'It's all about how you position the media to the clients and offer the value propositions'

Transit media is today one of the strongest pillars of OOH business worldwide. But transit media itself is a universe with several bodies moving in their own orbits. The predominance of airport media is understood by the entire advertising and marketing fraternity. The emergence of Metro media properties and refurbished bus queue shelters is also well chronicled in the OOH annals. Moving transit properties like cab branding and taxi tops too make the headlines. But, it is the advertising opportunities inside urban public transport buses that is the big story in the making, for two good reasons: most metropolitan bus transport bodies in the country have modernised their fleets; and a greater number of people representing all socio-economic groups are commuting by bus. This is a large captive audience for any advertising brand, and the aggregate numbers are huge. Bangalore is the latest to see much action on this front. I Reach Ads, the OOH arm of Secunderabad-based Technoedge Electronics (P) Ltd, is gearing up to execute the exclusive ad rights that it has obtained for 5,500 non-AC Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) buses. **Kedar Rao, business director, I Reach Ads**, talks about the firm's OOH plans in an interview to
network2media's Rajiv Raghunath
. Excerpts:

I Reach Ads has made a grand debut in the OOH domain with a large BMTC contract in the kitty. What made you go for this contract?

The ad rights for 5,500 non-AC BMTC buses is a big opportunity to establish an extensive reach within the city of Bangalore and we did not want to miss it. Today, 70 percent of people in the city commute by bus, so you can well imagine how important this segment is in the context of brand advertising. Also, the audience measurement metrics can be easily worked out as BMTC maintains the data on the bus movements and passenger load, which makes the sales function that much smoother.

Inside bus branding is emerging as an important OOH vertical with opportunities like this coming up not just in the major Metros but also in the mini Metros and Tier I cities. However, there is no clear evidence that the players operating in this domain are generating sufficient revenues or making significant profits. What would be your approach toward building revenues?

It is true that the bulk of OOH spend would go to conventional outdoor media. But we believe that awareness building and client contacts will alter this somewhat. We are touching base with every potential client in the city and the response thus far is very encouraging. So I believe it is all about how you position the media to the clients and offer the value propositions. Anyhow, our immediate focus is on building the I Reach Ads brand, and am sure the revenues will follow. We will subsequently tap into other OOH segments within Bangalore, before we venture out to the other key markets.

I Reach Ads has a presence in Bangalore and you are able to connect with all the local

clients. But this medium is also an advertising opportunity for brands based elsewhere for which Bangalore is an important market. How do you plan to get across to those advertising brands?

Currently we don't have a physical presence in other key cities but we do plan to open offices in Mumbai, Delhi and other cities where we will station our people to reach out to those brands.

Would you consider getting into marketing alliances with players who are already operating in this domain in the other key markets?

Our ambition is to build the I Reach Ads brand. So we believe that a marketing alliance will not work for us. We would prefer to build the market on our own accord.

In your BMTC contract, putting up LCD screens is a key component. From experience, engaging non-ad content is seen to be critical in generating audience interest in what is displayed on the screens inside the buses. Do you have a content team to manage this?

Not as yet. Currently, we are focusing on the other components of the contract. For the digital content, we will consider getting into some technology tie-up. As we are talking to a captive audience, I believe that the ad content itself should make the difference and engage the people on board the buses.

You are already reaching out to the advertising clients in the city. But, what will it take for the media planners to start considering this medium as an important platform for their respective brands?

The fact that the audience measurement metrics in this domain can be developed is one big plus. They can be further refined. Also, technology is playing an increasingly important role, what with Bluetooth connectivity, for instance. Commuters can download ads and view them on their mobiles. These factors should arouse the interest of media planners and advertising brands alike.

It is evident that inside bus advertising and branding is gaining ground in several cities across the country. But what we are seeing is fragmented media ownership in this sphere. As this medium grows, are we likely to see a wave of consolidation leading to a couple of big brands running the show?

That is highly unlikely considering that investments in this medium are of a high order. Besides, these are done through tendering. May be, at the technology level, some kind of alliance might happen but there is no evidence of that at this stage.

Tell us about Bangalore OOH. How is the city shaping up in terms of outdoor advertising?

This is a booming market with large consumer spend. So brands are taking up vantage OOH positions in the city. We are glad that we are present in this city.

5,500 buses is a staggering figure, especially since Bangalore is not as far flung as some of the other major metros. Yet the city is not uniform in all aspects. How are you packaging the advertising opportunity to the brands?

First, there are ten different kinds of buses in the BMTC network. Second, the buses go to all parts of the city, each of which is quite different. So, we have developed different packages. Our packages are not based on route numbers, but are linked with the specific bus depots. That will help an advertising brand to get to the TG in a definitive manner.

Urban transport bodies have upgraded their fleets in recent years in keeping with the national urban renewal mission. What is your assessment of the quality of buses made available to you under the contract?

The city bus fleet has been modernised and we are pleased with what we have seen.

Are you looking at similar opportunities in other cities, like Delhi?

We don't have a network outside of Bangalore. But, we will approach the other promising markets in due course. Yo can contact Kedar Rao here