BRANDING, THE EFFECTIVE WAY

Seminar gives SMEs tips on how to build relationships with focused marketing

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AN EFFECTIVE branding exercise for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need not cost an arm and a leg.

This was the message shared by marketing experts during the TODAY-HP Total Care Seminar held on Tuesday at the Singapore Management University.

“Focus is key to branding,” said Ms Rowena Bhagchandani, DDB Singapore’s brand and business director. “By focusing instead of doing mass marketing, businesses will be able to reach out to their target audience more effectively.”

Citing the example of StarHub’s marketing strategy during the recent Comex ’07 held at the Suntec Convention Centre, Ms Bhagchandani said the telco, while not having a big marketing budget, managed to generate a lot of interest and attention to its broadband products through creative marketing.

During the show, StarHub hired a rock band to perform on-site and demonstrated live how music streamed over the Internet can be intermittent and jerky – commonly known as lag due to narrow bandwidth. This marketing stunt – a tongue-in-cheek comparison of its services against its competitors, brought not only a smile to the faces of the shoppers, but also effectively drove the message across to its targeted audience – the Internet-sawy crowd.

“Several years back, we conducted a survey to gauge the public’s view of the HP brand and we were told that ‘HP is my father’s brand’ – an indication that it is a brand only the older generation would use,” said Mr Dennis Mark, vice president marketing, personal systems group of Hewlett-Packard Asia Pacific and Japan.

To change that image, HP conducted a global rebranding exercise to engage the younger generation. This resulted in its highly successful “The computer is personal again” campaign, which redefined the consumer electronic space by focusing on customers as individuals with the personal computer as the centre of their life. The campaign has also increasingly moved from offline to online platforms in a bid to reach out to the connected generation.

“What HP has done can also be achieved by the SMEs,”

Mr Seow said SMEs such as his 40-men catering operation, should leverage on information technology and the Internet for its management and marketing. This would allow small businesses to project a professional image associated with big companies at an affordable cost.

“The bottom line for all businesses is that any adoption of new technology and equipment must be cost-effective, and HP showed me that switching over to newer equipment with better features does not necessarily mean higher costs,” said Mr Seow. “Instead, the end result shows that we are now producing better marketing material with colourful designs at about the same cost.”