

Ode to The Average Man

'Think global, act local' is a refrain that has become a part of our vocabulary. So while there are larger issues of industry competencies, in my mind, the biggest impact in advertising will come from the quality of talent we possess and are now attracting into the industry. The need of the hour is not just re-looking at the fresh talent we are hiring. We have to also give thought to how we fulfill our people's needs, how we augment their capabilities, how we help them advance in their careers, how we make them permanent residents of our world.

I am being a little nostalgic here, but when I started my career at Ogilvy straight from IIT, I nurtured desire to work for a year and then do the routine CAT-IIM. I remember Rahul Kansal, my then super boss and an IIM alumnus, advising me on how stupid an idea it would be to leave my job, do an MBA and then get the same job again! And that then happened to be the truth! Try telling the same thing to a kid in advertising today. He'd probably think you've lost your marbles.

We need to make this industry attractive once again. And by just going to best colleges, hiring young talent at fat salaries, this will not happen. My belief is that people will come in and go away in a year's time. Don't get me wrong, they have the capability; they just don't need to fight someone else's battle. The fact is that that as an industry we do not offer enough intellectual gratification to our employees. That's the job of the industry leadership. The young talent can only add to the ammunition. So, the first and biggest responsibility of industry leadership today is to look within and without and figure state of affairs. Accept that all's not well and then act and not just talk about how things should be. On my part, I would like say that at Rediffusion|DYP, we have accepted that things have gone wrong with our industry and that we need to start afresh. Today we are definitely looking at things anew, trying to evolve a new business model fully aware that we are leaving traditional industry comfort zones in doing so. But we believe that to succeed, you have to accept failure first. Our pursuit now is to get the industry's relevance back, the value back, the joy back and the talent back.

Intellectual gratification leads me to the next point to our industry's overdue evolution. Why does our industry exist? This fundamental question demands a fundamental answer. I have often heard people take shelter in jargon; communications industry, marcom industry etc. When I was a trainee, I was told that the client represented the product and we represented the consumer. I was told that we existed to bring the client closer to the consumer. How simple! Unfortunately, it does not hold any water these days. Clients are far closer to consumers than us. I would like to propose that basic articulation of why we exist will be a great starting point. For starters, we have to stop looking at ourselves as *advertising* industry. The telecom industry as it used to be has ceased to exist; it's more of a lifestyle industry now. And the same is true of almost every successful industry today. The traditional industry definitions are blurring; I don't know why

ours has been cast in stone. We must look at ourselves in the context our new world as it emerges after the fragmentation chaos. So what do we offer our consumers, i.e. our clients? My rough thought is that our industry will exist tomorrow if we see ourselves as brand building specialists at one level and providers of last mile connectivity to a brand's consumer at another. Rough words at this stage but I hope to open a debate with this and would love your comments. Once we know the goalpost as an industry, the rigour, the value- add, the genius, all will follow. I do believe that what we must know as an industry is that as product parity becomes the norm, the stronger brands will continue to win the battles and the wars. And brand builders will have a small role to play in that.

If you thought that I am running away with just talking about people only, no such luck. As an industry, we have to wholeheartedly embrace technology. If advertising were a human being, my guess would be that creativity would be the heart and technology, its mind. One can't do without the other. The stronger the two of them, the healthier the body. We must learn to be at the cutting edge of development of digital technology as it is now all pervasive, and impacts our lives in every sphere. To get going on our journey, we need to embrace it fast.

Pursuit of creativity has to continue with greater vigour. It's like climbing Everest, the higher you go the tougher the climb, the greater the challenge. Our industry is now beginning to reach the global standards barring the electronic media (sadly). We now need to set benchmarks for the world to follow. And challenging ourselves is a good starting point.

As a bonus fourth point, something has to be said about the industry's unity. We must as an industry wake up to the truth all around us, stop our petty internal battles and face the real challenges. As children, we were taught that united we stand, divided we fall. Why do we forget our basics as we grow up?

In the end, I would like to say that biggest impact on the advertising industry will still come from the abundance of average folks, for as Conrad Hilton said:

The man who wins is the average man,
Not built on any particular plan;
Not blessed with any particular luck –
Just steady and earnest and full of pluck.
The man who wins is the man who works,
Who neither labor nor trouble shirks;
Who uses his hands, his head, his eyes-
The man who wins is the man who tries.
Amen!



MAHESH CHAUHAN
PRESIDENT
REDIFFUSION DYP

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