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Purple cows in India

Purple Cow, a term coined by entrepreneur and author Seth Godin can give startups some useful perspectives to create customer awareness in one swoop

By Harsh Pamnani and Shekhar Gurav | 25 July 2012



Creative Options: Faisal Farooqui

The year was 2001. It was just another hot afternoon for most Mumbaikars carrying on with their busy lives. Well, that was until the concentration of thousands of pedestrians and traffic-stuck drivers was broken by giant elephants ambling at their own lethargic pace right in the middle of the road. Each elephant carried a huge logo of Mouthshut.com painted in bright colors on flex material on their bodies. And there were 20 of them across Mumbai! Soon, the media got interested in the spectacle. Thousands clicked pictures; millions probably watched it on TV or read about it in

newspapers. In marketing lingo, Mouthshut.com just created the proverbial Purple Cow—massive customer

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awareness at one fell swoop.

So, what is a Purple Cow?

It's a term coined by Seth Godin to communicate something that is remarkable and noticeably different. Suppose you are traveling in the countryside and see many black, white and brown cows; but never actually notice them, and just then you notice a cow that's purple. It stands out among hundreds of cows. You click a picture and share it. You talk about it with your family, your friends and your neighbors.

Why? Because there was something remarkable about that cow. The same concept applies to your product or service. Today, every brand is fighting to capture the attention of its target consumers. And most of the generic market spaces are populated with thousands of brands and niche spaces with hundreds. How do you compete then? Or how do you compete successfully?

The strategy of buying millions worth of ads on TV and print doesn't guarantee success anymore. On top of all this, if you are a startup, you can never take an industry incumbent head-on by buying traditional marketing media—you'll soon run out of money. Purple Cow thinking can give you some useful perspectives. We will discuss three ways you can incorporate Purple Cow thinking in your product/service/brand development process.

Build something worth noticing

You can no longer afford to develop just a good product and expect it to be successful by spending a lot of money advertising it on TV/newspapers. For two reasons—one, everyone is busy doing that and every consumer is too busy to notice all those boring ads; and two, because then you are not competing on the basis of your product but on the basis of your marketing budget. An incumbent can easily take you down.

Instead, invest that marketing budget in your products' design or use it to build a killer feature as part of your service. This way you would build a marketing script right inside what you are selling and don't need a separate campaign to market it; word-of-mouth marketing would work for you.



Venky, Founder of the Goli Vadapav chain, did just that. Vadapav is the Indian equivalent of a burger and creating a chain of vadapav-selling stores on the basis of McDonald's is Venky's dream. In Mumbai, street vendors sell vadapav at almost every corner. Venky spent his money and energy in creating clean shops (remarkable service) selling hygienic vadapavs (remarkable product). He created more than 10

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Goal achieved: Venky, Goli Vadapav

distinct variations of vadapav and struck a deal with Vista Inc (suppliers of McDonald's). Goli Vadapav is known for best-in-class products and service.

When every other ice-cream chains sell standard flavors or allow two flavors at most to be mashed, Hokey Pokey has

created an experience for its consumers out of making an ice-cream. You visit a Hokey Pokey shop, go to the counter where you can choose from a number of flavors, then they chop and mix all those flavors, garnish with nuts and cookies—all in front of you. Voila! You are sold.

Ditch traditional media

Faisal Farooqui started Mouthshut.com around 2000. Marketing online would have been of no use since net penetration in India was very low. Faisal figured out the rates of billboards in different areas of Mumbai and found out a billboard costs Rs. 14-15 lakh per month at Mahim, and around Rs. 20 lakh per month at Marine Drive. Being a startup, he was not in a position to afford this cost. So Faisal convinced an autorickshaw driver, paid him Rs. 200 and painted Mouthshut.com at the back of his auto. This marketing strategy worked and within a few weeks, MouthShut.com's buzz was the talk of the town. Today there are rickshaws sporting MouthShut.com logos in all major cities of India. In Mumbai alone, on any given day, there are more than 10,000 rickshaws with MouthShut.com logos. Mouthshut.com gets about more than four million unique visitors per month. The medium used to get the word out itself was a Purple Cow.

Venky of Goli Vadapav latched on to the opportunity to serve his vadapavs at TiE Summit 2009. His stall was well-noticed. He offered his vadapavs to industry icons and also spoke about his Goli story in a session on desi jugaad. Media and investors noticed him. Influencers enjoyed his vadapavs and started talking about the product. Word spread very fast and soon Venky started giving talks at various forums and prestigious institutes such as the Indian School of Business (ISB) and soon Goli became a brand. Today, Goli Vadapav is India's largest ethnic fast food chain and has 140 stores in four states of India.

How much money is required to make a song a super-duper hit? The answer would be Rs. 1 crore or Rs. 2 crore, but Sreekant Dass, Creative Strategist, Jack in the Box Worldwide, made this possible with zero money. He and his team didn't follow the traditional marketing medium to promote the song Kolaveri Di, rather they used social media, a Purple Cow strategy. People were viewing and sharing and more than 41 million views happened across 220 countries.

On November 21, 2011, *Kolaveri Di* became the 'most searched video' on YouTube. Around two million caller

tones were downloaded and online buzz pushed TV and print media to talk about the song. Blogs, newspapers, news and radio channels covered and played *Kolaveri Di*. This Purple Cow earned more than Rs. 6.7 crore of media coverage with no money spent.

Find your script and tell it to the sneezers

A script is a story that goes along with your product or service. And it needs to be simple yet remarkable enough so that your sneezers can go and tell it to their friends.

Coca Cola came up with the slogan *Thanda matlab Coca Cola* and Cadbury came up with *Kuch meetha ho jaye*. These slogans are nothing but the scripts.

Worth the remarks

Today we live in an environment where customers have a gazillion choices for the same kind of products or services. Traditional media strategies don't work anymore as they are common and customers' interests are changing and attention span is reducing. The exceptional is required to achieve success. Unless you are able to stand out as a business, you will be lost in an ever increasing crowd of copycats. That's the premise of Purple Cow—the need to be remarkable.

This story appeared in the July 2012 issue of Entrepreneur.

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SATENDER On 25 October 2012 at 7:10 am

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i really liked this concept,ideas ,there are so many things to learn ,,m& its true no one has time to watch advertisements on t.v.....

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