

'OOH is ideal for communicating specific messages'

Tata Teleservices is one of the biggest advertising entities in the OOH domain. The company has rolled out notable innovations in the OOH space to engage with consumers in multifarious ways. Some of these displays have acquired iconic status in recent years, governed by the innovation imperative. **Lloyd Mathias, president, corporate, Tata**Teleservices

, who is also chairman of Media

Research Users Council (MRUC)

- , talks about the growth and development of the OOH industry in an interview to network2media's Rajiv Raghunath & Neha Nagpal
- . Excerpts:

You have worked with some of the best known brands that also command significant outdoor presence in the country. Over these years, have you seen any visible changes in the outdoor domain to speak of?

The outdoor advertising industry has come a long way in meeting the needs of brand communication but there are still challenges to be overcome. A large part of the industry is still unorganised, and as a result there are no uniform standards in the way this business is handled. As chairman of MRUC, I am quite aware of the roadblocks that are there, and we are working out ways for the industry to surmount them.

But as I have said the OOH industry is growing and increasingly getting integrated with the overall brand communications plank. It is part of 360 degree brand communications that are rolled out today.

Importantly, for sectors like telecom, in which we operate, the OOH presents a strong platform to communicate regional messages. So, while television is the medium for communicating across the national markets, OOH is ideal for communicating specific messages.

The other key development that I am seeing is of innovation. There is a whole lot of innovation taking place in this medium today, unlike in the past when outdoor displays were largely adapted versions of print campaigns. Both clients and media agencies have worked in tandem to bring alive this medium. In time, I am hopeful that moving messages in this medium will also gain wider acceptance.

What in your view are the showstoppers for the industry at this stage?

The OOH industry requires robust measurement metrics. Currently, this industry is highly fragmented and there is little attention being directed toward this imperative. MRUC has taken cognizance of this important requirement. Print and television have IRS and TRPs, respectively, as audience measurement metrics. There is little reason why the OOH industry should not have a common currency for audience measurement.

The other key concern is the increasing visual pollution in the cities, with unregulated hoardings mushrooming. This is something that both advertisers and the OOH industry need to address.

MRUC has decided to begin the second round of IOS. Will measurement metrics alone resolve the problems that bedevil the industry?

MRUC is focused upon building pan-India OOH metrics that are reliable. That will come about, but importantly the OOH industry will have to step up its own self-regulation to be able to draw in more brands.

What steps are necessary for this self-regulation?

The industry should develop its own 'code of conduct' that is uniformly followed across all domestic markets. The code should include all aspects of the business including safety norms for people putting up the displays.

Globally, digital OOH is acquiring new found acceptance among advertising brands. Do you see similar trends in India?

We are already witness to several key digital OOH initiatives in the country, such as high-definition LCD displays. But to get to the next level, this medium will have to acquire and offer greater interactive features. A response-led approach will bring better results. Interactivity can work well in the ambient media.

We are seeing a greater number of brands opting for onground promotions along with conventional outdoor advertising. Are you seeing a trend here?

Brands are indeed looking at activation with greater intent today. There are various consumer connect initiatives on view. With Bluetooth, this can be taken to an entirely new level.

What measures are required for the OOH industry to transcend to the next level, so to say?

First up, there is urgent need to establish standard quantitative measurement metrics. And since the outdoor presents such diversity in terms of media properties and locations, a ratings scale will be useful to the advertising clients. How do you compare a standard display with a moving message? Certain metrics are needed here.

I also believe that the ambient media can be better utilised, involving both obtrusive and non-obtrusive media.

Above all, I would reiterate the need for a self-regulation, such that wins the confidence of all brands at all times.

Is this medium ideal for social communication?

I have seen brands and OOH players displaying social messages such as on traffic safety and other issues of the day. However, from the industry standpoint, the social communication will have to be done within the ambit of OOH business.

There are early signs of Indian OOH going global. Is this a definitive trend?

Yes. Indian OOH is gradually scaling up to global levels and will get integrated with the global OOH business. We are ready for it.

This is a people-centred business. Shouldn't the industry plan for building its own talent pool?

I should certainly think so. Some level of planning is still required for talent development.

To sum up, what is your key message to the industry?

The OOH industry should focus upon measurement metrics, promote self-regulation and sustain the innovative approach to business. You can contact Lloyd Mathias here