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As an individual who commenced the career at the bottom of the corporate ladder and progressed to the pinnacle at a resilient level, I wish to state that the key element to my successful strategies in the cooperate world was based on the imperative tool which is “research” both formal & informal. During my career journey of 4 decades, I became a strong believer of the need of research data for decision making.

The youth today are the leaders of tomorrow. Whatever the profession would be, the knowledge and the skills they acquire with research will always be useful for a successful career. Both quantitative and qualitative research plays a predominant role in innovation, strategy, brand development and in the process of planning.

As a master practitioner of neuro-linguistics programming, I am aware that when one learns the techniques of research, the mind gets patterned to seeing things in an analytical manner. In this rapidly changing and complexed environment, nothing could work on pure assumptions or baseless predictions. In the process of developing strategies, products or service in our journey in to the future, research would be the vital factor. Therefore, it would be extremely important that the young future leaders in every sector of the community acquire knowledge and skill in research. This will come in handy in every

way to contribute to the society, country or to the world. It is also a fact that people who acquire knowledge and skill on research, have good analytical and communication skills and are better intellectuals. When driving brands to market leadership research findings have immensely helped me. Among them, following are some examples:

#### Example -1

Way back in 1990, S-Lon the pioneering brand of PVC in Sri Lanka was facing a downturn and was about to be sold out due to constant losses. During the ethnic riots in 1983 this market leader brand’s factory was burnt down to ashes and ever since, there were many other brands such as Anton, National and Duro that had taken its place.

I, having requested the management for an opportunity to check on the possibility of driving this brand to success was given just 3 months. The first step was the research. The initial research findings given bellow were eye openings.

#### Some Key Findings:

- Although there were many PVC products that dominated the market, the consumer referred to the entire category as “S-Lon”. Which means the brand name had become generic.

- Customers who come to the hardware stores asking for S-Lon were taking away other brands. But they were under the impression that what they bought was S-Lon.
- All brands of PVC looked alike and all PVC pipes in the market did not have a specific brand identification logo printed on the PVC pipes, hence no one could differentiate and identify the brand.
- The traders were selling the brand of their choice based solely on the profitability.

The decision of printing the name S-Lon on the PVC pipe was taken based on this initial research findings. The series of advertisements “look for the name S-Lon” was based in this research.

Within a span of 3 months we were able to turn the tables around and the brand S-Lon became the market leader in 6 months.

Prior to this, the Company, as an attempt to recover the losses, had changed distribution systems, distributors and even changed the sales management. All those attempts had been made without really understanding the situation.

Thanks to the formal and informal researches that were conducted, we were able to understand behavioral patterns and market insights which helped us to

# Pragmatic Research

## The way forward

articulate the turnaround strategy for the brand S Lon. Of course, there was a team who believed in the brand and together we achieved the market leadership.

### Example - 2

Maliban has been the market leader in the biscuit market of Sri Lanka for decades with a market dominance of over 80%. Munchee was trailing in as number 2 purely due to weaknesses in marketing and lack of marketing orientation of the entire organization. Although Munchee was equipped with a high quality innovative product portfolio, they were not able to face the stiff competition.

In the year 2000 when I took over the responsibilities as the head of Sales and marketing of the CBL Group in the year 2000, I realized that having an edge over the competition in innovation and technology was not good enough to drive the business. We had to find the missing link to win the hearts of the customer and gain market share. Changing a brand preferences of a loyal customer base is always a challenging task.

This pushed us to look for key consumer insights. While probing in to finding insights, a very simple insight was uncovered. When the children were given a lemon puff, they split the biscuit sandwich and licked the cream. Most children licked the cream and threw away the biscuits. That was a great insight. Why do children lick the cream and throw away the biscuit?

Reason was revealed that since taste of the cream is not prominent, they just licked the cream and threw away the biscuits.

This was the research insight that was directed to the research and development team. The current Chairman of Munchee Mr. Ramya Wickramasinghe, came up with the solution. He was able to produce a superior Lemon puff that brought out the taste of the cream even sandwiched in between the two puff biscuits.

This new recipe moved in to commercial production. The new product was differentiated even by the packaging. When the whole world had established Lemon Puff in a yellow colour packaging, Munchee took the bold step to relaunch lemon puff new formula in a white pack backed by a media campaign highlighting the insight and the solution. This move not only drove Munchee Lemon puff from a market share of 18% to a staggering 67% within two years of launch, but also grew the category by over 10 times.

As a prelude, Market research helped Munchee to elevate its market share to an impressive level within a short time span as explained above.



### Example - 3

Soy Foods Lanka was the pioneering company in the soy nugget manufacturing yet was an unprofitable company. They were making soya nuggets as a vegetarian food targeted towards the consumers who patronized vegetarian products. The market was very small making the company non profitable. The company could not survive and was bought over by CBL in the year 2000, where I was assigned to play the lead role in planning the way forward.

Research clearly indicated that the majority of the consumers of Soy nuggets consume it as a substitute for meat and not as a vegetarian food. This finding gave birth to a concept of a variety of soya nuggets under different meat and fish flavours under specific sub brands such as Chicken flavour under the brand name Chickosoy and seafood flavor under the brand name Malu soy.

Under each specific brand names, many flavours of dishes were launched. Those activated and revolutionized the entire category and the brand Lankasoy reached





great heights. Taking the initial monthly sales of 200,000 packets to over 4 million packets per month.

This would never have been a possibility, or these ideas would have never come in the absence of research.

#### Example - 4

The success story of Munchee; Super Cream Cracker was also advocated by research.

Cream Cracker was targeted predominantly at an elderly consumer who used accompaniments such as bananas, cheese etc when consuming the traditional Cream Crackers. This market was very small. Our research showed us that the Sugar free cracker could be promoted to all age groups. This is when we launched the Munchee Super Cream Cracker targeted across all age groups with the mention “accompaniments not required”. This was a super differentiator from the leader Maliban who owned over 83% of the local Cracker market. The market grew substantially and Munchee immediately began to gain share from the competition.

Sailing deeper in to the market it was evident that a large segment of the local consumer base seeks a convenient off the shelf food product in between the three main meals. This insight gave birth to the concept of Good for a small hunger. “Podi Badaginnata Super”. This took the brand Munchee Super Cream Cracker from 17% become the largest single segment in the cracker market and dominate with over 70%.

It is also important to know that whatever the research findings may indicate, it also matters in



how one interprets the data. If Munchee looked at the Cream Cracker Market as insignificant when looking at the data this big Cracker revolution would never have been a possibility. We were able to read in between the lines and identify the opportunity.

The fine examples depicted above proves that if a Brand need to reach the pinnacle of success, “Research “should be an imperative tool to face the competition.

It is also a well-known fact that many researches worldwide are done by university students. The products and services that come out from those researches are today world famous.

As a Sri Lankan, I’m delighted to witness that universities have

taken on the lead role where children are not only taught the methodology of research but are required to go the field to do those researches themselves and apply themselves to a greater extent. I urge the students to go out, talk to people, get their communication right and make sure that they understand the depth of research so the future of our country will be in the able hands of knowledgeable and skilful leaders who will be driving the cooperate sector to a greater extent.

I urge the students to go out, talk to people, and get their views, vibes and insights which will help you to acquire in-depth knowledge to develop yourself as skilful leaders.