



Indian Advertising: The Revolution is When Change Ceases

The next few years will doubtless be important years for the Indian advertising industry. First, let's take a look at some of the things that are influencing change in localised marketing thinking and put it into a practical perspective (we've squeezed in as much as we could).

All said and done, advertising is not about products, brands or services, but people. People as normal people, with normal mindsets, not as consumers. The distinction between the two is swiftly coming to an end. Everything about what we do, dream and believe has become saturated with messages from advertisers. So much so that we can often relate only brand names and subconscious flashes of advertising messages to many everyday things. Does it lead to successful sales and brand loyalty? Ask around and we'll see that the whole thing has to be done again and again. Expensive, and very unfortunate. Furthermore, across industry, many producers are constantly trying to sell what they can make, not necessarily what people need. To make it all work, manufacturers really must strive to deliver better products that truly mean something. Because, at the end of the day, a hundred brands are vying for their share of private space in people's minds. This mind-space is today coming at premium and the cost for ownership of one square inch is only going to shoot up. In its historic form, we've called dealing with it 'positioning'.

Today, the thing that drives name recall most is 'staying in touch'. Visibility, getting ingrained, so that one is always made to remember. The 'when' to do that has become the critical factor. The fact is, people are (more than ever) still not interested in what they do not need. We must not confuse a marginal show of wealth as a happy sign of things to come. New things cause excitement, obviously, and the existing economics of the marketing communication situation is but relative to our recent past. In the near future, *brand saturation* is inevitable. We will have to deal with every single entrant into India, plus the locals, screaming for attention, all at the same time - and at decibel levels much more than what we've experienced today. What can therefore make a brand succeed is going to be driven by not just 'how', but how often people can be reached *inexpensively*. Traditional media make its highly prohibitive. But it's already being realised, with rapid changes happening in mobile communications - making the Internet, in all its glory, easily accessible to those on the move. While advertisers and agencies do their best to make their brands scream for attention in the milieu, in the future we will be inundated by "the personalised message", making everything all the more alluring and interesting. It's also the easiest means by which people can react on their own terms. And that's just one measure of how consumers will continue to change.

As consumer change leads to an alteration in the characteristics of a market, the paradigms that define the advertising industry should, logically, also change. Buying communities are clearly evolving. These are groups of people, bound by a singular pattern in the way they live or interact with the world. Spotting these are the key challenge for every marketer. They are not bound by geography or way of life. But they are today more definable. Finding the right means to reach them effectively is going to be more difficult. The cost of acquiring new customers, therefore, is going to leap. While 'reaching out' is going to be the prerogative of the brand or product that has something unique to say about itself, reaching people by serendipity is going to deafen the

media landscape. Shoot in the dark, chances are you'll hit something. That's where most of today's products and brands fit in, product-service differentiation being virtually non-existent and the need for sales greater than ever. Retail stores in high-traffic areas are such.

The concept of 'retailing' is, evidently, dramatically changing. We find mixed signs of conventional retail evolution residing next to each other. At the same time, new methods of marketing are being employed to make ends meet. These will, in time, lead to new trends; some will lead to completely new standards, making it a unique situation that not many can fathom or comprehend. There is no case study in the world that can apply to the Indian scenario because it is changing so rapidly. Those who are patient and consistent will succeed more than those who are trying everything in the book. Customers are as finicky about the brands they buy into as ever, regardless of what is done to woo them. Negotiate they will, demanding appeasement for their idea of 'value'. Advertisers and agencies tend to feel that solid 'brand building' is the key to tiding over that. That means plenty of expenditure, to not only make the brand larger than life in the eye of the people, but also to make it more consistently visible. While we know that most brands would love to have their own retail stores, we believe that it needs to be product or service innovation. And into one or both of these is where we see a fair share of the money going.

While all this is happening, the question is, can marketing/brand communications agencies, large and small alike, depend on traditional forms of revenue? While 'design' has become an industry on its own, much due to the negligence of the process-led advertising agency, ad spends are getting more and more divided. At another level, it's not too hard to notice that popularly, 'great advertising' has become linked to 'award-winning' more than ever. This is a definite positive, as the country wins more international awards than ever before. But it can also lead to short sightedness. In the race to be noticed, the only thing we've managed to create is a new idiom for entertainment. Because, as already stated, we're not only treating people as consumers, not people, but we're also treating the specialist marketing communications agency as a service agent, not communications partner. And that's the ultimate, crucial change that most agencies will probably need to bring about in not only how they work, but also in how they encourage their clients to think. Who knows, maybe there'll be a profit sharing model of some sort that evolves into becoming the standard for advertising agencies. Change will tell.

So here we are with a few things that should influence the way the advertising industry is in the near future:

- Convergence in communications, where Internet meets mobile phone
- Product innovation
- Agencies become communications partners in the true sense of the word



**NAGESH
MANAY**
STRATEGY PLANNING
OPUS CDM

Buying communities are clearly evolving. These are groups of people, bound by a singular pattern in the way they live or interact with the world. Spotting these are the key challenge for every marketer.