

Towards Value Based Marketing

WILL YOUR MOTHER BE PROUD OF YOU...

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Recently I watched one of the most beautiful advertisement clippings that I had ever come across. The message is on cancer awareness, in which a little girl is expressing her responses to her brother returning home after cancer treatment.

This girl is hardly five year old. She cuts her hair herself and presents the locks of hair to her brother who returns home, after a stint of cancer treatment. He was wearing a cap apparently to cover his head after losing hair due to cancer treatment. This assumption dawns on the viewers' mind as the movie progresses. The clipping ends when the boy lifts his own cap and lovingly places it over the girl's to cover her unevenly cut hair. At this point, the only narration in the clipping appears. The total length of the movie is less than a minute.

You can download this clipping on <http://www.ethicsbasedmarketing.net/ethical%20ad/Cancer%20Ad.wmv>

To me, this clipping is an epitome of an ethically correct advertisement. The objective of this advertisement is to create an awareness

about Cancer and its treatment. Using the theme of 'love' in a very natural way, the objective is convincingly met. It uplifts the finer aspects of human emotions. Not a word is spoken in the whole movie, excepting the couple of words the narrator conveys at the end of clipping.

In striking contrast, in the month January 2009, there appeared an advertisement in one



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of the leading South Indian news papers, where the advertiser had offered an “Alto” car – a make of automobile – to all those who would “book” a villa with them!

To me, it is a typical run of the mill advertisement, the ethical basis of which is at best, debatable.

Why do I think so ?

- ◆ It is purely unnatural to give a car free to some one who just “books” a house. It is amounting to “overdoing”.
- ◆ It deliberately diverts the attention of the buyer to unrelated issues and probably intended to camouflage and potentially compromise on related core issues like quality, delivery etc.
- ◆ It evokes probably unwanted desires in the minds of readers. In the ultimate analysis, it is an unethical attempt at manipulating human minds.

The most intriguing aspect of this advertisement, however, stems from a totally different angle. On the same newspaper- on the very same day - a news item also appeared stating that a hoodwinker was arrested in the city by police for cheating potential property buyers with the promise of free cars for property deals !

Whether or not the newspaper was ethically correct in accepting such advertisements in first place is again a debatable issue, which I can defer for another occasion.

There appears to be a tacit acceptance both by the advertisers and consumers alike that any thing is okay when it comes to advertising and sales promotion. Equally explicit is the

common belief that salesmen are “loose talkers” and that they “tell lies” to sell their dreams.

Sales and Marketing is a noble profession in all fairness. Unfortunately, it is not always seen as such at least by a section of people in all communities. Like in all other professions, varying degrees of dilution of ethical principles can be noticed in marketing profession too.

It is the responsibility of the marketing professionals to blow the whistle of change and bring marketing profession to its rightful nobility. It is heartening to note that more and more guidelines on ethical aspects of advertising and sales promotions are put in place by several national level marketing institutes world over.

It is my firm belief that one of the greatest reasons for the economic recession that the world currently undergoes, is the greed of the business organizations of the world. In the last two decades the focus of these organizations have shifted from “customer” to “business” ; “Business” has become the only justifiable purpose for the existence of all business organizations. Customer has suddenly become insignificant in the business equations.

Customers have become sitting ducks for businesses to target their sales guns. Marketing strategies began to draw parallels from modern warfare. Competition is no more seen as “co-travellers” but seen as “adversaries”. Terminologies like “kill the competition” have become rampant.

Consumer psychology is a well researched subject today and it enjoys the status of a state of art machinery when it comes to enslave

the end users. The wide reach of internet opened up the flood gates of opportunities for these state of art machineries to reach these sitting ducks even in their bed rooms.

The whole range of sales and marketing is fraught with potentially ethical issues. Enforcement of law for ensuring the legally permissible standards in advertisement sadly points out to the need for such as laws.

Why is any sort of legal frame work required in the first place? They are there because we are not matured enough to ‘behave’ ourselves without it being there to enforce.

If we take our own homes, for example, how does the system of governance run in homes and families? There are no organized forms of legal system in our homes. There are no police forces and no courts of justice in homes. Every thing is run more or less smoothly based on an unwritten understanding of mutual love, respect and consideration. We exercise the power of wisdom at home. We do not manipulate the members of our families. (well, I am talking about the majority of the cases)

Can we not emulate this – at least as a mere idealistic possibility – in every sphere of our activity, with marketing given no exception ?

Can we institute self imposed regulations on the exercise of our freedom to advertise in any manner and solicit purchase of our products and services? Instead of spending our marketing resources to stay with in the boundaries of “legalities” of advertising regulations, can we not draw voluntary boundaries ourselves to the highest ethical standards, for the collective growth of all concerned just as we would do within our families?

There is a simple test to check on the ethical acceptability of any new initiation. Just ask yourself, whether your mother would approve of this and would be proud of you! It is a very simple test – but a very effective one.

If we can visualize today a marketing world that is based on mutual love, respect and concern between the advertiser and target audience , atleast it can become a possibility one day. Let us generate the critical mass of *hundred monkeys.

* *The concept of “ The Hundredth Monkey ” has become popular with the book by the same name written by Ken Keyes, jr. The concept was first brought out by Lyall Watson in his book “Lifetide”. Ken Keyes narrated an experiment involving Macaca monkeys in the Japanese island of Koshima in 1952. He narrated how the newly acquired behaviour of washing soiled potatoes with water, spread to other Macaca monkeys of other islands, once this new behaviour is adopted by a “critical number” of Macaca monkeys of Koshima island. “100” symbolically represents this critical number. The central concept is that once a social change takes root in the critical mass, this spreads through the collective consciousness of the species, leading to a massive shift in that direction through the length and breadth of the society – without the need for a conscious teaching and learning process .*