



Great Expectations

LOOKING AT BRANDS AS CITIZENS



brand is more than a name. It is a relationship based on an assurance, a promise and trust. Successful brands deliver these timeless values, build on them and resonate not just

with the immediate needs of consumers but also their larger aspirations. In doing so, brands deliver on their immediate promise and also build a long-term relationship with consumers.

But this relationship must negotiate a market awash with growing brands and multiple messages, making it that much more difficult to differentiate brands and sustain consumer loyalty. There is, therefore, an increasing need for brands to build a deep and meaningful connect with consumers so that brands rise above market clutter.

Consumers are increasingly becoming aware of the social, economic and environmental impact of the products they buy or services they choose. Their brand preferences and buying decisions are increasingly being driven by their expectations as 'conscientious citizens'. And the motivations for wanting to do so are the same around the world — concern for the family, the desire to have a cleaner planet and the drive to act to help achieve this.

This is both a challenge and a huge opportunity. While brands need to continue to meet consumer expectations of price, quality and convenience, they will need to address these larger consumer expectations. Brands that embrace such larger expectations and build these concerns into their innovation and branding strategy will clearly earn disproportionate rewards because they will connect at a newer level with consumers.

Companies are increasingly recognising this and many are taking definitive actions to leverage this opportunity. For example, Unilever has embedded the 'sustainability agenda' into its brands using a process called Brand Imprint, which integrates social and environmental considerations with the innovation and development plans of our brands.

Thus, the promise of Lifebuoy has evolved from a simple 'germ kill' proposition to 'being free from fear' of disease and to help build a healthy nation. Lifebuoy has acquired the flavour of a mission to cut diarrhoeal deaths and fight preventable diseases. The brand thus connects at an emotional level and so builds loyalty based on parameters beyond immediate brand use and brand promise.

By being a part of the everyday life of millions of citizens, brands have the leverage to make a big difference through everyday actions. The difference can come from large, innovative disruptions or from small-step changes that together go on to make a big impact on society. Brands thus become an ideal vehicle through which people take action and feel that their collective efforts really do add up to making a big difference.

Think of the marketing power of detergents which wash with less water. The success of our innovation Surf Excel Quick Wash is proof of this. By saving two buckets of water per wash, the brand endeared itself to consumers who were faced with water shortage. Its continued success is proof of the marketing power of such innovations. Toyota's hybrid car, Prius, traversed a long journey from an idea in 1994 to a successful product that saves fuel, appeals to the discerning consumer and latches on to the aspiration for a greener and more sustainable lifestyle. Toyota is ahead in the hybrid car market because it started well ahead of others with an understanding of the larger concerns and aspirations of its consumers.

As wider social and environmental issues become everyday agenda, consumers will aggressively separate green from greenwash. They will vote with their wallets for brands which address these issues with transparency and authenticity. The business benefits from doing this are not merely the soft ones about reputation or image. They are hard measures of growth and margin improvement. Brands that believe in this agenda and integrate it into their DNA will not only reap commercial success but be successful in building lasting relationships with consumers.

