'We aim to build presence in all main towns in 3-4 years'

Mumbai-based India Outdoor Advertising, promoted by **Rakesh Valmiki** and **Michael D'Costa** , commands large footprints both as an agency and media owner and celebrated its 10 anniversary on June 11. The firm is directing particular attention on building its media ownership in the state of Uttar Pradesh, one of the most promising OOH markets in the country. India Outdoor Advertising also owns media properties in Mumbai, Kerala and Punjab.

Rakesh Valmiki, managing partner, India Outdoor Advertising , talks about the firm's growth plans in an interview to **network2media's Rajiv Raghunath** . Excerpts:

You have completed 10 years in the Indian outdoor industry. What are the highlights of your 10-year experience in this industry?

The true highlights of our 10-year experience in this industry are the strong relationships that we enjoy with our vendors, suppliers and all our business associates across India. Equally notable are our relationships with our direct clients, media and outdoor agencies.

We would also like to highlight our achievements such as the ownership of hoardings in Mumbai, Thane, and along Mumbai-Pune Expressway, as well as gantries across Mumbai. In addition, we own hoardings in Lucknow, Kanpur and parts of Punjab.

The overwhelming industry response to our 10th anniversary celebrations on June 11 was an endorsement of the deep bonding that we have with our clients, agencies, vendors, suppliers and our well wishers.

Do you see greater competition in the industry today? How do you cope with the new challenges?

Yes. There is lot of competition within this industry today and we expect this to increase in the coming days. But we are ready to cope with the new challenges by giving our best services to our valued clients and agencies and also by creating new outdoor media opportunities in the areas of our operations.

As you are aware, due to massive competition in the outdoor industry, clients are looking for new media outdoor options to survive and make a mark in the market.

Would you look at digital OOH opportunities as you expand your operations?

Digital OOH is here to stay and will grown exponentially in the next 5-10 years. In time, it will become cost-effective. In any case, it is quite impactful. But, at this stage we are not keen to look at digital OOH opportunities as we have other key priorities in view. Our focus on digital OOH will come about as we expand our footprints.

How important is it for the OOH industry to consider green options, such as use of solar energy for outdoor illumination?

We are in complete support of green options. Solar energy is eco-friendly, but the technology that is currently available does not provide sufficient illumination of hoardings and kiosks. Neon

signs too would not run efficiently. A few vendors have experimented with solar energy for illumination, but they eventually got back to conventional lighting. I hope that appropriate and affordable solar lighting for the outdoor domain come up soon. We will be happy to switch over.

What is your assessment of the role of industry bodies in addressing the common concerns of the industry? Do you have any suggestions in this regard?

The outdoor industry faces innumerable concerns and issues, originating in different quarters. We need an umbrella body that takes up the issues and addresses them for the benefit of the entire industry. For instance, there are tax-related issues that need to be taken up with the civic bodies at appropriate times, which only an active industry body can do.

What are your expansion plans in the current year?

We are more focused on developing more media in towns like Lucknow, Kanpur and Varanasi and major towns of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh & Punjab. In the south, we are doing well in Kochi and Trivandrum. The two cities in Kerala are very promising and we expect to increase our presence there.

Where would you like to see India Outdoor Advertising in the next 3-5 years?

We would like to see India Outdoor Advertising as a leading OOH outdoor media buying agency and open India Outdoor Advertising branches in the main towns of India in the coming 3-4 years and develop our own media wherever possible.

You can contact Rakesh Valmiki here