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Keys of the consumer kingdom

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Putting a name to a face opened the door for marketers in the Philippines. An unexpected bonus was high employee engagement.

Exploring the world of Grace and her cohorts has enabled Mondelēz International to move forward organisationally and profitably into other regional markets, says **Pradeep Pant**, the firm's Executive Vice President and President Asia Pacific and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa. Yet unlocking the kingdom of this consumer resulted in more than consumer profiling and profits for Mondelēz.

Unexpected spin-offs have been an enviable uptick in the level of employee engagement, a culture shift in the organisation, and a radical shift in the way the company approaches market research. Originating in the Philippines, 'Amazing Grace' - a fictitious character, allowed employees to put a name and face to their target consumer, making her relevant to their lives and their work.

It was a direct break from the past in which the company, and others like it, would take a global insight and apply it locally, or make use of standard market research reports.

Currently into its fourth year, the programme has spread beyond the Philippines and Asia Pacific to emerging markets across Mondelēz. Russia, Turkey, Poland, South Africa, Dubai, Egypt, Czech Republic, Romania and Ukraine now have campaigns of their own, each one continuing to inspire and engage employees.

While profiling consumers and consumer-centric campaigns are now in their moment, the approach taken by the Philippines office in 2009 to bring Grace to life was innovative and went well beyond a generic consumer connection programme.

Nevertheless a strong focus on actionable and measurable insights was also needed, success-metrics being critical to a sustainable growth strategy for the company.

Engaging all its employees as it progressed, it took its initial cues from the television series the 'Amazing Race' with Mondelēz employees participating in a race to generate insights about the shopping and consuming life of a real person. The objective was to find new ways to meet the needs of this young woman.

The race took on a life of its own over the next four months, with 48 employees serving voluntarily on six cross-functional teams incorporating staff from human resources, manufacturing, finance, research and development, marketing and sales. The cross-functional representation helped introduce fresh perspectives from people less immersed in the brand, as well as build esprit-de-corps.

Teams followed Grace through all the touch points of her life, learning her habits at home and as she shopped, and as she and her family basically lived their life. Grace's profile became even more nuanced once team members got out of the office and walked in her shoes. Once finalised, posters and collateral materials were then developed and placed throughout the office and plants.

Eventually office and plant employees came to know Grace, almost on first name terms. "This gave them a sense of purpose about who they are," enthuses Pradeep.

Anyone who worked in the company was now in a position to influence the business, each employee contributing to the company in new and different ways. This also enabled them to be recognised for their input and output in a tangible way.

"They can feel the momentum as they compete for acceptance of their ideas," he continues, "And they're getting to know each other better as they leave their functional identities behind and go out to walk in the shoes of consumers and shoppers".

Life outside the silo

The experience saw Mondelēz International become more outward looking, shedding the inward-looking corporate psyche of the past. Personification was added to analytics in its planning process, allowing it to break out of functional silos and spur full employee engagement.

Employees now appreciated their roles more, understood for whom they worked, and the extent to which their decisions could affect the lives of others. "We know who we are working for. We feel good when we can make a difference in 'Grace's' life. We see her everywhere we go. And we speak of her as a friend," says Pradeep.

Meanwhile, creating buzz and excitement through the spirit of friendly competition increased the fun, recognition and team-building aspects of the journey to a point where staff clamoured for a second round. In fact, the programme was tweaked in the Philippines to allow a second and third 'season'. Mondelēz International now innovates in every aspect of meeting the shopper and the consumer on her turf, which means always working through a virtuous cycle of learning, unlearning and relearning as she changes.

Pradeep Pant is an Advisory Board member at SMU's Lee Kong Chian's School of Business