

At 80 years old, he is fit and agile. When Daily FT met him at the Cinnamon Grand for roughly 20 minutes from his busy schedule taking precious time for an interview with the man widely known as global guru of marketing, his dynamism was quite evident. On his first visit to Sri Lanka, Dr. Philip Kotler appeared quite excited. A globe trotter spreading his masterly knowledge on and insights into modern marketing, him discovering Sri Lanka personally just one week after i.e. Friday 3 June, celebrating his 80th birthday on 27 May, reflects the explorer in him.

He was visibly overwhelmed by the traditional warm welcome he received both at the Bandaranaike International Airport and host hotel Cinnamon Grand. Perhaps he didn't know that given his iconic presence and the reverence with which he is held by students and practitioners of marketing in Sri Lanka, there was more to follow in terms of Sri Lankan hospitality and warmth. Soon after the interview with Daily FT, Kotler was to get a further taste of traditional Sri Lanka at Nuga Gama, whilst on Saturday he paid a courtesy call on President Mahinda Rajapaksa followed by an address to Ministers, MPs and public sector marketing officials, and on Sunday flew to Sigiriya.

When he addresses the much-anticipated Knowledge Forum today at Waters Edge in the morning, which is estimated to draw 1,000 participants and later in the evening a near 300 at the CEO Forum, Kotler would have picked up more insights into Sri Lanka. Kotler, who is the S.C. Johnson & Son Distinguished Professor

of International Marketing at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, is also considered the father of modern marketing and the world's leading strategic marketer. Yet he is unassuming and in his opinion, Peter Drucker is the grandfather of marketing.

During the interview with Daily FT, he paid credit to several others as well. However, many of his most authoritative textbooks on marketing including 'Marketing Management,' which he first wrote in his late '30s in 1967 and now on its 14th edition, have made the biggest contribution to spread the virtues of marketing globally.

Having Kotler in Sri Lanka and marketing the idea to him of spending four full days with engagement with people and professionals from different levels as well as sightseeing is always a challenge.

Thanks to peace in the country and more importantly, the bold and persevering efforts by the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM), especially by Immediate Past President Rohan Somawansa and incumbent Thushara Perera, made the Kotler experience in Sri Lanka a reality.

His visit is also a big boost for the growing profile of Sri Lanka as a peaceful and vibrant destination for tourism and business. With Sri Lanka amidst an unprecedented opportunity to get it right as a country and do right things correctly as well as rebrand and reposition itself post-war, Kotler's insights will be critical. Here are excerpts from the Daily FT's exclusive interview with the world's guru of marketing:

By NISTHAR CASSIM

**Q.** A few days in Sri Lanka, what are your first impressions?

**A.** Well, very favourable. I was greeted with garlands and dancers and a very enthusiastic reception that was nice. We got here to the Cinnamon Grand, which is very impressive; my room is very nice. So I had positive impressions.

**Q.** Are you used to this kind of overwhelming reception when you travel abroad?

**A.** Yes I've had good receptions in many cases, but this one was outstanding.

**Q.** This is your first visit to Sri Lanka but you would have heard about Sri Lanka in your general idea about the globe. Do you regret not having come here much earlier and discovered it?

**A.** During the past five years I did try on two or three occasions to be here on invitations. There were a few reasons why I couldn't make it. It conflicted with my other engagements and in some cases I wasn't sure that the war experience was really over. My wife is always saying 'will you be safe where you go?' Of course I remained convinced that things are much better here and the past is the past. You know, your coun-

try is the country of the future.

**FT Quote**

Marketing 3.0 is more than about philanthropy; it's more than about just doing good. It's actually developing a DNA where you want to be profitable where your formula is profitability, people and the planet. Well actually I would even add 'purpose,' where companies would have to think about their basic purpose, people, planet and profits

say they are all using the same theories and so on. However, I think I may

try is the country of the future.

**Q.** You are perceived as the guru of marketing. Are you personally happy with the global take on marketing based on your various textbooks and teachings?

**A.** You know I'm often called the father of modern marketing. Marketing existed in text books from 1910, but they were too prescriptive and too descriptive. Now Peter Drucker, who we all admire, really is the grandfather of modern marketing, because he has said some very wise things that opened our eyes to marketing. The late Professor Ted Levitt from Harvard was also very important in raising the importance of marketing through his Harvard Business Review articles like 'Marketing Myopia'. But I have been here as the guru of marketing and I have influenced more people about the subject than any other single person who has written on marketing. There are also some other people who have written and promoted concepts such as guerrilla marketing and have had a good following. I hope my writing and theories have been working for companies. When I meet companies they



have reworked a lot of my textbooks. There are three books - 'Marketing Management,' which is the highest level, 'Principles of Marketing' at the medium level and 'Marketing - An Introduction' at the lower level.

The fact is that with the social media and the interconnected world, we have to put in much more. For example, I'm not sure we are going to be spending that much money on advertising. We continue to spin money on advertising, but I think we are going to depend more on people in the market place talking about us to each other than doing our own advertising and I think sales people are always going to be around, but some of them are finding out that they cannot get to the door of the customers because customers can get all those stuff from the internet.

**Q.** Marketing Management is now in the 14th edition. You release a new edition every three years. What will you unveil in your next edition?

**A.** I think the new edition will continue with the emphasis on branding, but add an emphasis on social media and values marketing where companies really will have a better chance to succeed if they make their beliefs and values clear to the customer. I think they should live by their values. And I'm going to put in more on what I call 'Marketing 3.0,' which is my latest book. It's more than about philanthropy; it's more than about just doing good. It's actually developing a DNA where you want to be profitable where your formula is profitability, people and the planet.

**Q.** Okay, you're coming out with a new set of Ps?

**A.** Well actually I would even add 'purpose,' where companies would have to think about their basic purpose, people, planet and profits.

**Q.** How would you look back on your marketing formulas vis-à-vis global recessions in the last 10-20 years? Do you think marketing can be a guiding light to overcoming recessions?

**A.** Yeah, you mentioned recession? You know the world is very capitalistic. There are all kinds of capitalism, by the way. Japan's capitalism is different; then there's Chinese capitalism and US capitalism. Ours (US) is freer, but it's also creating more booms and busts, so every five years we seem to have a down trend.

The last one

starting in 2007/08 has been the worst one recently.

Thanks to Obama, I really believe he has done a terrific job and he cares about the world, he cares about the nation. He's not caring about himself; this is not like some other places where the rulers care about themselves, as we saw from the Egyptians, etc. So the thing is, this has been a tough recession. It really means that a nation has to be more prudent. People were buying homes but they

were only putting in 10% on a home, can they pay back the money? And we made that mistake. It was a terrible mistake, our housing and all the poor stuff. So we have to learn how to curb what we call irrational exuber-

ance in the market place and we have to also learn how to rekindle and kick up again when the economy is flat on its face.

**Q.** You think that's the marketer's job? What can market-

# Marketing Kotler on the past, present and future



Sri Lanka's Best Bank Welcomes Marketing Guru, Prof. Philip Kotler





ers do?  
**A:** Marketers are part of the problem and part of the solution. They are part of the problem when they want to make everything cheap and available, more than people can

pay back their credit. That's when marketing is guilty. On the other hand, when you are in the down period, it takes marketing to whet our appetite. The tablet from apple, the new i-tablet to certain new clothing or food... Marketing has to drive the desire to buy and spend again.

**Q:** Asia, with China and India put together, is the driving force of the world economy. Do you think they have been very innovative in their marketing with regard to country and corporate strategies? Do you think they have been quick adopters of the virtues of marketing?

**A:** Yes. I think they are following standard marketing. China has huge companies that are now becoming world-renowned like Heier, Lenova and certain others actually putting in money to support the development of becoming global multinationals, but consider that they also sell to their domestic market. They are using marketing principles. They are trying to make their products better and more affordable. India is going its own way. India is very good in information technology. You've heard of famous companies like Wipro, Infosys and TATA.

Even TATA is in the auto business too, they are going to put up the Nano car.

**Q:** Yes it (Nano) was launched in Colombo last weekend.

**A:** I'm happy to hear that, I'd like to see the Nano car. I think cars are going to remain in all kinds of price levels, but we will have to have cars down to affordable price levels, even though that will create a new problem by way of more congestion. In many countries that are emerging, most of the traffic is bicycles, scooters and

motorcycles. If it becomes bigger like cars, how will the traffic move?

**Q:** Various professional bodies have actively promoted the need for greater place for marketers in boardrooms. What is your take on that and do you see more companies inducting Chief Marketing Officer (CMOs) on to the boards?

**A:** Yes, I'm happy about that development and it hasn't gone far enough. Now we don't even call the person heading the marketing division as the vice president of marketing, we call him the CMO - Chief Marketing Officer, and he's at the same standing as the Chief Financial Officer, Chief Technology Officer and Chief Information Officer. Now he (CMO) may not be treated that way, but he's out at the boardroom. He's shaping strategies like the others and that's a very good development. I actually think there are some companies that think that marketing is the driver of the strategy and not only just a participant. I'll give you some examples. That's exactly what happens at P&G and Coca Cola. In fact a book was recently written on the shift. The author interviewed 40 companies, where they are all beginning to show signs of marketing being the key driver of the future of the company.

**Q:** What's your own advice for companies in emerging countries like in Sri Lanka? They are all part of a dynamic region where everyone is becoming competitive.

**A:** I think the concept I like is that world class companies set a standard that has to be matched and you are world class when you are trying to be the best in your industry and to have the people who it takes to be the best and also the resources. I would like Sri Lankan companies to master themselves against the best and never fall behind and then they can go out too, not only selling here but around the world.

**Q:** We found that in your 14th edi-

tion you had Sri Lankan companies Dilmah and Odel as part of case studies. What really encouraged you to pick these companies?

**A:** Well you know I work on my regional editions with people who are very good and know the regions. I think it was on the Asian edition and I said 'please, Sri Lanka, get some cases; don't just stay with China or India'. So they went and got it.

**Q:** You are scheduled to meet President Rajapaksa during your visit. For governments that are also trying to be very entrepreneurial and brand countries, what will your advice to political leaders of the country be?

**A:** You know political people also understand marketing because that's how they get votes and elected, so they shouldn't be against

marketing. They should understand things like demographics, segmentation, targeting, positioning, etc. The Government has to think of Sri Lanka in terms of its basic treasures and character and create a brand that is well known to people. This is how you know whether you have succeeded.

You do a sample of people on the streets and say 'name three things about Sri Lanka'. Now everyone in Sri Lanka could do that, but if I stop people in the United States and if they say 'Sri Lanka, oh that's in Asia isn't it,' that's good, 'I hear it's a pretty country,' that would be nice. So what are the three things? Maybe even having a certain tag line will help for people to know. Then you are really becoming a brand.

**Q:** Can you cite some examples where global political leaders or countries have taken your advice and made a success out of it?

**A:** Oh, I've met so many leaders around the world. Success depends on whether they fully implement what I say. You know I was in Mauritius and I did some work with them; I did some work with Singapore. I think they are some really good success stories.

**Q:** What would be the challenge for companies in the next five to 10 years in terms of succeeding in local and global markets?

## FT Quotes

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I think successful companies will be the ones which are more creative. It is one thing to be left-brained, which is analytical, and another to be right-brained, which is creative. So try to be a company that has adopted a culture of innovation

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The Government has to think of Sri Lanka in terms of its basic treasures and character and create a brand that is well known to people. This is how you know whether you have succeeded

Marketing is the battlefield. It in this place where you win or lose and it's exciting and challenging. You become part of a company; it's like a sports team. I mean in many other professions like finance/law and so on, you don't get the feeling of the team and winning and that's marketing

Well I think competitive intensity is increasing. Similarity is increasing among the products and services. I think successful companies will be the ones which are more creative. It is one thing to be left-brained, which is analytical, and another to be right-brained, which is creative. So try to be a company that has adopted a culture of innovation. Thinking about everything, how to make it better, how to be different and secure yourself, etc.

**Q:** And for countries you recommend similar strategies of being creative and innovative, is it?

**A:** Yes, the same.

**Q:** Your advice to young marketers; why should they get into marketing?

**A:** Because marketing is the battlefield. It in this place where you win or lose and it's exciting and challenging. You become part of a company; it's like a sports team. I mean in many other professions like finance/law and so on, you don't get the feeling of the team and winning and that's marketing.

Pix by Upul Abayasekara

comes  
Philip Kotler



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