When searching for ideas, almost Anything goes

By Shashank Nigam

The buzz surrounding TV canned drinks Anything and Whatever has been infectious. Don’t take my word for it, you can check them out on YouTube, where the ads have been viewed more than 2,000 times. And you can also catch them on TV or radio.

Some who have watched or heard the ads have found them hilarious – maybe because they play on typically Singaporean traits.

The trait of being completely nonplussed.

Of refusing to take sides.

Of not wanting to make a decision.

The genius was in turning them around to make Singaporeans laugh at themselves.

And that, I suspect, was what got people talking.

For “die-hard fans” of this series of commercials, there are even “the-making-of” clips on YouTube.

This is not even counting the bus-stop ad campaign in May-June.

Remember? The reports of the empty cans on display that were stolen? This particular product and its marketing strategy caught my attention because I met one of their creators recently.

For those who have not caught the Whatever bug, or still lost in the mystery of what Anything is about, they are really new canned drinks.

Taking advantage of the indecisive nature of some people, these drinks might be the surprise return if you indeed answer “anything” when your friend asks what you would like to drink.

The second surprise is the flavour of the drink.

There are six flavours for each label. “Anything” consists of fizzy drinks: cola, cola with lemon, root beer, etc. The “Whatever” range is non-carbonated - lemon tea, apple tea etc.

The beauty is that you really never know what you are going to get when you buy a can.

When I met Mr Johnson Tan, one of the creators of the labels, I was surprised to learn that the company is not backed by any soft-drink giant.

It is just a three-man show.

Mr Tan, who is managing director of Out-Of-The-Box, the company behind the drinks, said the concept was developed because “people kept telling us they just wanted ‘anything’ or ‘whatever’ whenever we asked them what they wanted to drink”.

This inspired Mr Tan to start the drinks company with two friends.

They took just five months from getting the idea to implementing it. This, I thought, is rare in entrepreneurial terms. Ideas are a dime a dozen these days, but when it comes to executing them, it takes a team of courageous, determined and passionate people who are willing to get their feet wet. I am saying this from my own experience of starting a business, and heading an entrepreneurship club at my former university.

Even after launching the product, they had to deal with unexpected hurdles.

Their bus-stop ads were lined with empty, sealed cans, and as reported, the cans were quickly vandalised – whether it be the bored teenager pulling on the tab, or from people removing the aluminium cans to sell for money.

There were also concerns over the opened cans breeding mosquitoes, so the company pulled the ads down.

But Mr Tan and team did not fret. They focused on other mediums to get the word out.

Some would see this as simply a marketing gimmick, but a hyped-up launch campaign is definitely crucial to a product such as this, in a market where there are just so many soft-drink choices.

The spark I saw in Mr Tan’s eye was reassuring in a way. I feel that such a wacky entrepreneurial concept is rare especially in Singapore, and it should taste success.

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