

Business Standard

Games brands play

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Product promotion strategies now include games to attract consumers.

In a crowded market place, where brands jostle for loyalty and a lasting consumer connect, conventional communication mediums can fall woefully short of the purpose. So along came, 'gamification', enabling consumers to directly or indirectly engage with the brand.

Broadly, the term stands for gaming initiatives built around brands. Like, Godrej's virtual world Go Jiyo, celebrated Christmas this year by letting its 'citizens' decorate a virtual Christmas tree. For each ornament put on the tree, Go Jiyo donated a certain sum to the charitable organisation, Being Human. As per Kim Saldanha, VP - marketing, Customer Centria, a customer engagement company associated with the initiative, "This was a three-way promotional activity, that allowed brands to interact with the consumers and yet not be intrusive."

Here, the game or the activity of decorating the Christmas tree did not directly promote any of the brands involved; they were simply present in the background. This, for brand experts is the strength of 'gamification' - the ability for upping the brand's recall value by engaging the customer and yet not actively promoting the brand.

As per Manosh Sengupta, brand-parent at brand-@itude, games and brands have much in common. Hence, the ease with which the two can blend and create interaction. What's more, brands can integrate the message of the game and the brand's promise for impact.

To illustrate the point, consider this: the online gaming portal, Games2Win currently has a banner by Perfetti's Happydent. The activity - players have to simply scroll the smile-meter and make the model smile and the brand's promise - a white toothed smile - delivered!

Another variant of gamification is in-game advertising or advergaming. This is similar to product placements in movies. Here the products are either passively placed in the game or must be used for the game. Like another Go Jiyo activation, where citizens had to kill mosquitoes by spraying GoodNight, the mosquito repellent.

However, in these times, consumer engagement is not enough. Brands need transactions. As Alok Kejriwal, founder, Games2Win says, "Brands are no longer satisfied with the 'spray and pray' philosophy. They do not want to simply advertise and hope it works. They want advertising that will result in purchases."

And hence the seamless interplay of online and offline activities. Or what many refer to as 'shopper activation programmes'. So, when Nike distributed a game to a select audience via email a while back, this was its intent. Players began the game by choosing the shoe colour of the basketball player they controlled. After the game was over, recipients could click to buy the shoes. Players could also email the game to their friends with their high score and a snapshot of their best dunk.

Godrej has also worked on a similar activity. During IPL earlier this year, shoppers who bought Godrej products got a code along with it. They could

use it online to create a fantasy cricket team. The initiative brought together cricket, consumer and product together and enabled to push the company's sales.

Despite these examples and the potential of the medium, Sengupta opines that brands are not exploring it sufficiently. Or, creating entertainment for the consumers using this space.

And for those who doubt the potency of the medium, just go back a little and revisit the Angry Anna game, a spin off on Angry Birds, taking from the Lokpal agitation. The game went viral as soon as it hit the internet. This was mainly due to its topical nature. Now imagine a brand that could have come up with the idea instead and think of what it could have gained?