

The Silver Lining!

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Foreword

Written in the aftermath of 9/11, the Afghan and Iraq wars, "The Silver Lining" depicts a current analysis of Pakistan's business environment and a plan of action to build and rebuild in the light of ongoing changes.

It is an attempt to analyze ones strengths and convert them into opportunities, finding areas of concentration and activating a unified struggle to overcome obstacles.

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When the going gets tough, well, it gets tougher and tougher. At first it was 9/11 then the Afghan war, the Indian threats and now the Iraq crises all have made a significant impact on Pakistan's business and economy. What can one write in such turbulent times? You cannot keep marketing in isolation or provide dreams when your surroundings pose an alarming threat to your very existence. Marketing has a direct interaction with people and people are affected by such adverse macroeconomic changes. Both domestic and international business practices have been affected by the events happening in and around Pakistan. In the wake of yet another catastrophe for the Muslim world Pakistan faces an uphill task of stabilizing its domestic and international business practices. Our Manpower, going west, is facing acceptance problems, economy is fragile and businesses are desperate to find relief. On top of this our foreign currency accounts and remittances are subjected to scrutiny. More investment has poured into India especially after 9/11 where India has provided a stable and politically favourable investment opportunity for investors and outsourcing companies. Under such circumstances it is apt to say that Pakistan's loss is India's gain.

Stick to your Guns

Even in these difficult times businesses should bank on their core strengths. Diversification is highly desirable but discontinuing altogether what one does best is not advisable. You do what you do best otherwise you don't do it! You can always expand and diversify into other areas of lucrative concern. Diversification does not mean entering into an alienated realm. What it implies, is that, when things are not going smoothly and when abnormalities shape the things to come, only mavericks succeed.

We, as marketers, can look for product extensions and new market segments. We can find a niche through product variance, innovation and market explorations. Vertical brand extensions coupled with geographic expansion based upon a set plan is the key to forming a productive place for our offerings. Call me an optimist but every situation can be moulded to your advantage and this is no exception. Whether you are an IT firm or a consumer goods exporter you can take advantage of the prevailing situation. How? Read on....

Our Silver Lining

Yes there is always silver lining and even during a war. The prevailing and developing domestic and international consensus is putting up a clear picture for Muslims all over the world. They have to unite and form a strongly unified block of their own and the good thing is that Muslims throughout the world are becoming increasingly aware of this dire need.

If Muslim leaders fail to take a step towards a unified economic block then our businessmen and skilled professionals should take the initiative and consider this an opportunity to form an economic and political block for the Muslim community. As a marketer this is something interesting and one can take optimal advantage by responding actively. The Middle East is still a lucrative market. A market previously inclined towards the US and India. Although we may still experience some inclining tendencies but a lot more trust and confidence would now be placed in fellow Muslims. Fostering an environment of unity and collaboration is the key and it is time to move in this direction. Go ahead and initiate some unifying promotional projects.

Since the spirit of brotherhood amongst Muslim nations is high, if we act quickly we can trigger a positive support for our government and businessmen. It doesn't matter if you are a rice exporter or a software developer you have a bright future

ahead of you if you play your cards right. This is my silver lining and it can be yours if you act skilfully.

If we are to invest our time and efforts in the Middle East region then unity and brotherhood should be the central focus of our Marketing efforts. Let's look at a few sectors and their present and future plans.

Travelling & Tourism

This sector has taken a severe blow. The downfall of our Tourism Industry started immediately after 9/11 and is continuing as the Middle East crises linger on. Big names like Sitara Travels and Waljis have carried out major surgeries within their organizations resulting in huge layoffs. It is all the more important that these sectors stop relying on western tourists. I know such clients pay handsomely and that too in foreign currency which locals will definitely not pay but still local tourism can provide for the operational and administrative costs of our tour operators. When you have your operational costs taken care of you can think of tapping and creating custom packages and environments for tourists who still wish to come to Pakistan.

The new target market may have a different set of needs than the majority of mountain lovers and trekkers that we used to get. Pick your targets, study their habits and pass-times and once you know their mix you can give them what they want. Learn about your customers, for example, they may like to go to luxurious resorts, beaches, hunting, horse racing, springs etc. Our government too needs to add to the basic infrastructure for their diversified targets. Previously they only required working roads and bridges for their large visitors for the Northern Areas but now they should also look to cater for the needs of other visitors. Apart from the Arabs, Japanese, Malaysian and Europeans are all open choices and can be worked upon to revive an ailing sector of our fragile economy.

Oiling the IT Sector

It is sad to see the IT bubble bursting at a stage when Pakistan was gearing up for a competitive run. This is mainly attributable to the recession prevailing in the US economy and to companies who discontinued their major outsourced projects. To further aggravate the situation our IT professionals are still being churned out continuously without adding more jobs. The end result being that these Masters and Bachelors of Computer Science are accepting wages as low as Rs.3000 in the hope that their companies may gain a few projects in future. Better than being jobless.

The Middle East and Europe promises huge opportunities for Pakistani's especially after the US-led war in Iraq. IT companies and individuals should take advantage of this situation. There are sectors and regions waiting to be identified by you. Yes! You will have to discover these regions and offer better solutions in a collaborative manner.

Business Basics

Apart from the Middle East, European countries are still lucrative choices. Australia is another developing prospect while the UK economy is still hungry for IT. Outsourced projects form the lifeblood of IT Companies in Pakistan. It's a pity that we don't use the systems in Pakistan, which we make for others. It may take a complete generation shift to get that going but still IT companies should not lose hope even if there aren't big projects sprouting in Pakistan there are plenty available in the global market.

I can see a host of silver linings out there. If the US has made life difficult then the Middle East can open some closed doors. In one of my previous articles, I have mentioned that Marketing is all about relationships and I will say it again; build, manage and sustain relationships for unified collaborations all across the

globe. You just need to establish a link and build your trust. Our businessmen can make the difference when it comes to localizing the global Muslim community. Positioning and Brand Identity makes all the difference. Even in times of sheer desperation one may find a number of silver linings waiting to spread hope and prosperity. We just need to identify and follow them. The time is just right, so go ahead and discover your own silver lining.