





UNIT III
STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE



7

CRAFTS BAZAARS

IN a rapidly urbanising India, how does one strengthen the link between the rural crafts community and the urban consumer? This chapter highlights a few points for discussion on marketing strategy using a case study approach.

PRINCIPLES OF MARKETING

Ideally the crafts community should be in control of the dynamics of production, market, supply and demand. The key areas are as follows:

Market Survey

- Checking availability of products and designs
- Reviewing customer needs and demands
- Checking availability of raw material
- Researching to find untapped skills
- Providing training and skill improvement facilities
- Identifying buyers
- Financial forecasting

Good Product

The consumer or buyer will not buy a craft product out of compassion or charity. The product must be competitive in terms of its cost, utility and aesthetics.

Home-based Industry

Many people think that the handicrafts sector requires minimum expenditure, infrastructure and training to set up. However, if the handicrafts sector is to face competition from within the country and abroad, then training and development of expert skills would be necessary. The finer the workmanship and quality, the better the value of the craft item, which would rise above a market flooded with mediocre products.



Distinctiveness of Crafts

Every region has its own craft heritage, traditions, needs, resources and capacities. The development of the crafts industry has to be based on singular, unique skills available in the community. Mindless replication, duplication or copying of ideas would neither serve the crafts tradition nor the community.

Design and Creation of Products

The crafts sector is already crowded and many groups are producing the same goods, with the result that the market has become more competitive. Therefore, design innovation has to be constantly addressed so that the product does not become static.



The Tea Cosy

Europeans brew tea in a teapot. To keep the teapot warm a tea cosy is used. The tea cosy is a cover made to fit the teapot and is often made of padded quilted cloth that is decorated.

The most popular way of preparing tea in India is by boiling the tea leaves in milk and water along with sugar, and serving it 'ready-made' in glasses or mugs. In this method there is no use for the teapot or a tea cosy.

Some years ago, in India, schemes for providing employment to the poor were created and tailoring units were set up. The tea cosy was produced in large quantities. The market was glutted with thousands of similar, useless, badly designed and overpriced tea cosies. Indian families did not buy the tea cosy as they had no use for it.

The producers had to organise discounts while unemployed craftspeople became trainers and, in turn, trained more people to make more sales products. Tribals were encouraged to laboriously embroider tea cosies with flowers, regardless of the fact that the intended consumer increasingly drank his tea 'ready-made' in a mug.

Distribution System

The sale and distribution of the products is critical; the market must neither be too small nor too large as both can be harmful to the life and development of the craft practice.

Expanding the Market

With the overcrowding of the market with similar products, the handicrafts sector has to constantly expand and find new avenues—wholesale, export sales or an all India infrastructure for franchise marketing.

Well-being of the Crafts Community

Ultimately the benefit of the marketing strategy should improve the quality of life of the crafts community. Income generation should lead to development of the community at large. The investment of the income should go into providing health and safety norms in the workplace and homes, education of family members, research and development to improve skills and tools, and to find greener and more environmentally safe solutions for the procurement of raw materials and alternatives, disposal of waste, packaging, and sale.

URBAN CRAFTS BAZAAR

Crafts bazaars have been organised for several decades. Agencies like the Tourism Development Corporation, Handicraft and Handloom Boards and NGOs have organised crafts bazaars in urban centres. Over the years such crafts bazaars and craft promotion efforts have taught crafts communities how to test new products, developed confidence in them to work and organise bazaars and *melas* on their own, evaluate the outcome, and obtain feedback from customers.

Dastkar has organised such events as the Nature Bazaar with a diverse range of products made of natural materials like bamboo, jute, cotton, wood and clay. They have worked with craftspeople to design new products for the ever-demanding urban customers. The figures from these nature bazaars do not reflect the common perception that the crafts market is shrinking. Sales at the annual Nature Bazaar have steadily risen—from 10 lakh in 1995 to 2.5 crore in 2004. Sadly, it is the number of craftspeople that is shrinking—10 per cent a decade.



MAKING CRAFTSPEOPLE INDEPENDENT

The first crafts bazaars in the 1960s were an innovation in bringing rural crafts to urban areas and creating new markets for traditional handmade items. Exhibition of crafts and handloom fairs in various state capitals and cities organised by government agencies were soon accompanied by those organised by agencies like Dastakar and Shilpagrams in which craftspeople themselves (from all over India) sold their own products.

To organise such crafts bazaars, organisers had to take care of all aspects as craftspeople coming from a rural background were unfamiliar with the urban setting. They had to pick up the craftspeople from the station, help to set up their stalls, organise accommodation and food—on some occasions even bedding and warm clothing. Today these same craftspeople have become confident world travellers. This is because crafts bazaars have made the crafts community more independent in every aspect of production and marketing of their products in urban bazaars.



To develop independence and confidence in this field, craftspeople must participate in both planning and helping put up the bazaar. To do this a pre-bazaar meeting must be organised to set the rules and guidelines, and to sort out all infrastructural and managerial issues. Post-bazaar workshops assist crafts people to evaluate the feedback, share, analyse, and celebrate sales figures and plan for the future. Such post-bazaar meetings must also be organised to ensure that the lessons learnt are used to improve the next occasion and to strengthen the community spirit.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF MARKETING CRAFTS THROUGH BAZAARS?

1. The most important advantage is that it is one occasion where the craftspeople are the centre of attention—where the craftspeople get the kind of exposure, publicity, visibility, and focus that artisans otherwise don't get in urban metros.
2. The bazaar is an opportunity to highlight crafts products and skills
3. The bazaar experience can also bring to light the problems and potential of the sector. It is important to use valuable exhibition space to raise other issues regarding craft production, and social and environmental problems.

The attitude of even the persons committed to the development of crafts is patronising and one questions as to what is meant by preservation—is it keeping the craft traditioners and their practitioners frozen in time? Do they still see the craftsmen linked to them by the age-old jajmani system, or are they seen as creative persons who pour their creativity into their work and are not slavishly churning out copies of old patterns, old forms, which in the act of mechanical reproduction lose the purity of form, the flow of the line and freshness of expression? Do they command the same respect and position in society as painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers and performing artists? Or do we still think of them as skilled hands seen only as anonymous, faceless, which have for generations produced crafts to embellish our persons, our homes, our environment and enrich the merchants.

— JASLEEN DHAMIJA
India Magazine





4. The advantage of a large open-air bazaar in a place like Dilli Haat, Delhi; Bandra Reclamation, Mumbai; Surajkund Mela, Haryana; Shilpagram, Tirupati; Dakshin Chitra, Chennai; Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal; Shankardeva Sangrahalaya, Guwahati, etc. is its ability to attract a wide cross section of buyers, including those who would not normally buy craft products. There is quite a false perception that handicrafts is 'exclusive', meant only for the 'elite' rich customers. One of the advantages of an urban *mela* or crafts bazaar is seeing more and more people actually buy and enjoy crafts—realising there is something for the varying tastes of a diverse urban population.

Berozgar Mahila Kalyan Sanstha (BMKS), the best-selling tussar saree group from Bihar, participated in a bazaar in 2008. Their sales at the bazaar in Delhi were very good and the community improved its living conditions where just 12 years ago they had been helpless bonded labour.

5. The bazaar is a learning place where the craftspeople can interact directly with consumers, learning about tastes, trends, and colour preferences. Theoretical instruction passed on at workshops and trainings, in letters or lectures, about quality control or sizing, can be understood in practice and in the most direct way possible at the crafts bazaar.

At one bazaar women embroiderers from Gujarat changed their multi-coloured mirror-work embroidery cushion cover into different tones of blues. These blue cushion covers became very popular with Europeans, especially as the British and Dutch, generally, cannot resist blue!

6. There is strength in collaboration. Seeing and interacting with other crafts groups, in the bazaar and at the *dharmashalas* or guest houses where they all stay, gives collective confidence, and they learn from each other. The exhilaration of hearing of another crafts person's 15 lakh sale is a great catalyst for any crafts group participating for the first time in the metro market. Mega craft success stories come

from agencies across the country such as Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Lucknow; Banascrafts, Ahmedabad; BMKS Tussar; Ranthambhore project; URMUL and Kalaraksha, Rajasthan; Central Himalayan Rural Action Group (CHIRAG), Uttarakhand, etc.

URMUL, an NGO from Rajasthan, sent a group of craftspersons to a crafts bazaar in Delhi in 1988. They had been apprehensive about participating in an unfamiliar urban market but when they hesitantly and fearfully sold goods worth ₹85,000, they were encouraged to regularly participate in bazaars across the country.

7. Craftspeople learn of the importance of new designs and products, but also the importance of maintaining one's own identity in a competitive mainstream market. It is the artisan's distinct craft skill and design tradition that gives him/her an edge. Experience shows that a quality product, however expensive, is easier to sell than a cheap, ordinary one. Craftspeople, instead of imitating and undercutting one another, can attempt to enhance their designs and range of products. Local markets may want mill products at a low price, but metro markets are willing to pay a high price for hand-crafted traditional craft objects, given it has been converted for contemporary usage and is in fashion-led colours.

8. The bazaar is a good place to test-market products, and to discover what needs to be done to improve sales. It can also test and set targets for effectiveness and impact. It provides immediate data—on growth, sales variations and customer preferences. However, a new design range is best test-marketed in smaller, specialist exhibitions that focus on a specific technique, product or region, and have a specific target audience.



REVITALISING TRADITIONS

What happens when a woman moves away from her own country and migrates to the West? How does she keep in touch with her traditions? For these traditions form an integral part of her community, and give her a sense of identity.

The example given in the following box is only one of the many ways in which people are attempting to do this.



In 1991, a migrant from Bangladesh, Shireen Akbar, began to visit small groups of migrant women in and around London, showing them slides of the Victoria and Albert Museum where she worked. This museum houses a large collection of Indian Art.

The slide-show was followed by a visit to the museum, when, after a talk by Shireen, the women walked around the gallery making drawings of the designs that interested them. They took these designs back to their groups, to try and translate them into fabric. It was also a way of introducing them to gender issues.

"I would stop before a beautifully embroidered piece of silk from Shah Jahan's time and ask them if they could guess who'd worked on it," says Shireen. "They almost always said 'women' and were

really surprised that it was actually men who had produced such delicate work. We could then tell them that, with payment, men would do what they disdainfully passed off as 'women's work'. They started comparing it to their own situations, saying that, although their husbands wouldn't enter the kitchen in their own homes, they were actually chefs at work. It made them angry."

What started in such a small way has now been extended to women's groups in 40 countries, and involves more than 800 women.

Shireen then launched the Mughal Tent project—which was completed in the summer of 1997 and takes the form of a giant, brilliantly-coloured tent inspired by the Mughals. This tent is made up of 50 scarlet and blue textile panels, each individually designed by groups of South Asian women both in U.K. and as far afield as India (Chennai), Dubai, South Africa, U.S.A. (Los Angeles) and Burma.

This entire project has brought awareness to the general public, a whole new audience to the museum and tremendous confidence in the women involved. "They come into the museum whenever they like, to check little details in the designs or, more hearteningly, to take in an exhibition that's completely unrelated to South Asia. They've started selling their work, and giving radio and television interviews—its tremendous. I'm redundant now," says Shireen Akbar.

Disadvantages

The main drawbacks of a crafts bazaar are

1. It is a transient marketplace—lasting a few days only.
2. There is a relatively heavy investment in publicity, presentation, and promotion to build public interest and draw media attention. The craftspeople in such bazaars are a fleeting phenomena—here today, gone tomorrow.
3. Having created exposure and awareness for crafts, the event often does not link craftspeople with permanent outlets and orders for their products.
4. Organisers have no control over the quality of products being sold, nor are they able to ensure that craftspeople follow up later on the orders they receive. It is vital that craftspeople spend time before and after the event, planning what they will bring, and follow up on sales and orders. Craftspeople sometimes exploit the transient bazaars to bring defective stock to an exhibition, knowing there can be no returns or rejects.
5. The bazaar should be part of an integrated production and marketing process, not a stand-alone event which many of there are. Many government departments, NGOs, and institutions today use bazaars and exhibitions as a promotional exercise for themselves—sending out telegrams to unknown artisans without proper planning or purpose, skimping on display and publicity.





6. Another limitation of a crafts bazaar, particularly the smaller, shorter exhibitions, is that though they give exposure to the crafts, functional crafts products, especially handlooms, need to be available in bulk—giving customers a choice of colours, sizes, fabrics, designs and textures. For a short-term exhibition it is difficult for poor crafts people to transport products in bulk.
7. Crafts bazaars are useful in bringing together a wide range of customers face-to-face with a wide selection of products. However, expensive artistic pieces require better presentation and promotion than is usually provided at an exhibition. Less expensive functional products also suffer, for example *jharus* or baskets, as they do not have the instant glamour of jewellery, and are bought only when the need arises rather than on impulse.
8. In most exhibition venues there is lack of proper display and storage facilities that further contributes to the image of crafts as a pavement product—a cheap trinket or souvenir rather than a work of art. Craftspeople hesitate to invest in and bring large, expensive, or one-of-a-kind items. Bazaar organisers must build facilities in their exhibition spaces—stalls should be spacious and well lit, provided with racks and stands, enhancing rather than obscuring the beauty of the hand-crafted items. The investment is well worth making.

At a recent bazaar a stone-sculpting group from Konark, Orissa, sold an exquisite Natraj for over ₹75,000, as well as their entire two lakh stock of remaining smaller *murtis* as they were able to display their products well at the exhibition.

PREPARING FOR A CRAFTS BAZAAR

Students learning about the living crafts traditions of their country may wish to make a career in this sector. It is important, therefore, to study the bazaar as a marketing option in greater detail.

- There is more to a bazaar than booking a hall. Every aspect from choice of venue to local Sales Tax regulations has an impact on sales.

On one occasion organisers of a craft exhibition failed to get police permission for parking outside the exhibition hall and this resulted in chaos—and the loss of half a day's sale!

- How an exhibition looks, and how it is advertised is also extremely important. Colourful cloth *torans*, banners designed by local crafts groups, brightly coloured distinctive displays, combined with visually attractive invitation cards, press releases, and advertisements play a major part in establishing and advertising the event.
- Proper organisation and promotion, along with proper production planning by the craftspeople can make the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful sale. Banners, kiosks, advertisements and mailers, may convey the core message of 'Crafts made and sold directly by craftspeople'.
- Ultimately, it is the participant craftsperson and the crafts product that must be the focus. Prior intimation to crafts groups, information about the venue, target consumers and potential trends, must be sent in time for them to develop appropriate stocks.
- Too little stock is almost as much of a tragedy as too much. Bazaars are such occasional affairs, and there are so many hidden costs involved in participating, that making the right things in the right amounts is crucial.
- The bazaar calendar of events should be the starting point for design, development and production planning through the year.
- Calculation of real costs must include provisions for hidden expenses and unforeseen circumstances. There are variable costs, with lower mark-ups for mass market goods, and higher ones for the unique, one-of-a-kind pieces are something that craftspeople, when they are their own vendors, can experiment with. Fixed prices, proper bills, and no bargaining, are very important principles at the crafts bazaar, if crafts and craftspeople are to be respected.





- Organising a successful crafts bazaar is an expensive business which entails expenditure on the rental of a space large enough to hold a sizable number of crafts groups, putting up stalls and stands for stocking and displaying merchandise, publicity, administration, travel and infrastructure.
- What is the criterion for inviting a crafts group to a bazaar? Their need for a market must obviously be the first priority, but they must also have a marketable product. It is always better to first work at developing the product, before launching the product into an already overcrowded marketplace.
- There are several government schemes that can help to subsidise costs. The attempt should be to make exhibitions and bazaars self-sustainable, with craftspeople contributing to costs on the basis of their sales and scale.

One NGO was approached to help a small group of village women in Hapur, one of the poorest districts in UP. These were illiterate, shy women. They strung glass beads for the export market for ₹10–15 per day. Through a Swedish development project the women had received design and skill training from NIFT but lack of an end-market meant no orders. Their training had ended in frustration and bitterness.

The women were invited to a crafts bazaar. Two months before the bazaar they developed some new products targeted at the Indian retail market. Raw material was bought with a small loan from another Delhi NGO. When the crafts bazaar was to open, the women were so hesitant they did not want to go to the bazaar. They complained in hesitation—“Selling in a market is against our culture”; “What would the community say?”; “Who will look after our children?”; “How will we speak to customers?”

The organisers declared that if they didn’t go, their products wouldn’t either. They reached the bazaar three hours late—giggling and nervous. By evening all their stock had sold. They worked all night making more products. The next day those products too sold out. After 15 days of the bazaar experience they had turned from passive, exploited labour into confident entrepreneurs. Today they travel all over India to bazaars, investing their own savings to make stock, developing new designs and adding new village members to their group.

EXERCISE

1. You are asked to make a presentation on the poverty and educational status of a local community of metal workers in your area. Describe the schemes that the local government has introduced to enhance the livelihood, education and health conditions of this community who serve your locality.
2. Write a newspaper report (100 words) that is comprehensive and interesting with factual information. A newspaper article must have
 - a headline that is catchy
 - name of the reporter
 - the place and date—e.g., New Delhi, 20 December.
 - the lead paragraph in the third person stating date, time, venue of the event
 - what happened and why
 - some eyewitness comments or short interviews.
3. Analyse the advantages and disadvantages of craftspeople practising their trade on the pavement.
4. Find out who the craftspeople in your state are who have received the national crafts award, and describe their contribution.
5. Develop a scheme for a locality in your city or town that will benefit the local crafts community focusing on education, health, shelter, environmental and social issues.

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