‘Content is indeed king on this medium’

Mumbai-headquartered Realtime Interactive Media, the exclusive content and marketing partner of Equifone Solutions -- which holds the rights for installing LCD screens along with GPS, GPRS and Bluetooth connectivity inside 150 BEST buses in Mumbai – is one of the foremost transit digital OOH firms in the country. Realtime Interactive Media runs the 'I - Mumbai TV' network inside designated BEST buses which is rich in content and high on audience engagement, reasons that have propelled a whole range of advertising brands to test this medium. In September, the firm also won the ad rights inside 250 Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) air-conditioned intra-city buses. **Kaushik Tanna, managing director, Realtime Interactive Media**
, talks about the transit digital OOH industry’s growth prospects in an interview to **network2media’s Rajiv Raghunath**
. Excerpts:

Transit media is one of the fastest growing segments in the OOH domain. Are you seeing any new trends here?

Transit media is not a new phenomenon. Properties like bus back panels have been there for a long time. They are an integral part of the OOH industry. And brands in general have opted to go with transit media because of the reach that it provides and the uncluttered environment in which it operates. So, the scope is huge. In this, transit digital OOH has come to occupy a key position. Transit digital OOH also provides higher consumer engagement with interactive features that are of essence in brand positioning.

What is the big opportunity in the transit digital OOH space?

Public transportation is the preferred mode of transportation for the majority of people living in the metros, cities and towns. Governments too are focusing greater attention on upgrading public transportation networks that include improved bus services. With PPP and other interventions including JNNURM we are seeing modern bus transportation gaining traction not just in the metros and cities. Given that this is a highly visible media vehicle, advertising brands are getting attracted to the media properties available on the outside and inside of city buses. There is huge scope for transit digital OOH like LCD screens inside buses in these markets.

Brands have also taken note of the fact that there is a captive audience inside the buses that can be engaged with content-rich advertising. What is important to know is that the majority of commuters travel within defined timeframe, so it is easy to target and monitor the audience preferences.

Transit digital OOH is a different ball game. So how do you approach brands keeping this in view?

Transit digital OOH needs to be positioned differently to advertising clients. To build consumer engagement we place great emphasis on content. Content is indeed king on this medium. If we were to just play ads, it would seem like an extension of all the advertising that consumers are exposed to all the time. Hence, we are called upon to be more creative and

innovative.

Internationally, China has made significant progress in this domain, with Vision China Media and Focus Media taking giant strides. They even operate live TV channels inside buses with unique programming.

Are we likely to see similar trends in Indian markets in the near future?

The opportunity is there. Since 70 percent of the commuters are like to be repetitive consumers, present in specific timeframes, it is possible to run programmes on the lines of daily soaps on TV. **What are the typical challenges in running transit digital OOH across different markets in India?**

Investment in this business is huge, both in terms of equipment and technology. Governments have also raised the rentals, which puts significant pressure on the business. I would like to see Governments keeping the rentals at moderate levels and instead consider transit digital OOH inside buses as an additional facility being offered to commuters.

Also, the content that is generated for this medium has its own costs, and lack of defined measurement metrics adds to the challenges.

Have you made any attempt at developing inhouse measurement metrics with which you could go to advertising clients?

We are working on this. We are working on log reports pertaining to the content shown, and the viewership obtained thereby. With cameras we are able to ascertain how many people viewed the screens at particular times. These become the basis for our analysis and the data we present to clients.

As such we conduct random surveys to study consumer preferences, but we are also planning to work more systematically with well-known research firms on this.

Digital OOH does not get the attention that it deserves. The OOH industry is fairly pre-occupied with challenges of a different kind. Do you think the digital OOH should collectively articulate its own views, maybe by creating a separate forum?

On the business side, some level of consolidation will take place in the digital OOH domain, which will have a positive impact on the industry. However, the digital OOH industry would do well to set up a forum where the players are able to find common ground and address common issues.

Is the Indian transit digital OOH industry ready to globalise?

Not at this stage. The Indian market is large and vastly untapped. While we do work with international partners for technology, the focus will be on leveraging the domestic opportunities in the coming times.

Where does Realtime Interactive Media stand in relation to the growth and development of transit digital OOH?

The metro markets are growing and we have sizeable presence in Mumbai and Bangalore. We are also looking to expand our network in these two cities, apart from expanding into other cities. The two areas that we would focus upon in particular are brand awareness of the medium and efficient implementation of the growth plans. We expect that passengers will progressively demand that digital OOH screens are installed in buses, both for inter-city and intra-city movement. You can contact Kaushik Tanna here