Is branding the next new thing?

Mr. Salehin Rashid shares his views

BRANDING has become somewhat of a buzzword in recent times. Consumers today are more concerned with the brand image associated with different products. As a result, organizations are putting a lot of emphasis in branding, which in turn has skyrocketed the importance of the role played by a Brand Manager. In order to give our readers a peek at the prospects of branding in Bangladesh, **Tawsif Saleheen** from Star Campus consulted **Mr. Salehin Rashid**, Brand Manager, Premium Brands, BATB.

When asked about the major difference between selling and branding Mr. Salehin replied that selling and branding are inter-related marketing activities. In most cases, companies sell their products through various supply chain partners. Therefore, we can define selling from two perspectives, the organization's and the retailer's. For the organization, selling is making the product available at the point of sale, i.e. to an entity, which then transfers it to the consumer. In the case of the retailer, selling is transferring a good to the consumer. On the other hand, branding can be defined as the combination of all the messages that are communicated consistently about a brand across all communication channels to create a unique identity with which the target consumers can empathize. From a consumer's perspective, branding is more of a continued promise of fulfilling his or her needs by providing a product or service that he or she wants. To summarize, selling is more about product availability and subsequent purchase by the consumer, while branding is more about building and consistently communicating the brand identity to the target consumer.

Mr. Salehin admits that consumers today are better informed and more selective than they were even a decade back. The exposure to different media and access to information has changed the expectations, needs and purchase behavior of the consumers forever. In a world where technology facilitates product attributes to be replicated quickly, the best way to differentiate is through branding. All other factors being equal, the only thing that gives your product a fair chance of being chosen over a competing product by the consumer is branding it differentiates your product from similar ones available across different price points.



Branding is equally important for the organization. An organization with strong brand equity will be able to market its products in comparative ease and the products will also have higher acceptance among the consumers. For example, the i-phone has benefited from the strong brand equity of Apple.

When asked about the different challenges normally faced by a Brand manager, Mr. Salehin replied that understanding the consumer psyche is the greatest challenge. Even a product with the best quality might fail, if the right messages are not communicated. The Brand Manager has to understand the consumer needs (what drives the consumer to buy the product) and the brand story has to be told accordingly.

Another major challenge for a Brand Manager is to convince the top management about the continuous need to invest in brands in order to ensure continuous growth. Simple tactics like discounting can give growth in the short term, but to build a brand to last, it is imperative to build strong brand equity that will ensure growth over a longer horizon.

The other challenges range from differentiating offers in the same product category to the mundane task of balancing product cost versus profit.

Mr. Salehin added that different companies follow different branding strategies irrespective of being a local company or an MNC. The difference is in the level of freedom. Local companies have more freedom in terms of branding. MNCs on the other hand, have to follow global guidelines, while remaining within the legal constraints of the country, because the communications have to be in sync with the ones being done in other parts of the globe.

As an expert in this field, Mr. Salehin believes that a career in Brands holds a lot of promise for the prospective graduates. Every organization has its own way of grooming Brand Managers. However, those who are interested in building a career in Brand Marketing should develop understanding of Marketing Research, Demand Forecasting & Supply Planning, Pricing & Excise, Legislation related to the product and marketing, Distribution Channels, Media, Trade Marketing & Activation. It is essential that a Brand Manager has experience in sales. To sum up, it is imperative to have a clear understanding of all the aspects of marketing. A Brand Manager has to work closely with most departments in the organization and with a lot of external stakeholders like the advertising agencies, suppliers, buyers, regulators, control groups, etc. Hence, it helps to have good interpersonal skills.

Last but not the least, a Brand Manager needs to have an entrepreneurial zeal and the willingness to take calculated risks! Speaking about the future prospects and growth opportunities of a Brand manager, Mr. Salehin admitted that nowadays all accepts