



It doesn't always have to be a grand purpose. It's more important to be honest and transparent.

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

I stayed in a humble village called Saty in Kazakhstan. I thoroughly enjoyed the basic yet satisfying and healthy life. I stayed with generous hosts and enjoyed simple yet wholesome meals. Brown hills, green meadows, horses and sheep – such beauty and simplicity make you question the many assumptions you make in life.

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

The man who taught me most of what I know today is Hemant Malik, who currently heads ITC's food business. I've also closely followed Harish Bhat and his approach to purpose-led marketing. Their intensity, integrity and passion are inspiring.

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

An orangutan. The bond between an orangutan and her child is a caring and nourishing one. I would like to believe the bond we share with our consumers would be just as strong.

The other option is a horse because it represents intelligence, speed, strength, grace and devotion in equal measure.

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

How does a brand stay relevant to consumers who are so widely spread across the demographic continuum? Across this wide base, consumers' expectations are often varied and pull at opposite ends of the string. To sometimes choose between them, and at other times marry them to deliver a more overarching proposition, is exciting for us.

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

Technology is one – it has made brands more accessible and has put them under much larger (and welcome) scrutiny. Consumers promptly call out brands that are based on flimsy edifices or don't walk their talk. Today, brand authenticity really matters.

Customer experience is another one – be it in physical retail stores or across online touchpoints, consumers can only be meaningfully engaged if the experience enriches them. It has gone beyond simple product purchase.

Marketers across segments have fetishised the millennial. But

hand on heart, which demographic will drive growth for your brand over the next 12 months?

Millennials are among the most discerning consumer groups brands have ever encountered. They are intelligent, aware and exacting... and have fairly high disposable incomes. That said, for a brand like ours, that appeals to consumers across demographic clusters, the task is to play a rewarding role across segments, including but not limited to millennials.

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?

No. The mainstreaming of technology has ensured that brands are not just more accessible but also under high scrutiny. I think that is a good thing. I strongly feel that brands which are less than honest with their consumers, and that go any distance only to 'sell', should rightly be called out. The only caveat here is that I am referring to genuine and honest trolling, not the kind that is orchestrated with any mala fide intent.

Brands ought to be upfront about their purpose and role in their consumers' lives. It doesn't always have to be a grand purpose. It's more important to be honest and transparent.

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

A media mix is like a balanced diet. An overdose of any ingredient will lead to diminishing value of returns. Brands need to define their reach, engagement and revenue objectives wisely, and choose horses for each of those courses. No single course should dictate the choice of a singular medium.

What do agency partners grumble about most, today?

Our agencies don't grumble. But if I were to guess, then the need for speed and clarity in decision-making would, perhaps, top the charts. ■



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