'Innovations act as clutter-breakers, so they are important for us'

Vodafone is credited with some of the most innovative campaigns in the outdoor domain. The brand has not only made an effective use of the medium to take its value propositions to a wide cross-section of consumers, but has also supported social causes like environment protection. **Sanjay Warke - CEO, Vodafone Essar Mobile Services Limited, Delhi**, talks about the brand's outdoor experience in an interview to **network2media's Neha Nagpal**. Excerpts:

The outdoor has seen a sizeable presence of telecom brands in recent years. How have you approached this medium in taking your brand message to your target audience?

As you know ,telecom is a very competitive industry. It's important from our viewpoint to ensure a continuous connect with our target audience. So, the outdoor is an important medium to play and it is clearly a reminder medium. It is important that we plan for innovations in the outdoor. If you are one among many, there are higher chances of losing your way in the clutter. Hence we always do something innovative like the Ravan with ten heads, Erick, etc.

The brand objectives vary when it comes to the outdoor. When it is a brand launch, it is about salience, leading to a heavy use of outdoor. As we move towards stature, the use of outdoor reduces but the objective is pretty much on building stature. Now we talk about innovations. It's not about flashing all over but about standing out in the general clutter using creative and innovative displays. Hence our advertising budget for the outdoor varies depending upon the specific needs of the brand.

The outdoor delivers to a local audience unlike the print or television. Do you communicate differently on this medium?

If you were to plan a Ravan in Mumbai, it wouldn't make sense. The festival is celebrated much more in North India. But doing something with Ganesha would be an area of interest for Mumbaikers. In that sense, localisation becomes critical and the outdoor becomes important in your advertising strategy. To be able to capture the imagination of the customer is indeed important.

Talking about onground activities, we do a lot of such events. Last year we planned events associated with the Navratras to connect with customers but this time we focused on CWG 2010 instead. We evaluate these on merit as the advertising budget has limits. We have to look at allocating the advertising budget to get the maximum value for money.

Over the last one year, telecom service providers have used the outdoor medium for promoting new tariff plans as well as value-added services. Which of the two registers more with the consumers via outdoor advertising?

It's difficult to actually measure these. More than this comparison, it's the relevance and the way they have been presented that would make the difference. So you can have a tariff message which may not appeal to consumers but if presented in a creative and innovative could make all the difference. You have seen the way we presented the plain tariff plans the

'Zoozoo' way.

Are you concerned about the general clutter of outdoor media in the main cities? What is the brief to your agencies in tackling this issue?

Clutter is continuously growing, in all parts of the country. The question is how do we stand out. Hence innovation becomes the key. We brief our agencies to be as innovative as possible in sustaining our brand message. The crucial thing is to be consistent with the brand value, to ensure that the message is delivered effectively, and to be as innovative as possible.

Is it necessary to use innovations to deliver your brand message in the outdoor? Are you satisfied with the kind of innovations that agencies deliver?

The pressure on agencies is always to out-innovate the other in the outdoor arena. The important thing is to ensure that you are consistently working with your agencies to outshine other brands.

Is the lack of uniform measurement metrics in the outdoor a concern area for you when you look at outdoor advertising?

Yes, there are no accepted metrics which tell us how the outdoor industry is working. There were some studies initiated in Mumbai and Pune which will probably help in that direction but I believe it will take time to get the established uniform measurement metrics in place.

This has been discussed for a long time. Even when I was working with Cadbury's, which was long ago, we used to talk about this; about what should be done in the absence of established outdoor measurement metrics, how many people pass by the displays, how we should access the feedback, what is the noticeability of the hoardings, etc. These are very subjective. The best way to find out if the outdoor is working for you is to know how many people talk about it. The proof of the pudding is in its eating.

Would you say that CWG Delhi 2010 has opened up new OOH opportunities?

Yes, it has actually increased the opportunity for creating innovations. All these events have inflection points. If there are no such events coming up, the outdoor would have been growing on its own pace. With such events we will be seeing a lot of innovations.

If we have to compare India with the international markets, we have a lot to catch up but if we look at the development over the last five years, we have come a long way. India has competition with its own self.

Vodafone branding of the E-Rick was an interesting initiative. Is this a one-off initiative, or are you planning similar initiatives in Delhi?

Clean environment sustainability is something that we as a brand are associated with. We were associated with the Clean Delhi initiative with Art of Living. We have done the Erick. We try and promote the E-Bill service which helps in saving paper, and we are looking at launching the solar phone and solar energy for network sites. So there is a whole lot that we are doing for the sustainability of clean environment in Delhi. That's a very critical area for us. For Delhi, we are clear that we would like to be associated with clean environment activity in some way or the other.

Erick is something we would like to be associated with and continue to do so, and we are examining other options to promote the clean environment sustainability initiative in Delhi.

Would you say that social communication is an important dimension of brand communication? If yes, could you discuss this in the context of Vodafone's CSR initiatives?

Yes it is. Social communication is very important. One of the important pillars for our brand is how we present it because you know how CSR initiatives are being looked at by other brands.

And Vodafone again would like to be ahead in the race. The kind of social initiatives and causes we actually support and the way we go about doing it is actually the reason we looked at Erick before anybody could even think about it.

What after Zoozoo?

There was a question, what after the pug, then Zoozoo came. I think both have got legs in terms of communication and are not a spent force as of now. I think we should continue with them. What would be the next, has not yet been worked out but staying with these two for a while is something that should do very well for the brand. You can contact Sanjay Warke here