



**‘Outdoor firms engaged in city infrastructure projects are not focused on the maintenance of the utilities’**

Over the last 10 months since assuming the additional duty of regulating the Delhi outdoor industry, **B N Singh, OSD--advertisements, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)**, has taken bold steps to regulate and standardise the outdoor media in areas that come under the jurisdiction of the civic body. Singh has also directed attention on boosting the MCD’s advertising revenues by placing demands on other civic bodies in the city to share advertising revenues accrued from media properties that reside on lands belonging to the MCD. At the same time, he has come down heavily on unauthorised hoardings, unilaterally and in partnership with the industry bodies. Singh talks about the eventful outdoor experience in an interview to

**network2media’s Rajiv Raghunath**

. Excerpts:

**You have completed ten months in your role as OSD--advertisements, MCD. What has this role meant to you and what are indeed the accomplishments?**

My primary objective at the very outset was to bring in greater transparency in the MCD’s dealings with the outdoor industry. Associated with this was the goal of minimising, if not eliminating, unauthorised outdoor advertising in the city. I believe that we have covered significant ground on both these fronts. Further, I also set upon the task of protecting the MCD interest in several pending court cases related to outdoor advertising revenue sharing arrangements with other civic bodies. Here too, the results are encouraging.

At the same time, we have adhered to the Supreme Court observation in letter and spirit that the revenue realisations from the outdoor media in Delhi should be counter-balanced with the greater developmental goal.

**You have taken firm steps to curb unauthorised hoardings in the city. How did you go about the task?**

When I took over the current role I realised that the penalty imposed on those responsible for unauthorised hoardings in the city was too little to have any visible impact. The penalty, often times, was mere Rs 200, that too after several rounds of legal action. So, I introduced the 2x penalty norm wherein the advertising companies and the outdoor agencies associated with the use of unauthorised media properties were served notices to pay up twice the benchmark license fee each. Notices were sent to the managing directors and CEOs of advertising companies that were found to be on the wrong side of the regulation. This not only curbed the widespread problem of unauthorised hoardings in the city but also raised awareness among the companies about the outdoor norms. I reckon this move was a first of its kind in the country.

**Has the industry responded favourably to these steps?**

Yes indeed. This is a win-win situation for all stakeholders. You pay and you get the permission to conduct your business. The number of displays has gone up. There is more

variety in the outdoor media.

**You have also prevailed upon the Delhi Outdoor Advertisers Association (DOAA) to play an active role in curbing unauthorised practices. Are satisfied with the level of internal regulation that the industry has demonstrated?**

I am quite happy with the DOAA initiatives regarding internal regulation. My message to the industry body was, that all inter-firm issues should be tackled by the association itself, whereas the association and the MCD would discuss matters at the industry level.

**What about the MCD revenue flows?**

Revenues from advertising have gone up by 150-200 percent every month. Importantly, by making unauthorised advertising costly we succeeded in promoting legal media which has had a positive effect on our own revenues. Also, we have ushered in a more predictable regulatory regime.

**Have you taken any steps to promote a competitive environment in the outdoor?**

Yes, we have. Earlier, media properties were tendered out on zonal-basis. That led to opaque practices. Now, we tender out properties on site-basis, so in any given zone there are multiple operators. Meaning, more outdoor firms get to participate in the Delhi outdoor spectrum and they all exert a certain 'check and balance' upon each other.

**This brings us to the area of public-private partnerships (PPP). What is your assessment of the role of outdoor players in public infrastructure projects?**

In my view, the outdoor firms that take up infrastructure development and maintenance projects are far too focused on the revenue considerations and do not pay adequate attention to the maintenance of the projects. That tends to defeat our objective of delivering high quality services to the public. This is the case with regard to public urinals, parking lots, etc. I believe the maintenance of these properties should go to agencies that have the requisite capabilities and interest.

**What are the next steps on the anvil in regulating the Delhi outdoor media?**

We would want to standardise the signages and displays in the markets, for better aesthetics. For this, we are talking to the shopowners associations. As I have said, for the MCD, city development and aesthetics will be the key considerations in regulating the outdoor media.

[You can contact B N Singh here](#)