# "A Blue Ocean Branding Strategy: The Case of Mlesna"

**W. D. L. Prematunga**

## Abstract

This case study reveals the legend of "Mlesna" specialty tea and digs deeper into how Mlesna created a distinctive position, which led to a world- renowned brand name in the "Ceylon Tea" commodity market in the local and international arena. The paradox of the fact is that this brand virtually created a centuries-old mood and tone, which still appeal to the new consumer.

Mlesna Tea revolutionized the local traditional tea export from bulk raw material and cheap consumer packs to a more lucrative form of exclusively finished consumer and gift packs. While all other Ceylon Tea players were competing within the low-end market segment whilst catering to the masses with bulk tea or value for money teas, Mlesna realized the impact of eroding margins of such a market and anticipated the requirement to seek for new markets, in order to combat cutthroat competition. Having identified their core competences, Mlesna Ceylon Tea decided to add value to the raw leaf of Sri Lanka instead of merely selling it as a low-priced raw tealeaf to major foreign purchasers. They were the first Sri Lankan tea company to introduce the specialty tea concept to Ceylon Tea and thereby shunned the commodity "bulk" tea exporters and value added Ceylon tea. They also introduced lifestyle retailing which is a novel concept in Sri Lanka. Today Mlesna stands for the hallmark of quality tea both locally and internationally and has won 79 awards, which consist of 19 Presidential Export Awards, 11 National Export Awards, 23 Lanka Star Awards, 17 Asia Star Awards and 9 World Star Awards.

**Key Words :** Ceylon tea, value added tea, speciality tea, value delivery system, brand mantra, brand positioning, ingredients of branding, lifestyle retailing, eroding margins, core competencies.

**W. D. L. Prematunga**
holds a Dip. M (UK), MCIM, and an MBA from PIM. She is Manager Brands at Ogilvy Action (Pvt) Ltd., and possesses ten years experience in advertising and brand management