 ‘Our network particularly appeals to brands seeking innovative solutions’

Four years into the business, LiveMedia -- which pioneered the concept of ‘captive audience networks’ in India for advertising brands to reach out to their target audience in destinations like restaurants, coffee shops and office complexes – commands the largest screens network in the country and has set several new benchmarks in consumer engagement. **Rajan Mehta, CEO, LiveMedia**
, talks about the company’s growth experience, industry trends and the way forward in an interview to
network2media’s Rajiv Raghunath
. Excerpts:

Digital OOH is a growth story in the developed markets. However, in India this medium has grown in fits and starts. Tell us about your growth experience.

Let me clarify at the very outset that we are a destination media. The term ‘digital OOH’ does not adequately define what we do. However, with reference to your question, I would like to point out that with changing lifestyles, media consumption habits have changed, paving the way for new media formats to emerge and develop. More people are spending more time out of home at places like office, restaurants, coffee shops and commercial complexes. Even a hospital today is no longer a ‘gloom and doom’ place but a part of lifestyle. We saw an opportunity in putting up networked LCD screens in these places, which serve as a powerful medium for brands to connect with their target groups in a focused manner.

In foraying into this business we also took cognizance of the fact that conventional media is highly fragmented. Nobody is a big daddy today. And there was a clear role cut out for us.

In the four years this industry has grown steadily to reach an overall size of Rs 60-70 crore. This might not be a big number but the industry has come into own. Haven’t we seen businesses that make a good beginning lose their way and go into oblivion? Fortunately, that’s not the case with regard to our business. We have been recognised for what we are.

Our industry growth would hinge on the overall economic growth and infrastructure development. Our network will expand as more restaurants come up, more clubs are established, and more such destinations are created. Greater acceptability of this medium will also drive business in the coming times. What is quite remarkable is that 85 percent of our advertising clients give us repeat business.

I would add that as brands come under greater pressure to seek innovative solutions to reach out to their consumers, the solutions that we offer would increasingly appeal to them.

Our medium compares with the Internet in many ways. The Net can map the profile of its users, their locations, and the particular context of usage. Likewise, we know the profile of our consumers, the particular locations where our screens are put up, and the context in which our media is consumed. This will greatly help an advertising brand in targeting its audience. The intrinsic value of advertising on our network can be gauged.

Are you satisfied with the pace of growth in your business, especially in revenue

terms?

As a young player our focus is on providing the right value propositions to our advertising clients. Money will follow. I have seen that certain start-ups in their eagerness to push ahead on all fronts have ended up shooting their own feet.

This industry has huge potential, and as I said before, advertising clients are looking at a new media mix. They are no longer interested in just impressions that the conventional media delivers. Instead the focus has shifted to consumer engagement. Our network is ideally suited to meet this goal. Our screens are put up in places where people sit down. In due course, we can enhance the consumer engagement by giving people a direct product experience linked with the advertising shown on our screens.

Are media planners taking note of your network and are you able to attract a larger number of brands with the existing inventory?

We need to evangelise this medium and continue to create a positive experience for all advertising brands. The word of mouth itself will bring more brands into our fold. We steal people's glances to our screens with engaging content and that's how we will expand.

How do you assess the audience engagement level?

We work with IMRB in assessing the audience engagement. The findings are used purely for internal consumption. From experience we have seen that as the engagement level increases, more brands take to our medium.

To ensure the highest quality of delivery, we use only branded screens, most of which are 42" screens. The animated content shown on our network is a big draw with the audience. Short programmes like 'Make My Word', 'Humour Live', 'Kitty & Witty', 'Graffiti Live' and 'Kaun Banega Hoshiyar' represent our content which seeks to deliver education, entertainment and engagement. Recall studies have revealed a high degree of recall of these programmes.

The large screens, 80 percent of which are at eye-level, have enhanced the audience engagement. Our philosophy is that the screens should look at people. For the advertisers, we have created the right values and right pricing. Today, we command 65 percent of the industry business and at any time some 25 brands are being advertised on our screens. Our network has 6,500-7,000 screens in over 3,000 locations.

Which are the main advertising categories that have taken to your network in a big way?

There are numerous advertising categories including FMCG. In the initial stage, FMCG brands were not inclined to advertise on our screens but over the last 3-4 months we have seen a spurt in FMCG brand advertising on our screens.

Audience measurement is a concern area in the OOH domain? What steps have you taken on this count?

We undertake demographic and psychographic studies as well as research on the noticeability of our screens, the level of engagement (we are a glance media) and effectiveness of our medium – which is done on the basis of recall studies.

Do you believe that participating entities in your domain can come together on a common platform and address the common concerns as well as create new growth opportunities?

This would be a positive step for the industry, as and when it happens.

Is there scope for digital screen networks in the smaller cities? Are you planning to connect with these markets?

We have already entered the smaller cities and towns on an experimental basis, with some

250-300 screens. Our screens have been put up at select ITV eChoupals. These screens draw large audience, as they offer high quality viewing without interruption. We are also experimenting with vernacular content.

Are you planning to expand overseas? Not at the moment. This is quite like a brick and mortar business. You need to take care of your assets and get the business model right. This is our immediate goal. You can contact Rajan Mehta here