

Design-wise generation next now chanting ring-in-the-new mantra

By Dr Darlie O Koshy

SECTOR WISE the journey in the value chain from original equipment manufacturing (OEM) to original design manufacturing (ODM), and thereafter to original brand manufacturing (OBM) is being accelerated by a number of Indian corporates and companies, and in this process the value and power of design are being discovered. Gone are the days for 'used-apple', 'me too', 'reverse engineering' policies.

'Ring out the old, ring in the new,' say new generation entrepreneurs in India, who are turning design-wise. Design is also changing gears to a 'power role' in strategic sphere from the earlier tactical levels. Typically, the design interventions in Indian companies just few years ago meant, at best, peripheral applications concerning 'form and shape' through industrial design and 'colour and graphics' through communication design.

The design had thus found a dead-end and designers were no more than 'make-up' artists to

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most corporates and companies. Viewing design as an envelope or an integrating force driving a top-down strategy of business was not a familiar terrain with Indian entrepreneurs. Design as a strategic tool meant toppling the apple cart in the existing board rooms and marketing/commercial departments. This has already happened to a great extent in the UK, paying rich dividends in the process.

In the UK, the Design Council has been urging the industry to in-



vest in imagination, creativity and inventiveness to deliver tangible business returns for companies and exhorting them to take the greatest risk of the world that is "to think, to act and be different."

This is truly the essence of design strategy. Many UK companies did just that like Boots, which is one of the strongest brands on the UK high street.

Boots took the boldest decision of creating a new retail brand under the Boots umbrella – Pure Beauty. The proposition was to look at how to increase market-share and add value to the Boots brand. The resulting brand and retail designs were rated as a noteworthy commercial success. Designs played a key role in creating a new image and presentation to the

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Boots merchandise. More exciting was the change-over of the all too familiar Hovis bread brand in the UK. With the help of a new communication design strategy, Hovis broke with the tradition. The creative packaging boosted its sale by 20% and re-established Hovis' market dominance not only in the brown bread sector, but also in white bread and provided a fertile ground for future growth. Land Rover had the challenge to reinterpret its brand for a

21st century audience without compromising on its cherished brand heritage. Apart from the long-standing values like authenticity, capability and off-road performance, new emotional values had to be found and reengineered. And the new communication with hippos and tigers hit the bulls' eye.

The story of Skoda is about how a car brand dogged by negative perceptions confronted its image problem head-on and went on to grow 33% a year in a flat car market. Star Bucks has become a design and brand icon for the new generation in several countries.

In India, the Barista and Café Coffee Day made a hesitant entry making a splash across many metros. Design played a role in both-with Michael Foley's designs for Café Day and competition for the easy mover 'Barista'. Suddenly, coffee became a part of a continuing conversation from the work-space to social space.

(The writer is Director of National Institute of Design. He will return next Thursday to focus on youth and corporates designs)