

Miles To Go Before We Reap...

We, in the public relations business, are obsessive about communication. Yet we are equally obsessive about the evidence to support communication.

The India Shining Campaign, the horse being flogged in the elections post mortem, was a shining example of a communication campaign where the evidence was not thought through.

This is not to say that it was not based on facts. Sure it was. All the macro statistics add gleam to the luster. Great growth rates, booming services, high business confidence, surging stock indices, resurgent agriculture backed with good monsoon, sound financial reserves... then where was the problem?

The catch lay in the detail - below the surface and between the lines.

India had made positive movement along the path of development, but it was a tad early to say it was shining. Not just in rural India as has been made out. In the cities as well. A peep outside the window of our air-conditioned cars even in the metropolises where we work shows the grey patches that are crying for attention.

India is shining, but is there electricity?

Glitzy malls in Gurgaon have become a symbol of India Shining. Yet huge power units hidden behind these malls indicate a gaping hole in the lustrous fabric. Power backup has become a standard demand in apartment buildings, office complexes, malls and cinema houses in the heart of the country's capital. Away from the heart, the lesser said the better.

India is Shining, but is there water?

Leaking tankers chugging down roads, long lines of people near dry water taps waiting for them to come alive, angry letters to the editors, routine news of water scarcity and drought affected areas...

We could go on and on about unemployment, poverty, uneven development, rampant corruption, weak law enforcement... the point is amply clear. India has scaled up the march of development, but it is not yet time to pop the bubbly. It is however time to ensure that even if development in our case did not begin bottom up, it trickles down fast enough.

There are whispers of another 'India Accelerating' campaign that was on the cards post elections, had the BJP-led NDA returned to power. Could that have been a better pre-election note to sing?

Whether we give the Vajpayee government credit for it or not, the fact remains that India is accelerating. And the rev of its engine is being heard worldwide. International analysts are placing their bets on India, they may be holding their breath for a bit as we transition, but are still optimistic about our future. With Manmohan Singh in the saddle – puppet or not – there has been a general sigh of relief about general economic roadmaps ahead.

The India Shining campaign has been diagnosed to death and will continue to be a case study for analyzing success and failure in the contradicting worlds of creativity and outcome for years in the advertising industry. Yet, as a reputation consultant, it brings us back to fundamentals. Communication is a powerful tool when backed with sound evidence. It is however a sword without a tooth if it is not based on the 'entire' truth. It has been once again a proof that no arm of the communication industry can be a spin-doctor.



Reputation is built on the 101 things that we do everyday and the 1001 experiences that people have as a result of these deeds. Together with communicating the right message to the right audience, it ensures impact.

Yet, 'tis not time yet for impact but further effort. There are still 'miles to go before we sleep' and 'miles to go before we reap'.

Prema Sagar
Principal Associate
Genesis PR

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