

REVIEW

How to Advertise to Asian Consumers?

By Sascha Roosen

This month's ADB meeting was well attended by about 40 members to listen to an interesting topic. Mr. Karthik Siva, Group Strategy Director from Ogilvy & Mather (O&M) Asia gave us a very good insight into the do's and the don'ts, the opportunities and risks of branding and advertising in Asia. What are the differences in consumer values, attitudes and behaviour between the West and Asia? What are the implications for building strong brands, and creating good advertising?



Mr. Karthik Siva, Group Strategy Director from Ogilvy & Mather (O&M) Asia

With a lively and entertaining way of speaking, Mr. Siva explained that many people don't really get brands, even though many think they know the ins and outs. A typical problem is that many times the CEO delegates the brand building to the employees or assumptions are being made. 'We want our logo bigger' are frequently seen as good branding.....

Mr. Siva started with the essence of branding. What is a brand? Mr. Siva: 'We live in a brand world, but its not just what it does to you, but how it makes you feel'. A brand is a set of memories, however these memories don't even need to be your own memory for you to

be able to identify a brand as associations can be thought. Even when you have never been in Paris, you still could recognise it by just seeing the words romantic, elegant and fashionable.

To understand brands, its important to know that strong brands have unique personalities, are consistent in spirit and have anchored themselves on powerful universal human emotions or insights, e.g. Apple, Marlboro & Harley Davidson. It's almost impossible to copy strong brands, as they go beyond the product like the Marlboro man or the Singapore girl. The ultimate feeling one could have with a brand is a feeling of unification: 'I am Harley Davidson.' An interesting statement Mr. Siva made is that no. 1 brands have (on average) 3 times

higher gross margins than no.2 brands and 6 times higher than no. 3 brands.

Sweet spot

In marketing, there is also a sweet spot like in sports, and this is what makes a consumer relate to a brand. A sweet spot is met when the relevant benefit fuses with the right consumer insight. The insight can be slightly below the surface, it's a personal truth about a consumer, in order to have effect. It is a revelation about human behaviour or human emotions that can be leveraged to build a brand. An insight makes advertising meaningful, relevant and helps connect with the target. Important to bare in mind is that it springs from an understanding of people, not products. Take for example the powerful insight on chocolate: women who are depressed like chocolate. According to Mr. Siva, 'it puts a smile back on her day'.

Understanding Asia

Living in Asia everybody knows that it is very diverse, with many different cultures, languages, geography and races. Asia is extremely complex and paradoxical, and what you see is not what you get.

To understand Asia the single biggest problem is that the many western people who create Asian advertisements don't even live in Asia, and don't know a thing about how or where their target group lives. They have difficulty to relate and fall regularly into clichés. Golden rule is that one cannot write creative, if you don't know whom

REVIEW



you write it for. Much research is done by people whom have a different value system from the target group.

So what makes Asians different? Is there a common set of values for the whole of Asia? What makes the Chinese unique and different or what makes an Indian an Indian? And very important, can we appeal to all these Asians through one communication?

Mr. Siva mentioned that there are two solutions to communicate with Asians:

1. Leverage universal human insights but localise them to fit each country;
2. Forget globalisation and take a completely localised approach.

Mr. Siva showed some Asian commercials, which made clear that brands like McDonald's and Long Beach approach Asian countries with universal human insights, but with a local flavour. McDonalds brings out the child in you and focused on the knowledge between parents and children. They talk to the parent through the child. On the other hand, the localised commercials had a sense of humour and value to them that was very different for each country.

Furthermore, Mr. Siva gave useful insights to understand Malays, Indians and Chinese:

Understanding Malays

- Rustic simplicity
- Unhurried approach to life
- Family orientation
- Sensitive sophistication
- Gentleness
- Focus on play rather than work
- Graciousness rather than frantic pace

Understanding Indians

- Spirituality over materialism
- Sentimentality and drama
- Respect for elders
- Intellectual orientation
- Family honour before personal honour
- Spontaneity, joy and passion
- Mythology over history
- Fatalism
- Stronger individuality compared to the rest

Understanding Chinese

- Materialism over spirituality
- Pragmatism over sentimentality or abstractions
- Action orientation over intellectual orientation
- Premium on face value
- Ambition / success orientation
- Hard work ethic

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Even though the Asian people are very different, there are some common Asian values that would make it possible to create an Asian localised' commercial or advertisement:

- Harmony and order
- Institution above individual
- Respect for elders
- Strong family and community ties
- Fear of losing face / honour
- Team above self
- Consensus based approach
- Strong traditional anchors
- Premium on relationships rather than objectivity

Mr. Siva finished his presentation with concluding that one should not be misled by appearances. Do look beyond the surface, what you see is not what you get! People may look westernised with miniskirts etc, but their values can still be conservative. Never underestimate the sophistication of Asian culture. And last, but not least he mentioned that you can't talk to Asians if you don't master "the nuance".

It had been an entertaining and interesting meeting and discussions were continued in the Tradewinds bar with the enjoyment of some food and beverages. 

