'We spend a significant portion of our media budgets on OOH'

Amitesh Rao is the director - brand and media, MTS India. In his current portfolio, Rao is at the helm of brand building and drives the marketing ommunications function for the company. His responsibilities include growing and enhancing MTS' brand image, experience and promise by propagating it throughout all aspects of the company. He has fifteen years of rich experience with companies and brands like Pepsi, Nestle, Microsoft etc. from many standpoints - as chief executive, marketing head, communications specialist, sales manager and entrepreneur. In an interview to **network2media**, Rao talks about the importance of OOH advertising, innovations and various other facets of the industry. Edited excerpts:

How important is Out-of-Home advertising in your overall media mix?

Out of Home Advertising is a very important part of the entire plan, because it delivers on two fronts; first, it aids brand salience, and second, in some specific environments, it catalyses actual purchase decisions.

Does conventional outdoor medium take preference in your media consumption over other forms of OOH media?

We have an optimum mix of both. Being a data focused voice enabled telecom service provider, it is important for us to ride on the technology drive, high-impact innovative OOH media, while also utilising conventional media to magnify secondary visibility and brand saliency .

With noise levels increasing in the outdoor advertising arena, what are the principal differentiators that you aim to create to stand out from clutter?

The key differentiation depends on 'HOW' you use OOH media – it is vital to innovate, to be creative with content as well as form factor. Cutting through the clutter can also be influenced by choosing new innovative OOH media, maximizing interactivity, and exploring co-branding possibilities.

With metro markets getting saturated, are you looking more aggressively at using OOH in the non-metro cities?

We are already using OOH media extensively in non-metro areas, independent of the saturation levels in metros.

Since you are a global brand, does your media usage pattern in India follow a global approach, or is the media usage in India unique in itself? In that context, how does OOH usage in India compare with the usage of the medium globally?

Though we are a global brand, our use of media is specific to media consumption patterns in India and within our target group.

How does airport advertising feature in your overall OOH plans?

Airports have become key hubs for corporate citizens, SMEs and the economically vibrant middle class of India. They are also logical catchment areas due to the concentration of internet

enabled and digitally active consumers, who are a key audience for our data products and Smartphones.

What about mall advertising, do you think it plays an important role in your media mix?

Malls and Multiplexes are also fertile environments, since they have become popular hang-out areas for youth. In fact malls have also become centres of socialising and leisure, which offers opportunities to engage consumers at secondary levels.

Do you think digital OOH will achieve its full potential in a market like India?

OOH is bringing in a lot of dynamism and offers extensive innovation opportunities. They are disruptive and will be of great value for communication.

Do you think that mobile OOH (Vehicle/Train wraps etc) are fast emerging as a more efficient media alternative to static small format outdoor media?

It is slowly becoming cost effective, but it remains limited because of the constraints limiting its efficacy. To start with, above average dust and haze levels in India accelerate the deterioration of such media, resulting in a dull and faded appearance, especially in the case of mobile OOH.

Activations are increasingly being used by brands to create consumer connect, engagement and build interactivity. What are your thought on efficacy of activation initiatives?

Activation brings in qualitative engagement and experiential opportunities with the brand and hence creates longer recall. The fact that dialogue, or two way interaction is far more effective than passive one way messaging is already established beyond doubt, which is why, activations have been gaining in importance over the last decade or so.

The Indian outdoor advertising industry has made serious efforts in the last few years to ensure standardisation, accountability, research etc. Have you noticed any significant changes while dealing with the industry practitioners?

Clearly there has been some work and positive movement, but it has been restricted to a few pockets in India including metros and perhaps some class A cities. For the industry as a whole to achieve standardisation will take time. Also, I believe, concerned regulatory bodies play an important role in encouraging standardisation.

From a brand owner perspective, how important is research and measurement metrics for the growth & development of the Indian outdoor industry?

Any media platform with a robust research and measurement metric will always be the preferred choice for a marketer. The more precise the parameters of evaluation, the better are the ROI possibilities for a brand owner.

Do you believe that the outdoor industry bodies such as IOAA/DOAA etc have succeeded in their efforts to ensure greater standardisation of the OOH media business practices?

The initiatives have definitely helped in creating an environment that has encouraged stakeholders to work towards usage of certain standardised parameters. They have also helped create forums for the industry to collectively develop the medium.

What are the key changes that you would like to see in the outdoor advertising domain in the immediate and medium term future?

Undoubtedly, one would like to see greater transparency in valuation. And it would be great if the evaluation methodologies are more scientific, reliable and standardised.

Do you see MTS as a brand investing a higher percentage of their advertising budgets into the OOH medium?

We spend a significant portion of our media budgets on OOH, especially through our circle operations, where outdoor is a crucial medium. You can contact Amitesh Rao here