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CORPORATE IMAGE ADVERTISING

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CORPORATE IMAGE ADVERTISING

In closely monitored economies, companies and organizations have to be always alert and sensitive to possible changes in the legislation, regulations, directions, and guidance from the government and administration. These organizations, therefore, have to conduct themselves in such a manner as to not only steer through the regulations and directions if imposed, but also to initiate processes in advance (through activities) to prevent imposition of further controls. Cultivating an overpowering public opinion is one of the strategies available to organizations. Favourable public opinion does not make an organization invincible, nevertheless it presents the organizations with unperishable opportunities to deal effectively with pressures from the external environment. It also helps them in implementing modernization, diversification, and expansion programmes.

Companies have to establish their credentials with the shareholders to strengthen their position in the money market. Misconception, miscalculation, or misinterpretation can lead the investors to undervalue the worth of the company. A skeptical opinion by the community of investors can agonize the corporate image. Enterprising and well timed corporate advertising can pay rich dividends in shaping the investor's perception of the capabilities of the company.

To a considerable extent markets are propelled and controlled by the merchants, traders, dealers, and retail shopkeepers. Besides inflated rates of commissions, the reputation of the company encourages sellers to push the products. The prescriptions of the dealers can influence the

customer's decision and purchase behaviour, particularly in rural areas where personal relationships, diffused business transactions and resultant loyalty to the dealers play important roles. Giving sound technical advice cannot be considered as an eminent domain of the dealers for lack of training and field experience. Therefore, the tendency of the dealers to rely more on a company's fame, product popularity, prestige, and market standing cannot be ruled out. For example, they can hardly recommend a particular chemical for a specific worm problem, but to be on the safer side, can always suggest the products of a well-known company. They are aware, that wrong advice can endanger their own reputation and standing. Persistent and persuasive efforts to build a corporate image can be remunerative in inducing dealers to recommend the company's products.

A robust corporate image can overcome the initial hesitancy of the customers. Markets are not only infiltrated by newer products and companies, but more and more young people are also entering it as customers. An incoming customer is always irresolute and indecisive about his response to a product. He is also worried about the likely caustic remarks from his family members, relatives, friends, neighbours, etc., should his decision to buy certain products turn out to be faulty in their perception. Thus the recognition that it is a product of a well-known company can also give him confidence.

A good corporate image also fetches new business contacts and contracts. Participation in joint ventures is decidedly dependent on the rating of the organization by other business houses.

Resourcefulness of the staff working in the organization acts as a prime mover of its strength. An organization perceived to be good to work with attracts talent conversant with production and managerial skills. Besides giving job satisfaction, a creditable reputation inspires and encourages the staff to be vigilant, venturesome and innovative. Corporate advertising thus helps organizations to build their own internal environment.

A favourable corporate image shared by different types of public, therefore, not only provides invaluable services to the production and product marketability, but also helps the company admirably well in its growth plans. To put it differently, an otherwise quality product of a poorly rated company runs a risk of receiving pitiable response from the market. Outstanding corporate image advertising acts as an insurance against such a risk.

Corporate image building campaign, therefore, should be based on what the company or organization stands for. It should have a recognizable, high order goal even if it be inventing new ways to make better products; assuring reliable service to people; offering packages to improve skills, efficiency, working pattern, etc.; striving hard to reduce the cost of production; understanding and attempting to solve people's problems; maintaining high quality standards; helping to generate new resources in neglected regions; showing concern about national problems; or accepting new challenges. Obviously this list is not exhaustive, but by and large, corporate advertising themes would include some aspects of a larger commitment to the nation, communities, institutions, people, ethics and values,

technology, management practices, culture, nature, or financial achievements.

Only the right kind of approach and presentation of relevant information can convince the readers how serious the organization is about its proclaimed commitment. As a corollary to this argument, therefore, this commitment should also be reflected as stable over a reasonable period of time. A claim without supportive evidence to form public perception can weaken the case. Hence it is always advisable to opt for building a performance based image. After selection of the theme, what really counts is forceful data to support the arguments and the manner of presentation. The following paragraphs provide a possible set of themes for building corporate image with suitable data-based message strategies.

A) Inspiring a sense of pride

By associating itself with something of which people are proud of, a company can muster their support and goodwill. A wide range of choices should be available from fields like sports, cultural heritage, ancient art, historical events, national heroes, classical literature, music, religious places, things of beauty, etc., for this purpose. It can take advantage of old memories and portraits by associating the company's interest with these ideas and objects of pride and by showing how the company, howsoever remotely, is interested and involved in sharing these glories. It can also indicate how these events, objects of glory, ideals, and teaching help the company to perform better. For example, a company which patronaged champions

of sports claimed that it "helps to remind us again that, however much we plan, it is always the extra effort in the instant of action that counts - and that the success of every enterprise ultimately rests on individual imagination, individual innovativeness, individual creativity."

B) Narrating a Company History

Company history with pioneers' insights can be narrated to justify its present level of achievements. The copy can elaborate on: a) how these insights were related to national problems, priorities, perspective or planning; b) how the company derived its name, identity and early periods of entrepreneurial abilities; c) how the company's or pioneer's farsightedness contributed to the diverse applications of its products; and d) how the company is at present in terms of physical coverage, technical competence, categories of users served, market share, product range, R & D, quality control, new designs, new manufacturing techniques, testing procedures, etc. Some or all of these qualities can be narrated in quick and short statements. The narration can be summed up with the company's future plans, growth prospects, dreams and desires, and promises it holds. The objective of the theme should be to show that it is not an ordinary company.

C) Emphasizing Trade Performance

A successful company can talk about its skills in handling the trade. In doing so, it can expand how the present day trade is different and more complex than what it used to be before and the quantum of trade handled. For example, a company can stake a claim if it is one of the major producers

of a particular item in the country. In this context, it can stress on a) the scale of its operation by specifying the annual sales turn over, the market share, and the size of manpower employed; b) specific target population whose interest it has promoted (poor, small scale industries, artisans, rural, backward regions, underdeveloped sectors, etc.) It can also boast of its contributions to exports or import substitution; c) the kind of transactions were involved, and their results; d) the type of managerial skills that were brought into play while executing these transactions. In what way the company's accumulated experience helped to implement these transactions; e) the contributions of these trade transactions for national resource development; and f) present levels of organizational strength to support the complex trade of today.

D) Establishing Product Superiority

Quality can assure product superiority. While quality can be objectively determined, it is also a matter of faith. A satisfied customer is what a company ultimately desires. Although it is not inconceivable that a customer may compromise quality to pocket a small price advantage, one can easily come across cases indicating willingness of customers either to pay more or wait for quality products. This is particularly true for products involving a substantial amount of long term investment. Quality products help command the customer's appreciation and a good company image.

One simple way to emphasize the quality is to let the public know the opinions of an independent jury or institutions which assess the product

qualities objectively. This not only helps to establish product superiority, but also boosts the credence of the company. The message then elaborates a) selection criteria, standards involved, and the conditions imposed by the jury; b) details of the award, trophy, citations, recognition, etc.; c) how would they help company to maintain its reputation as a quality producer; d) how do its manufacturing plant and techniques compare with similar others; and e) claim to indicate that the company takes quality seriously and its pride in the recognition.

Another way to emphasize quality is to show very convincingly how the company does not compromise on critical items which go into product manufacturing. This mostly deals with raw material and relates to such questions as a) how much time is spent on getting the right ingredients and grades, b) what the people in charge of procurement look for, and how they are trained, c) what is the technically complicated but surest way devised by the company to get these materials, d) how does it build frustration within the system if things do not go right to convince the great lengths the company goes to preserve its quality commitment, and e) a statement to indicate that the company will always wait till the right type of raw material is received.

3) Stressing Financial Achievements

The financial achievements summarize in one stroke the competence, dynamism (of leadership), productiveness, coordination (of activities), utilization (of opportunities), maintenance (of machinery), and similar

other attributes. The message can describe: a) in what way the investors are rewarded by the company's performance; b) what was the company's financial report a few years ago and how does it stand now; c) the production statistics and annual growth rate during the reference period, increments in the dividends, etc; d) how the company is likely to enter into a new stage of expansion, diversification, growth, etc.; to keep with financial success; e) what projects or proposals are under way and are they likely to bring additional rewards to investors; f) why does the company feel that the tempo of the present financial performance is likely to be accelerated; and g) how the organization is poised to achieve such a growth.

Reports on the earnings, acquisitions, leading shares, reserves, bonus issues, etc., earn a company a stock of beneficial corporate identity.

F) Highlighting Rewards to Customers/Clients

Customarily, the industrial units are not set up to undertake welfare activities. They do so to derive benefits from the incentive schemes offered by the government to encourage participation in development work. While such efforts can be amplified for image building, in the final analysis the steps taken to satisfy the consumers play an important part. These steps should be substantial for a tickle-and-tackle policy is not likely to honour all the customers all the time. Concentrating on the problems, needs, requirements of the immediate customers or clients, a company can be entitled to make public its policy of being conscientious. It can indicate: a) how the company helps them; b) real life and to-the-point descriptions of the clients, their special activities, and

significance of some of these activities; c) problem areas to expand the scope of these activities; d) how does or did the company provide an answer to help understand and solve the problem; e) stepwise account of efforts or actions initiated, transactions completed, time taken; f) benefits accrued to clients as a result of the actions, productivity, expansion of markets, etc.; g) a point to prove that there is need in the present socio-economic environment for products/services offered by the company; h) a statement from the beneficiary as to how it was benefitted; and i) a reminder to the goals or commitments of the company.

G) Making Reference to the National Scene

Direct or indirect participation in the furtherance of a national cause can reinforce the corporate image in certain quarters. Even if such contributions are of a marginal value, one can proclaim allegiance to a higher order goal without any restraint. One can begin by broadly describing a) the type of society we have: industrial, rural, democratic, agricultural, traditional, developing, or any other type; b) the specific features of the chosen type of society and implications of these features for the population in general; c) analyses of the recent trends in these features; technology, policy, funds, management, international importance, etc. In specific terms what is likely to happen this year as a result of these trends; and d) how does the company look at these trends and its commentary. It can then advance link statements to suggest the emergence of the company policy out of the concern for these features. The efforts, both deliberate and sustained, of the company towards the specified goal can

then be elaborated. Finally it can comment on what is now available to the people as a result of these efforts; and in what way it would help to improve the national scene.

H) Claiming Technological Contributions

Conclusive and demonstrable contributions to evolve suitable, appropriate, complex, energy saving, indigenous, intermediate, or latest technology can earn a precious image for an organization. The message can touch on a) the research and development work carried out by the company; b) duration and magnitude of the company's involvement in R & D work, purpose, and achievements in terms of enhancing product reliability, compactness, convenience in use, cost, low power consumption, efficient operation, etc.; c) one of the very successful results of these R & D efforts, and what segment of the client population is likely to enjoy the fruits of these results, and how; and d) specification of expected characteristics if these efforts provide any edge to the company's product technology over other manufacturers. These claims should lead to brief descriptions of the company's product lines and/or specific product features available to clients. The concluding statement should firmly establish a desire to continue with a strong R & D foundation to search for even better technology to keep the company moving ahead.

I) Banking upon Competitive Advantage

Information about the status of the company vis-a-vis other competitors is of great value to the relevant public including the present and

potential customers. This provides information which can aid customers to arrive at the right decisions. A customer would be interested in knowing:

- a) in what way the company is different from other manufacturing or servicing units: wider network, highly trained personnel, range of services offered, etc.;
- b) what does all this mean to him: saving time, efforts, movement, correspondence, tensions or even money;
- c) the experience of the company to maintain such standards of service; and
- d) a sample list of people, institutions, communities benefitted as a result of deliberate policies of the company.

J) Making Reference to Standards of Efficiency or Effectiveness

Companies have different goals and industrial activities to follow. Yet there are universally accepted standards of work performance applicable irrespective of the products produced. These standards make reference to the company's ability to serve customers directly or indirectly. These may refer, for example, to the rate of rejected material, withdrawal of account holders, utilization capacity, cost per unit, ratios indicating incidence of stress, etc. The copy then gives stress on the desirable rates/levels of achievements for the industry as a whole and how does the performance of the company compare with these standards. Explanation as to what benefits follow both to the company and customers can make the point clear. What does it take to adhere to these standards. Ways of developing the understanding of the processes involved, innovations needed, and resources devoted to maintain the standards. Commitment of the company to the standards of achievements can then be expressed in specific terms.

Organizations are not endowed with good corporate images. They have to build the images for favourable corporate images can reign markets. The potency of image building exercise depends on the goals of the company, the manner in which these goals are implemented and its capability to select themes and message formats which can sway public opinion. The themes and formats presented here can be useful in organizing such efforts.

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