Dial M for dummies

Marketers spend Crores of Rupees to outdo their competitor in the communication war, but they often forget the end-user

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There's something about Apple products that divides the world into two. There's no middle path. I belong to the group who to put it mildly, doesn't like Apple. And doesn't want to 'secretly' possess one. To my defence, it's Apple that ignored me. It's been treating India as a dumping ground for its surplus defunct versions when it launches its new versions in the US. I am a big fan of HTC meanwhile, even though they are a couple of months behind in releasing products in India, and even though its much awaited Tablet – the Flyer was a big disappointment. However, the rant here is not about the war between Apple or Android fans or the inconsequential circumferential foot-soldiers – BlackBerry and Symbians of the world.

It's about how the circumferential foot-soldiers, and I accept, even the Android players too, treat their customers. And it's about a point where I feel lost to Apple fans. It's about the experience – at the pre-sales level, the latter gives to its fans. I have often felt my intellect and worth demeaned, when each time, I've gone to a retailer to buy a handset for myself or for that matter anybody else (my parents or my girl-friend/s) or relatives back in Shimla, who feel that I can get for them, the same phone at a cheaper price (compared to Shimla) in Delhi. Of course, they don't count the petrol price I pay for, when I go shopping for their goods.

Coming back to the topic, it's the dummy phones they hand over to you if you want to see a particular model of any brand that makes me want to melt down into Mother Earth. I feel insulted, I feel like a pariah. What am I supposed to do with it? Bang it on my head? Throw it out of the shop or find out the marketing brains of the brand and give them a piece of my mind?

I am supposed to shell out my hard earned money for the eventual product and I don't get to see it, feel it, find out its features... till I don't pay for it.

The retailers have an easy excuse. "To show you a real product, we'll have to break the seal of the pack. And if you don't buy it, nobody else would buy it, as everybody demands a sealed pack." Marketers spend Crores of Rupees on building strategies, communication, Point-of-Purchase visibility and what not, and often throw away money in stupid attacks on competitors. However, nobody cares to let a working handset be there in the shop to let people experience the product and its features. In spite of all information available on the internet today, I can merely check for specifications of the product online, or to the extent have a virtual experience, which can never be as close to the real experience. I can only explore the features of a phone, when I buy it, and if you find something amiss or a feature or a certain expected behaviour from the phone that the retailer thought was there and you eventually don't find it, it will not be returned or exchanged for other brand or model. You are stuck with it for a year or may be more.

While one can test out a television set or a music system, or even a laptop, even at the tiniest of the shops, or for that matter test drive a Maruti or a BMW car, without any discrimination, I cannot touch and feel a real mobile handset. All I get is a dummy to hold.

Here's where Apple fans/customers score when they get a royal treatment and 'experience' at Apple stores. Here's one arena, where there's room for stores like Croma. But I wonder, why the manufacturer can't take that initiative to let you have an experience in the mobile market. Is anybody listening? I don't want to lose out to 'snob' Apple. ∎

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