



In the face of an ever-changing market, product and customer scenario, formulas do not work.

## PANKAJ GUPTA

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**What's the most interesting thing you've done outside of work in the last 12 months?**

I have started learning trivia related to soccer, gaming and cars as my 10-year-old son constantly quizzes me on these through the day! Over the past few months, I have followed some of the CSR interventions by HDFC Life – this has helped me understand 'transformation' in new light. Beyond information, our lives or work must persuade, inspire and lead to action that make our world a better place.

**Name a brand marketing executive or corporate personality - Indian or international - you admire. And tell us what about her/him is admirable.**

I have a lot of admiration for Satya Nadella of Microsoft. The way he has transformed Microsoft so fast, in a competitive and dynamic environment, and in the wake of two illustrious predecessors, is remarkable.

**If your brand were an animal, what would it be - and why?**

A horse. They stand tall with grace, epitomise a healthy competitive spirit, and are success oriented.

**What was the biggest challenge you and your team faced in the last 6-12 months - and what did you learn from it?**

One of our biggest challenges is keeping our brand and its communication relevant in the face of an ever-changing market, product and customer scenario. Formulas of any sort simply do not work. We actively educate and re-educate ourselves about our products, our customers and the changing marketplace. We routinely get speakers, from internal teams and external agencies/companies, to speak to us and share their perspectives.

We encourage our teams to visit our branches and listen to consumer calls. We have also upped our time and effort on customer research, as it helps us stay relevant. An example of this is the launch of India's first 'mogo' (musical logo) in the insurance space, which helped strengthen our 'Sar Utha Ke Jiyo' positioning.

**Which outside forces or trends impact consumer behaviour in your category most? Give an example.**

Technology and rapid digitisation are impacting every category and business across the globe. It is no different with insurance.

**Marketers across segments have fetishised the millennial. But hand on heart, which demographic will drive growth for your brand over the next 12 months?**

We've been engaging with the young millennial for the last two years through our #youngandresponsible campaign. For us, the contribution of this TG is growing at a significant pace year after year, across key categories. The retirement segment and the segment planning for early retirement are also very promising, thanks to trends like changing life expectancy, age demographics, shorter career spans

and a budding aspiration to retire early.

**Nowadays brands get trolled all too frequently on social media. As a marketer, have your views on trolling changed in the last couple of years?**

Feedback or complaints are an opportunity to improve and strengthen our focus on customer-centricity. Yes, outrage against brands has become more frequent these days and may at times seem trivial. But brands cannot afford to ignore any communication, big or small, sent their way on social media. It makes little sense to spend tonnes of money on research to understand your customers and then ignore what they are saying directly to you, only because it seems inconvenient at that given moment.

All communication coming a brand's way, rude or otherwise, is critical as it is, in essence, real-time feedback on what your customers think about the brand or its services. Yes, it may not always be entirely fair, but it can direct you to an underlying problem.

**If you could advertise on only one medium for the next 6 months, what would that be - and why?**

In today's times, advertising on a single medium would be of very little help, unless supported by a monstrous advertising budget. That said, if I must pick one, I would be tempted to choose between TV and digital.

I'd choose TV because, if you have a good story, well told, then TV remains the cheapest medium to take your message across to the country. However, if my communication has something newsworthy and share-worthy in it, I'd then choose digital as it is likely to give two or three times the impact on every rupee spent.

**What do agency partners grumble about most, today?**

Time and money. This is one agency-client area that has remained constant over the years, regardless of all the technology changes and evolution. ■