'Profits are a by-product of right people, right product, right process and right perception' Even as the Indian OOH industry basks in the glory of a sunny economic environment, leading OOH firms are beginning to focus on factors like robust processes, products and people to sustain profits over a longer period. **Kaushik Chakravorty – ED and Group COO- Retail and OOH, Starcom MediaVest Group**, talks about the current industry trends and the factors that will support the industry's growth over the longer run, in an interview to **network2media's Neha Nagpal & Rajiv Raghunath**. Excerpts:

The Indian OOH industry has had a good year and the prospects look good for Year 2011. Can this be sustained over a longer period?

The current growth follows a difficult period that the Indian OOH industry encountered in 2009 when things fell apart globally. The Indian industry was not insulated from the global economic meltdown but the positive aspect was that our economy recovered quickly. Interestingly, when the slowdown began our industry realised the importance of focusing upon the product and associated processes rather than just profits. It is this mindset change that will stand the industry in good stead in the long run.

For me, profits are a by-product of a few important factors such as right people, right product, right process and right perception about you.

As a group what was your response to the changed economic circumstances and emerging industry patterns?

We are one of those specialised, diversified, cohesive groups in the country. And we are part of a global set-up. In the emerging scenario, we decided to bank on our core strengths, gain a global perspective of the broad level changes happening in the industry and adopt global practices by Indianising them to a certain extent. As a result, our organisation is much more cohesive today and we think differently. Importantly, we maintained our focus on transparency in all our dealings.

Could you please explain why some of the global processes had to be Indianised?

As a communications company we use various planning tools that have to be modulated according to the local conditions. For instance, when we use our proprietary tool SCOPE, it has to be adjusted for the Indian market conditions. We know for a fact that data like traffic count in India is not as robust as say in developed markets like Japan. That being the case, we see how much of the generic part of the tool can be used here. At the same time, the scale of operations in India is umatched. Today, for one of our clients we are working in 700 plus towns. I don't know if there are many other countries where the coverage can be so extensive.

The OOH business is highly diversified and has numerous touchpoints. Would you still call this a reminder medium?

OOH was a support medium for a long time but the perception about this medium has changed over the last 3-4 years. This change might be slow but it's steady. Many clients are

now moving money from the traditional advertising arena to the so called non- traditional arena like OOH. However, there is no conflict between the traditional and non-traditional mediums. If we can tie the two together and work on ambient, brands will get much more exposure.

OOH is no more a reminder medium. It has graduated by its own merit to become a main medium in certain product categories. But, I would like to look at the entire spectrum of brand communication instead of just a segment or medium. We does matter is the consistency of the communication that can raise my interest level and curiosity level to the point that I go looking for the product. At Starcom – Vivaki we religiously practice what we call integrated marketing communication.

Is the integrated approach finding a larger market?

Yes indeed. Today you have more and more brands demanding integrated communication. If you look at the top agencies, they all have practices that facilitate the integration. I would say that at least the vision is there and for some organisations like us, this is not an option but a mandate. We are media-neutral people. We will not just go and offer OOH because it suits us, but would rather offer clients integrated communication that includes print, TV, internet and OOH.

The OOH industry has grown in different directions. Segments like transit media, malls and digital OOH have caught the fancy of many advertising clients. What is your impression of the emerging OOH segments?

They are all growth multipliers but when it comes to planning, the approach is not media-specific. The choice of segments entirely depends on the specific communication needs. The emerging segments have given the planner a broader basket to choose from.

At the very outset you referred to the imperative of finding the 'right people'. What steps are required for the industry to enhance its talent pool?

As far as talent is concerned we as a group are a little fanatical about it. Talent is not a resource. There's much more to the people who work for you. I am not saying that we must welcome or accept wrong doings. But if people are doing good things, appreciate the effort. Give them enough responsibility, and enough freedom to make mistakes. The supervisors' job is to figure out how we can minimise those mistakes.

Are you taking any specific steps to develop your team capabilities?

We are a very process-oriented organisation and there is a lot of knowledge sharing happening between our Indian team and our global set-up. We also have an intranet where our people can share case studies. We are also present on Yammer.

We encourage what is called 'liquid' talent. In our company we offer the flexibility of moving or shifting from one country to another.

Where do you see the industry going in the coming years and what are your own goals?

What we would always like to see are happy clients and happy employees. Having that said we are taking steps to bring a lot of new thinking into our processes. As the industry itself evolves, we have to evolve faster than the industry. We are not after numbers. If we have the correct process the good results will follow. What we have to do is to accelerate this process.

At the industry level, digitalisation is happening. People have started to realise that value has to be tangible. Clients are beginning to see you as consultants. You can contact Kaushik Chakravorty here