IAA Leadership Forum 2006

By Harin Fernando

The Sri Lankan Chapter of the International Advertising Association recently held an evening leadership forum. The speakers were from a wide cross section of the advertising and marketing profession. Stuart Young, the Managing Director / CEO of Nestle Lanka Ltd. addressed the gathered audience of industry leaders on ‘the challenges of 2005 and enhancing competitiveness in 2006’ was Young began by providing the audience with an overview of the operations and activities of Nestle as a global and local concern. He then went on to look back at the year 2005 through the eyes of Nestle and a general overview in respect of the economy. The first major challenge of the year was in the tsunami. Speaking on the post tsunami activities of Nestle, young highlighted that the ‘modern corporation is an integral part of society, when society hurts the corporation hurts’. Young placed little value on the publicity if any that Nestle gathered via their drinking water program, insisting ‘it was done because it needed to be done.’

Young told the audience about a project to build 15 pre schools, the first two of which have been opened, made possible by the donations of the staff. Young then addressed the second challenge that faced Nestle in the previous year. It was regarding the imposition of price regulation on milk based and infant formula products by the consumer affairs authority (CAA). He criticized the CAA’s unfair and irrational pricing policies and explained that taking such drastic and unnecessary measures could never reduce the cost of living. Young reaffirmed estle’s commitment to Sri Lanka, ‘if Sri Lanka progresses so do we’ he elucidated. The third and fourth challenges are closely related according to Young. Political instability has plagued the nation for too long and he commented that he saw the new government as taking steps to implement changes, he said these changes in turn would develop the fourth challenge, which is the countries credibility. Young stressed on the importance of upgrading the countries credibility as it would attract further foreign direct investment.

On enhancing competitiveness, young stated that the country needed to become more competitive in every respect, he praised the corporate sector for being ‘fierce and highly competent’ in this regard. Young elaborated the challenges the peace process poses and how it is affecting industry, the economy and in turn

competitiveness. He said we have many lessons to learn, he used from his home town of South Africa as an example, here he explained, the problems were resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. Young ended his session by speaking on the necessity of infrastructure if Sri Lanka is to progress. ‘The secret of everything is infrastructure’ the more the country invests in generating electricity, building ports and airports and developing roads the more benefits it will reap. Dr. Meena Kaushik spoke on the new trends that are molding modern day consumer lifestyles in South Asia and taking them ‘in to the future.’

The keynote address was by Raymond So the chairman of BBDO Asia Pacific who spoke on ‘the power of creativity in building profitable brands.’ So started by expanding on the basics of brand building and the role that creativity plays in its success. He compared brand building to that of building a pyramid. Something of ‘eternal success’ something that people will remember for years, something we can pass on to the next generation.’ He described the creative process whereby the creative gains satisfaction not financially, but from the emotion leveraged by creating a brilliant campaign. He spoke of his personal satisfaction on launching Lux in China in 1986. So emphasized that creativity has to be relevant, original and make an impact.