'The outdoor will work for you if it is used smartly and creatively'

Tata DOCOMO has maintains a sizeable presence in the outdoor spectrum since its launch in mid-2009. Over the last one year, the brand has run several high-decibel OOH campaigns in all key markets where it debuted. **Abdul Khan, Advisor to the MD and head - GSM marketing, Tata Teleservices (Maharashtra) Ltd** , maintains that OOH advertising is integral to brand's communication strategy. In an interview to **network2media's Rajiv Raghunath & Neha Nagpal** , Khan says that OOH can work as a lead medium for major promotions. An alumnus of IIT (Kharagpur) and IIM (Ahmedabad), he has over 20 years of experience in brand marketing and advertising. Excerpts:

Tata DOCOMO was a highly visible brand in the outdoor over the last one year, guided by a series of launch campaigns? How would rate the experience?

Our experience with OOH advertising has been pretty good. To say that the outdoor is a reminder medium is an archaic view. I can say that for us OOH has been the primary medium for our brand communication in Mumbai. There is always an element of newness attached with OOH advertising. Besides, it lends itself to innovation and topicality. Talking about the flexibility that it offers, when we planned to use neon signs in Mumbai and were presented with the choice of two large neon displays, we instead opted for 11 smaller neons across the city and that made a bigger impact.

The outdoor will work for you if it is used smartly and creatively. It would help if your partner OOH agency provides the right analytics.

Telcos form a major category advertiser in the outdoor? Do you expect this trend to continue over the next two years?

I can say that our brand will continue to look at OOH for our branding exercises. May be, we may not be present in this domain 24 x 7, but we will not opt out altogether at any time. In Mumbai, we have made a big presence in the OOH space. I would like to add that our focus is on the OOH, and not confined to traditional outdoor properties like hoardings.

Telcos use OOH to promote new services and new tariff plans. Do you see this leading to some kind of clutter?

Our consumers are used to multiple messaging. Hence, I don't see a reason for a 'one at a time' communication. Of course, we are not talking about 50 sets of communication at any given time. It isn't about the range of messages going out. The key lies in identifying the target audience and contextualising the communication.

Industry trends indicate that telcos would be increasingly targeting the smaller cities and towns for growth? Do you think the campaigns in these markets will need to be different from the ones run in the metros and big cities?

Tata DOCOMO is an aspirational brand that particularly appeals to the youth who have similar preferences, be they in metros, cities or smaller towns. Hence, there is no need to dumb down the communication message when it goes out to a smaller city or town. Of course, the

language would vary, but not the imagery or concept.

Brand activation and other onground activities are becoming integral to outdoor campaigns. What is your view on this?

Onground activities are becoming quite important as consumers seek direct brand experience. Tata DOCOMO has set up its own experience centre on Hill Road in Mumbai as well as other cities where consumers could visit to get an experience of our offerings. They would have questions, perhaps on valued add services, that get answered there. We believe that communication is a two-way process. Onground activities help us to obtain the consumer viewpoint.

Telecom brands are seen to be striking an emotional chord with consumers through various community-based and development activities using the outdoor media. Is this a focus area for Tata DOCOMO?

This is not a tick-mark item but if there's a CSR angle to any activity, we will fulfil that. You will appreciate that the Tata Group is engaged in numerous development activities. In Mumbai, Tata DOCOMO is associated with Sophia College in supporting the education of special children.

What is the level of importance that you would attach to innovations in outdoor campaigns? Are they essential in markets that are relatively cluttered?

Innovations that we see in the outdoor space are somewhat predictable. The industry should come up with new basis concepts for executing campaigns. I don't see that happening. Innovation should be planned for furthering the brand credo, and to create a refreshingly different presence.

Do you consider digital OOH options when a campaign is planned?

Here again, I would say that this is not a tick-mark item but if a particular campaign calls for the use of digital OOH, we will go for it. I would like to see greater interactivity in the digital OOH offerings. There are options like augmented reality that creatively deliver higher consumer engagement. We will look at such options at an appropriate time.

On the whole, I feel that OOH needs to be present in a more impactful manner at youth hangouts like college canteens, etc.

Where do you see Tata DOCOMO in the next 3 years?

We are gearing up to reach out to as many consumers as we can. In time, we would get into segmented offerings and of course usher in 3G services. You can contact Abdul Khan here