliant that it makes everyone in the industry go ‘wow.’ But if it doesn’t achieve the goals you and your client want, then it is merely an interesting concept that didn’t serve its purpose.” Jayasinghe himself is probably a good example of this balance: he’s an award winning creative director, but he’s also had long years of experience in client service and strategic planning. “Perhaps the biggest challenge facing our industry is how to grow beyond wonderful creatives to effective communications,” says Jayasinghe. The POP awards were the icing on the cake for Jayasinghe and his team and a wrap to a remarkable first year. And it has merely confirmed what everyone in the advertising industry has realised in the last few months: there’s a new kid on the block who’s blazing a trail for others to follow.

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