



Off the beaten track

HCL's new campaign uses the teaser-reveal format perfected by FMCG companies to demonstrate how it is different from the rest of the pack

CAMPAIGN LOGIC ■ MASOOM GUPTA

This is a strong, edgy image building ad for a company in a somewhat conservative industry. Conservative because when a company in the information technology space undertakes an image building exercise it simply gets down to the nuts and bolts. There is a type of righteousness and seriousness that creeps into agency thinking — and this reflects in the output.

That's not to say image-building exercises by Indian agencies have not been creative. Kotak Mahindra's 'Zindagi ka hisaab-kitaab' campaign and Hero MotoCorp's 'Hum me hain hero' are two good examples, where the respective agencies have driven home the message without being completely in your face about it. Yes, for the advertiser the stakes are undoubtedly high, but that applies to all brand advertising. So what's the harm in being a little entertaining, if you can get away with it?

The currently-on-air campaign from HCL will, one can safely assume, play no small role in pushing its recall a notch higher. Reason: for a corporate campaign, it is quite unlike any other. It doesn't talk about making a difference or giving back to the community and hopefully changing the

lives of a few. While the HCL campaign does try to bring out why HCL is like no other company — that, after all, is the entire point of a corporate campaign — it manages to stay away from hollow sloganeering.

What you get instead in the latest campaign that follows a teaser-reveal format are beaches and bikinis. In the teaser ad, which ran for around about a week, Mr HCL and Mr Banker are back and on a beach holiday. While relaxing on the beach, they are approached by a young woman and invited to a bikini bash. The teaser ends, asking viewers what they think will happen next.

After the braun (or in this case the beauty) come the brains. The reveal ad represents the cerebral part of the campaign and tries to tell the viewer how HCL can make a difference. It shows the two protagonists stuck on an island with no way of contacting anyone for help. The knight in shining armour — also known as Mr HCL —

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SAURAV ADHIKARI
President, corporate strategy, HCL



uses the battery of Mr Banker's phone to create a rudimentary GPS system, smoke, to be noticed by rescuers. Saurav Adhikari, president, corporate strategy, HCL, explains, "It (the campaign) takes our communication further from just speaking about technology and solutions offered by HCL to focusing on the HCL way of thinking, that is, innovative and out of the box."

The company first started advertising in 2005 in its bid to build an image as not just a hardware manufacturer but also a serious software player. The campaigns were designed keeping in mind three core audience groups — corporates that could be potential customers of HCL, its internal audience (employees of HCL in specific function who may not be aware of its full repertoire)

and lastly young graduates, fresh out of college, looking for jobs in the sector.

When the company decided to design campaigns for the mass media, it also decided to make a typical member of the audience a part of its forthcoming campaigns, explains Shiveshwar Raj Singh, group creative director, DraftfcB + Ulka, the creative agency behind the advertising. And that led to the birth of the two characters, Mr HCL and Mr Banker.

The three campaigns since then have followed a case study format, showcasing the length and breadth of HCL's services. Over a period of time the company felt there was a need to move away from that formula and introduce a fresh perspective. So the bikini and the beaches. The idea was also to draw the eyeballs as the brand was coming back on air after a hiatus of almost two years following a not-so-successful 2010 campaign that patched up a series of vignettes together.

In some ways, this one harks back to the 2005 'Fearless' campaign of HCL, that screamed bold lines like 'At HCL there is only one thing more important than brains — guts' or 'you don't have more courage when you are young, you have less fear'. The only difference, the virtue is no longer courage, it is now innovation, the

buzzword of our age.

A comeback with a shift in thinking needed a fresh build-up feels Singh, and hence the teaser-reveal format. On his part, Adhikari feels that this campaign is all about fun and the oomph factor brought in by the Brazilian model helps pique viewer interest. Who wants to see an ad that puts one to sleep, he asks.

Valid points all. But is it safe to move away from an established corporate campaign, which is supposed to be the 'character' of a company's communication? Of course,

an effective creative campaign in the form of a teaser can set a company apart from the competition and allows it to give to its potential customers an image of what makes the brand different from the competition.

But is it a good fit with the nature of the business HCL is in? The jury is out on that one. "The central figures

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of the current campaign of HCL may slot the company as one not to be taken seriously," says an advertising executive. "The odd man out is not always the out-cast. He may just be the one 'standing out' in the long run," says another. Besides, for a generation that thrives on breaking the rules, a brand that challenges the stereotype may just be the perfect candidate to tweak their interest.

Well, that takes care of one of the stated aims of the campaign.

The television commercial will be supported in other media like outdoor and digital. It will run for a period of six weeks, till

around the first week of August. Being the annual campaign for HCL, it will be back in the later months and aired in short bursts. An integrated ad (that will pull parts of the teaser and reveal ads together as one commercial) is in the works and will be used for the later bursts, says Singh. ■