

Category Entered: Corporate Communications

Title of Project or Campaign: Rural Goes Digital: Amaron Harvest Amaragaon – Living with the Community

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### Objective / Brief from Client & Strategy

Amara Raja Batteries Limited (ARBL) India, an Amara Raja-Johnson Controls USA Company is the technology and market leader in the Indian automotive battery. Their primary consumers are tractor owners, tractor mechanics, and farmers in rural areas of India. With competition increasing from unbranded batteries and the rural India scene being cluttered with a slew of aggressive promotions for FMCG brands, ARBL felt the need to create an organic linkage between corporate, brand and rural consumers through a *fountainhead marketing strategy* where the brand Amaron Harvest is an organic part of the farmer's daily life – communication originates from and stays within the village as opposed to aggressive outside-in marketing at the village level. Ogilvy recommended a *CSR approach* as a direct reflection of the fountainhead marketing strategy, where ushering positive change for the community intersected seamlessly with creating an enduring bond with farmers countrywide and helping Amaron batteries reach high acceptability. The goal was to achieve business performance through targeted social impact.

### Intended Audience

Tractor owners, tractor mechanics, and farmers in rural areas of India. This group are constantly seeking latest information on various current issues, farming needs and about new opportunities to improve theirs and their families quality of life.

### Method deployed and Challenges

Ogilvy chose as a social cause – the bridging of digital divide in rural India. *Rationale:* the cause sincerely reflects Amaron brand values of innovativeness and progressiveness and India's 6.5 lac (0.5 mn plus) villages needed an IT intervention, which helped them consistently through knowledge and hence economic empowerment via local language content delivery. The overall goal was to create an impact in alleviating poverty at the rural grassroots through knowledge delivery for quality of life improvement.

Amaron Amaragaon rests on two pivots:

1. **Knowledge Delivery IT kiosks:** Established in a core village, serving 50 satellite villages. The internet-enabled, local language kiosks propagate knowledge pertaining to sustainable crop management, animal husbandry, links to markets, rail and bus reservations, insurance, access to better employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and up-to-date, accurate information on entitlements, such as health or welfare benefits through participation in e-governance processes at the district level. Amaron kiosks are designed to run around a sustainable revenue-generating model, which helps in maintenance of the kiosk - a unique model, involving multiple stakeholders - local government (data), technology and content provider (Drishtee), rural consumer communities, trade partners, ARBL (corporate and local branches) entrepreneurs (kiosk operators) and Ogilvy (communication and strategic partners). While the seed investment is from Amaron Batteries, the recurring kiosk maintenance cost is taken care of through minimal charges for services provided by the kiosks.
2. **Community Conversations (“Choupals”<sup>1</sup>)** - ongoing topical and contextual farmer-centric events covering a range of rural development / quality of life themes. A platform for ARBL to showcase its rationale and investment in supporting the cause of digital divide:
  - Agriculture-local wheat varieties, Organic farming and fertilizers, Community Health, Education and Literacy, Local employment opportunities, Career Counseling, Tractor battery check up camps, Drought Management, Drinking water management, *Panchayati Raj* (Local Self Governance) education, Self help groups and Microcredit, Irrigation Management, Labour issues in Mines, Sugarcane pricing and supply, Local micro developments like road, bridge, Water and sanitation, Watershed management, Local festivals planning

### Outcome including formal evaluation of results

<sup>1</sup> “Choupal” is a local word for informal village community get-togethers. Amaron campaign utilised these community convergence for ums to talk about the kiosk and its benefits as also conduct a range of education sessions helping improve overall quality of life.

Amaron Amaragaon in 2003-04 covered 6 States, 35 administrative districts, 335 villages, through 44 computer kiosks and 2500 community conversations / evening get-together events (choupals), reaching over half million villagers. The innovative intervention proved that it is indeed possible for a brand to stay within the village and communicate brand USPs through social investment (kiosks) and rural development / quality of life education. Over a lac people visited Amaron kiosks and participated in discussions.

ARBL field monitoring teams found that Amaron Harvest not only gained the goodwill of the target group - primarily tractor owners, farmers and youth, but was also able to communicate the superior features offered by Amaron Harvest batteries in a non-aggressive and sensitive manner. Weekly feedback sessions observed ARBL's ability to reach out to new untapped markets and communicate brand attributes.

The social investment dimension lent the campaign credibility and enduring emotional connect to the brand. While the IT kiosks provided to farmers much-needed access to knowledge which they could use, the 2500 odd events or *choupals* discussed topics of relevance to rural life through influential resources either from the government or local non-government organisations.

Amaron benefited as a brand, communities benefited through knowledge delivery and practical use, farmers could reduce cost of accessing information and services and Drishtee, the ICT technology and content provider, could execute its mission of connecting India village by village. A targeted and focussed IT intervention thus sowed the seeds for community to fight its poverty through access to both online and live on-ground interactive knowledge.

#### **Relation to Objectives and Cost Effectiveness**

*(Source: Field level NGO Assessment & Amaron local Team Surveys)*

- The services from the kiosk have, for farmers, reduced knowledge access costs, increased agricultural yields, increased literacy levels and created easy access to government services.
- The dramatic increase in number of adults and children learning computers in selected markets has almost trippled and the time spent by farmers to access local agriculture information has been reduced by almost 50 %.
- ARBL through Amaragaon could create partnerships based on mutual trust, benefits and growth targets. Almost 28 NGOs and 6 folk groups, 5 ICT solution providers, 2 international level academic institutions like Indian Institute of Management and Indian Institute of Technology, about 200 Village Councils, 35 District Government Administrations have created wide web of partnerships to spur the campaign at all levels.
- Amaron Harvest found a sustainable platform to influence consumers' lives and thereby influence buying behaviour – a platform that they now own for life.
- Campaign covered widely by all local and vernacular press at the district and block level.

The campaign was cont effective in that ARBL invested part of the social investment budgets with the balance contributed by community, local NGOs and entrepreneurs and the ICT Solution provider Drishtee. This is a classical Ogilvy PR CSR Partnership model wherein brand, communities and NGOs together contribute to create a brand and community impact.

#### **Creativity & Originality**

While it was clear that Amaron Harvest brand was facing problems of recognition in rural areas, it was also true that the Ogilvy-Amaron combine had the foresight to develop a campaign long-term in impact instead of knee jerk reactive and aggressive marketing. It is indeed for the first time that a management philosophy of bottom-up marketing has been executed through a CSR platform yielding benefits both to the community and the brand.

#### **Indication of Outside Contractor where used**

Drishtee –an ICT solution provider for installation and maintenance of computers, networks, net connectivity and content.

Local NGOs – for community and brand communication implementation.