



Guessing Games

Our success 'lies' in the minds of those who use the solutions we offer.



The fortune cookie

Attempt to create 'value' for the customer, not just a 'technology'.

I don't know if you've ever dwelled on the other meaning of the word 'lies' in the adage, "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder". Could it mean the opposite of 'truth'? Or does it mean 'exists'? My take is that this sentence has become so famous only because of its not-so-obvious meaning. [Pun]nily

enough, it probably tells us that beauty is not an absolute attribute—it is the emotional response of the beholder in whose perception it is 'seen'.

Our mind's eye sees the world in our own contexts and tries to pick out things we believe will provide 'value' to us. In last month's issue of this magazine, Janani Gopalakrishnan

Vikram ['ViewPoint'—Page 10] points out that "...entrepreneurs seem to think of the consumers as [being] fellow-technologists!" She goes on to recommend that we step into the consumers' shoes so we communicate this 'value' in a way that they can understand how our solutions will make life better, easier or whatever else the consumers are looking for. Well said, Janani! I'd like to add to her train of thought by recommending that we also find ways of making sure that the 'value' lies in the consumer's mind.

Clearly, doing business successfully is as much a psychological game as an offering of skills and capabilities. This is much more relevant in the software domain since most of what we're manipulating are zeros and ones that are transported through ethereal clouds. The touchy-feely aspects of physical products are completely absent. On another note, sustained competitive advantage comes from adopting a culture of first deconstructing our current practices to be able to reconstruct the communication needs of the enterprise. We have to learn to play the guessing game and understand the unwritten rules of the markets of today and tomorrow.

In India, we have the benefit of being exposed early to the values and principles espoused in the *Bhagavad Gita*. While communicating in the language of the consumer is desirable, we have to be aware that tipping over to the point of manipulating the consumer's mind can be counterproductive, if not downright unethical. The benefits of our solutions will be found in their

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ability to fulfil the expectations that our communication creates in the minds of prospective users and will be measured by the extent they actually do so. For example, Facebook (since I come from a generation that just about managed to grapple with the Internet, I can't seem to get obsessed with social networking) is a networking platform that is more the making of the media than of real value. It is yet another 'opportunistic' venture that defines the hollowness of western capitalism and marks the shallowness of real world relationships.

Let me clarify. Facebook is clearly an offering from a techie. While I do not want to efface the effort of putting it all together nor the commercial success it has managed to achieve, I am not convinced about the real value of putting together a platform of sorts hoping that the consumers will 'find' their own ways of using it. Besides promoting chaos and idle surfing among impressionable minds, it is one more classic example of a technologist thinking of human beings as *things*. After a year of hype, Facebook, Second Life and the rest are facing a backlash, writes Claudine Beaumont in the *Telegraph*, UK (26 January, 2008). In the same article, Ri Pierce-Grove, an analyst with Datamonitor, adds: "*Once social networking users have collected the*

people they value into their friends list, the service has to give them a reason to keep logging in. Right now, generalist social networks like Facebook and MySpace are competing for stickiness by accreting features and applications, and encouraging users to share and store videos, photos, and other user-generated content."

There are several other questions that we technologists have to start taking into account before jumping into designing applications. I have to reiterate my view that in overturning the current techie mindset, the responsibility lies (no pun intended) on us to create 'value concepts' first and *then* use technology to actualise them. Otherwise the phenomenal opportunities that have presented themselves before us, especially through the power of Web 2.0, will go begging. Users will continue to get attracted to the 'novelty' that each application promises and this will wear off as quickly. We will be left with platforms and technologies strewn randomly across cyberspace, manifestations of which have already begun to show. Call it Facebook Fatigue. It's time for us to unlearn our old ways...time for us to learn what the consumer really needs. Time to play the guessing game.

Let us change our ways of thinking and communicating to ensure that the value of our solutions lies clearly in the minds of our intended users. **IT**

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