

'Exploiting the true potential of OOH Arena'

Developing strong and reputed brands makes good business sense – after all, brands are what the consumers relate to and buy. To build successful brands, it is important for marketers to exploit the true potential of billboards and other OOH media. More on this in an interview where impact's **Nitin Sharma** speaks with **Mukesh Manik**, M-I-C, EncycloMedia Networks Pvt. Ltd.

What is it that excites you about Billboards?

Media and advertising has always intrigued and amused me. A message is sent out to the masses repeatedly over a period of time, and that this message has a multi-dimensional impact on the choices that are made by an individual and the perception of a product is fascinating. Billboards are my favorite, as more and more people are spending time out of home. They also present their own set of challenges, as they have to deliver a message while the viewer is moving – in most cases at speeds of 60 km/ hour. This gives just a few seconds to catch the attention, deliver the message and assist brand recall. The trick lies in the design, which should be able to engage the viewer in those critical few seconds while there are other distractions like traffic, environmental landscape, music, etc. A well-designed billboard is easily one of the most powerful, consistent and effective means of communicating to an audience on the move. Marketers still have to exploit the true potential of this medium as this presents an opportunity like no other.

What role does innovation play in the OOH Media?

Innovation isn't just about using cutouts and neon, though they are effective at times. Innovation lies in understanding how best to use the tools available to enhance the billboard creative, to create an impact that has a lasting recall. Truly innovative billboards are remembered years later, much after the campaign is over. In the recent past, one of the most innovative billboards I have seen was the *Barclays Bank billboard*, which just carried their logo on a white background. The innovation was in its simplicity and ability to make the announcement that Barclays is now in India.

How does one justify the cost of innovations?

Innovation is perceived as being expensive but in actuality it is quite the opposite. In the Barclays billboard I mentioned above, there was no additional cost of materials, cutouts, neon, etc. but it still had the desired impact. Innovation drives recall and recall fuels sales. Advertising is meant to provoke a response. If the ad is forgotten, it cannot possibly invoke a call to action. Though there is technology available to measure the effectiveness of Outdoor advertising, the true measurement is in the aftereffects of the campaign. Product advertising is easier to measure, as compared to a service since the advertiser can just take a look at their sales graph.

What difference can be made in terms of innovation for Outdoor (Traditional Media) and for Indoor (Alternative Touch Points)?

I believe that a media plan consisting of an Outdoor campaign and an effective Point of Sale is sufficient to achieve sales objectives for a brand. Marketers need to appoint specialist agencies for the different media formats they advertise on. This is easier said than done. The creative and innovation has to be across all the formats. An agency specializing in TV commercials and Radio cannot possibly be expected to come up with innovative creative solutions for an Outdoor campaign.

Is Outdoor seeing a growth in popularity?

Clients are increasingly accepting Outdoor as an independent medium. The double-digit growth in the Outdoor advertising industry confirms this trend. There are over a 100 TV channels and hundreds of print publications, and the chances of an advertisement being missed is higher than ever. Outdoor advertising addresses that issue easily as a good outdoor campaign cannot be missed when people are on the streets. The industry will mature with the growth in Outdoor spends. Cutouts and Neon are considered innovations in the absence of specialist outdoor design studios.

Do you think that the changes in the Indian OOH Industry in the past 3-4 years will make it more than just a reminder medium?

As clients see path-breaking billboard designs by specialist agencies, they will demand the same for their brand as well. This will lead to fantastic creative innovation in Outdoor advertising and billboards will not be considered a poor cousin of mainstream advertising. There are many brands even today that successfully use only Outdoor Advertising to communicate their message.

How would you analyze the sync between agencies, media owners and the statutory authorities?

To expect the media owners, agencies and statutory authorities to come and work together is a far-fetched thought. The change has to be from within. I believe that if media owners offer international standard media formats and quality media displays to agencies, it will encourage better designs and print quality. This in turn will change the cityscape for the better. It has already started to happen with the introduction of street furniture, modern bus stops, etc. ■



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