

Increasing the Indian Fragrance Market — Random Reflections!

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Last week my colleague Shekhar Upasani asked me “How do we grow the Indian fragrance Industry? Any thoughts?”

“Yes, by simply creating newer avenues for using fragrances and by increasing the fragrance content in the current consumer product categories,” I answered. The answer seemed rather obvious and naive, but the question definitely set me to deep thinking.

Creative development scenario

We know that for a long time now, no new fragrances gets actually created. Surprised! Frankly, today true creativity does not exist. The fragrances that we create now are only rehashes and modifications of earlier creations; may be a little twist here or a little twine there.

We cannot find fault with creative perfumers for all this, as their ingredient pallets only keeps reducing with every passing day, either due to government rules, safety regulations and legislations, or due to prohibitions bought by IFRA, EUC, US, UK, Japan, directives and guidelines.

The availability of natural plant oils for fragrance creation is also on the decline largely due to inadequate cultivation.

Moreover, being dependent on climatic conditions, yields and availability vary, year after year differing from season to season. Unpredictable qua-

lity and odour profile is common. Price fluctuation is rampant. Supply and demand is rarely even. Hundreds of plants have yet to be commercially exploited for fragrance ingredients. Some natural ingredients are available in abundance, while some in very limited quantities and so prohibitively expensive.

We have to accept the fact that in the present scenario there is little that a perfumer can do to truly create a fragrance. However, is there a limit in marketing the fragrances that are already created?

Innovative industry

The fragrance industry, in general, is creative; otherwise, we will be still rubbing fragrant leaves and shrubs all over our body and wearing flowers at all times.

Today, we have fragrances in a range of product categories like personal care, fabric care and household care. Toilet soaps, shampoos, hand wash, shower gels, cosmetics, hair oils, hair styling products, body talcum powder, shaving creams, shaving foams, deodorants, laundry soaps, synthetic detergents (bars, powder, liquids etc.), fabric conditioners, household cleaners (glass cleaner, surface cleaner, dish wash, toilet cleaner, etc), air fresheners, candles, incense sticks, insect repellents, mosquito repellents, *gutka* (chewing tobacco), *gudaku* (oral application), *pan masala*, (chewing), after shave lo-

tions, splash cologne, eau de cologne, eau de toilette, eau de parfumes, aromatherapy products, paints, stationeries, plastic and polymers, motor oils, etc. The list is long, but is it long enough? Not really, if our goal is to make the fragrance industry grow!

Way to go!

One simple way to increase fragrance usage is to ask every Indian to spend at least one rupee on fragrances every day. With a population of over one billion, the fragrance market will shoot up to over Rs. 265 billion per annum.

Wishful thinking isn't it? Supposing we extend this idea and request our friendly neighbouring countries and they readily agree. Ha! Ha! Ha! Our fragrance exports will sky rocket. Now! Now! Now! Let us become realistic! Growth has to come naturally. It will not happen by such imaginative means and methods.

Celebrities galore

One way is to ape the western marketing style. Make use of page three fashion designers to promote a product as an extension of their clothing range. It really does not matter if they are achievers or not.

All consumers are happy to use designer fragrances even if they are not aware of the designer or their exploits. Using a celebrity for promotion

is another way of fragrance promotion. Any film star will do; even Mika and Mikhee. We already have fragrances named after Lata, Zeenat, Amitabh and Shahrukh.

There are a lot more stars in mainstream and regional cinemas who can be invoked to sell a fragrance. I am sure all of them will be willing to lend their name to a bottle of fragrance – for a price though.

Let us also not forget the innumerable number of television stars of the ever-popular Saas–Bahu serials who will not mind joining the bandwagon to make a fast buck. We need not stop here we can also consider personalities like writers, directors, singers, dancers, musicians, models, and the likes.

Why not think about business tycoons? Tata's, Birla's, Ambani's, Piramal's and the rest. It is possible that they might already be thinking on these lines of immortalising their family names on alcohol through their retail chain networks they intend to set up. Oh! Oh! Oh!

How did I forget our sports stars? We can have them all – Sachin to Sania! Our beloved stars may not play hard to win matches, but will definitely perform their level best to promote fragrances. How about Sourav promoting a body fragrance spray that will last you through life's vicissitudes and suitable when you are on the high and also when you are in the dumps.

I am sure a tee shirt twirling Dada shown smelling fresh and pleasant after a tough cricket session, endorsing the fragranced product can work wonders to our cricket crazy nation. Let us also not restrict ourselves to stars from the cricket, tennis or sports from

the western world. We can also have sports persons from *Kho-Kho*, *Kabaddi*, *Kusti*, *Gulli-danda* and other Indian games promoting fragrance and fragranced products through *melas* in far-flung villages.

Political figures too can endorse a few of the fragrances. Sonia's scent, Atal's bottle, Jaya's gems and Man Mohan's Manmohak fragrances can become popular, not to forget Veerapan's pure Sandal Attar talc.

We can go a step further by creating fragrances for the young and name them after the political youth brigade. Political followers to show allegiance to their idols will purchase and wear them in copious amounts without a thought thereby increasing overall fragrance usage.

Jewellery shops can come out with their own brand of fragrances to be sold along with their gold and diamond jewellery. In any case, it will be purer and cheaper than their adulterated merchandise whose prices only keep moving upwards. Hotels and lodging houses can come up with their range. Instead of a welcome drink, guests can be welcomed with a bottle of fine fragrance spray.

A fragrance bottle can also be placed along side the usual Gita or Gideon Bible in hotel room desks. Coconut / supari being offered during marriage in Indian weddings can also be complemented with a fragrance bottle to spread good cheer all around. Temples, mosques, and churches too can help in this effort.

Clever utility?

LPG used for cooking has a fragrance added to detect leakage. The smell of mercaptans can be easily

identified and warn people of potential hazards. Have we not been able to fragrance machine oil used in vehicles? Let us not forget petrol, diesel, kerosene, etc.

Similarly have we not been able to market fragrant mixtures comprising of dead roots, stems of plants, twigs, shrubs, dried flowers and other unwanted natural remnants of plants, as potpourri?

May be we can send in a proposal to our municipal authorities to spray fragrances on sewage lines, gutters, dumping grounds and land fills. Is it not worthwhile to fragrance all the dead and decaying rubbish strewn around all over our roads? Thanks to our inefficient municipal workers it is a large area that we can capitalise!

Fragrances for health & cleanliness

The various methods discussed above will clearly indicate that success can be achieved if the desire to succeed is strong enough. If there is a will, there is a way. The future of the fragrance industry is bright.

We should look out for growth not only from endorsements or forced promotions, but by also looking outward for newer ways and means of delivering fragrances to consumers. Consciously, we should look for avenues where fragrances can be applied or where consumers would like to use fragrances. It is important to convince people that use of fragrances is an indication of good health and an improved standard of living.

Fragrances give a social expression to a purely functional product and provide emotional feeling of satisfaction for good health and well-being. Isn't it interesting to know that countries

where fragrance sales are high have the least cases of malaria, plague and typhoid? This could be a unique selling proposition as people who like to keep themselves clean and fragrant all day may also keep their surroundings tidy, neat and clean.

So what if I am incorrect in this context! I believe that by now I have made my point very clear. Fragrance growth will be a reality if we are able to convince consumers that a fragrant world is a happy world and that we can be happy on all days of the month and not on pay day alone that comes just once a month.

Dire necessities

To increase penetration, innovative strategies, proper positioning, a strong brand promotion, effective communication, a good distribution network, superior quality product and easy affordability are all important. As consumer needs keep evolving, marketed products also have to change and keep up with the times.

If you look closely at the present market scenario you will find consumers move from a single product benefit to products providing multiple benefits.

The basic challenge for the industry today is to produce a product that is very much affordable with added benefits to the majority of the masses.

To be successful one should be driven by a strong sense of personal mission, constantly challenging one, and leading to change in leaps and bounds, than incrementally. An idea does not come by itself.

We have to look outwardly, every-

where, and at all times seeking connections from varied areas and consciously work hard for them.

The creation of a fragrance involves far more than just the translation of an abstract idea into a commercially viable product.

Right from the beginning there should be a clear understanding between all the concerned stakeholders as to what exactly have to be accomplished.

Constant communication and the combined use of talents in marketing, technical, evaluation, and creative perfumery is necessary if goals have to be reached and greater strides have to be made for fragrance market development.

Importance of innovation

Innovation in any business function is very critical for development, for beating competition and for increasing market share and profits. Strategies that were very successful yesterday may not serve the challenges of tomorrow and one has to rethink strategies and models, to be successful.

Innovation is very much, the result of a directed action of creative expression and entrepreneurial behaviour, that all stem from oneself. "Get innovative or be dead" has been the statements of many business gurus.

An old Chinese proverb states, "Man must sit in a chair with the mouth open for a very long time, before roast duck fly in." God does give every bird its food, but he does not throw it into the nest. Similarly, we have to work for what we need or want.

Strategic conclusion

Today, fragrances are present throughout all levels of product, right from an expensive one to the cheapest, playing an invaluable role.

The fragrance used in a product form may range from 0.5 per cent to 2.0 per cent but its performance and signal attributes claim a very high percentage of almost 70 per cent to 80 per cent. Prophet Mohamed once remarked, "Perfume is the nourishment that stimulates my thinking".

Truly, a fragrance in functional product takes care of this emotional need, stimulating as well as calming or relaxing the user.

To be successful the initial customer should come back for more and a consumer will repurchase only if the product is in a position to fulfil the functional and emotional need of the consumer.

As I was composing my thoughts on the importance of fragrances in functional consumer products, a courier boy delivered a packet. It contained a new soap brief.

A high profile personal wash manufacturer wanted an herbal fresh beauty soap fragrance with a price brief of Rs. 2800 per ton of finished product for their 75 gm soap bar marketed at Rs. 10.50. In short, the fragrance content value wise in the soap would be around a meagre 2% on MRP.

"When we receive such briefs from knowledgeable clients, how do we grow the Indian fragrance industry? Any thoughts?" I now wanted to know from Shekhar.

What could be the answer? Your guess will be as good as mine!