

OUTDOOR INSIGHTS

Mukesh Manik, M-I-C Encyclomedia Networks Pvt. Ltd., shares his views with *Outdoor Advertising* in an exclusive interview on 'What's right for the outdoor medium'



What does it take to succeed in outdoor advertising?

To be successful, you must be involved. You must take the time to learn your client's business and brand attributes well. Let the client know that you care as much about the business as he or she does. Analyze the business, its chief competitor, its unique culture, mission, vision and trends of the category it's in. Most importantly, stay focused on brand attributes upon which the client can build. Be single minded, literally. Don't throw many attributes out there in the hope they'll take away just one. Be certain about the one you want them to take away. If you don't know your client's business intimately, you are likely to focus on attributes that really aren't important to the consumer, often at the client's request. It's your uncomfortable obligation to be honest and say, "That's an attribute that has no meaning to the consumer." Recommend what is right for business, what is supported by logic, research and solid, strategic thinking; that which differentiates your brand from the competition. Only then can you communicate in a compelling manner and cut through the clutter and attract interest and attention.

What according to you are the essentials of outdoor advertising?

There are five essential skill sets in outdoor advertising.

The first essential skill is creativity, the art of being innovative and imaginative. We must apply creativity to everything we do - tirelessly exploring innovative ways to communicate the brand's USP in a meaningful, relevant way. The message has to break through and resonate with

the consumer to be successful. Consumers are not waiting for your message. You must deliver it to them in an unexpected manner. An effective creative has an after-shock. It will be felt long after the campaign is over. When that happens, you've done your job. That's creativity; you can't put a price on.

The second skill is media savvy. With the media fragmentation increasing exponentially, each medium must be understood for what it is really capable of delivering. It must be targeted precisely and assessed with the end user in mind. As with the creative, media planning and placement must build the client's business.

The third is unyielding commitment. You are more than the agency; you must be an evangelist, preaching the virtues of your client to your staff, your client's staff and public. We must be committed advocates as well as dedicated business partners. The entrepreneurial approach that we apply to each of our client's business must be evident in every phase of the advertising development, from planning to creative to execution.

The fourth essential skill is discipline. At 'Encyclomedia', we assist clients in focusing on the compelling, differentiating selling points that include consumer consideration. We must never lose sight of that focus as we move from creative development through media planning and execution. We seek to reach the targeted consumers with an effective, focused communication to which they will respond.

The fifth is accountability. The bar is set with the client's business objectives. Then we raise it a few notches higher. Our philosophy is the image-building and branding must

always be balanced against the need to deliver on the bottom line. Advertising in Outdoor is a mean to an end, not an end in itself.

What's your definition of a breakthrough idea?

Breakthrough ideas might appear to be instant or impulsive, but they are not. They are based on sound strategy, outstanding visuals, and the correct application of timing and media. The art is in ensuring that all elements of communication work together, so that the end result is more powerful and effective. It's like conducting a symphony orchestra- all the instruments working together, the timing just right to make beautiful music. In outdoor advertising this is a total business solution.

How can a brand always remain top-of-mind?

It is important to understand the life cycle of a category, a brand, and a product to take a brand to the next level and drive long-term success. New brands must establish a niche. A mature brand must find new life, possibly by re-inventing itself through extension or by creating a new identity that connects with today's consumers.

How important is the budget for outdoor advertising?

Outdoor advertising will always, like any other advertising, be dependent on brand's budget to some degree. Having inadequate money to spend puts undue pressure on the advertising. Whether you have the budget or not, the advertising must be truthful, relevant, eye catching, memorable and down right pleasing, only then will it go through to the mind and memory of the consumer. Smart advertisers know that outdoor advertising helps develop brand awareness, and they select a specialist outdoor design and production agency to deliver the job.

What's your take on the changing media scenario?

We're a very visual audience. The world is changing in so many ways. Today, television shows and movies are quickly clipped, with constant talking and constant cuts. There are no more long scenes. In outdoor advertising one must understand that this is how people consume information, so one must work to bring them in, but then your campaign must nurture them along and be there for a long time. Remember that an outdoor medium is not a 'Speaker's point'.

Nitin Sharma