



AMIT DOSHI

Chief Marketing Officer | Lenovo India

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PERSONAL**Who is your biggest professional mentor?**

There isn't just one; a few have had a deep influence on my growth and journey. But I'd love to mention my father here — I believe I get my work ethic from him.

If not a brand marketer, what would you be?

An internet entrepreneur possibly, or a cricket analyst or even better... both!

Name a brand (other than your own) you admire. Why?

Muji, the minimalist Japanese retailer with a wide range of generic products. Quite paradoxically, 'Muji' in Japanese, translates to 'no-brand quality goods'. I admire the fact that they live up to the meaning of their name and the way in which they have created one of the most distinctive experiences in the lifestyle business. They have a unique design sensibility that truly cuts across everything — products, stores, service.

CATEGORY**What are the big challenges you see coming your way in the next 12 months?**

It's not a new challenge, but an enduring one of balancing short-term growth versus long-term brand building. I also see the need to reduce the work we do - do fewer things but take on the ones that have impact. The other one is the debate around customer data and privacy — I don't see it as a challenge but an opportunity for industry stakeholders to discuss and crystallise a point of view that is right by both, customers and brands.

What's the biggest change in the way consumers approach your segment today, versus a year back?

We are seeing outstanding growth in the premium laptop category (over ₹50,000). The industry is seeing interesting segments and niches developing, for example, gaming. Lenovo has already grown its 'gaming laptops' into a \$1 billion business globally, last year.

Over the last year, customers have become very comfortable buying laptops online. A quality, entry level laptop starts at ₹22,000-23,000, and customers today are open to making higher value transactions. It started with mid-range smartphones (around ₹10,000) and that experience, I believe, is encouraging consumers to move up.

In what way/s does your marketing strategy change from Tier I to Tier II and III markets?

In Tier I markets, our focus is on growing both, premium laptops and emerging-form factors such as ultra-portable laptops and gaming laptops. In Tier II/III markets, access is important and we are on a journey to expand distribution. Having said this, the gap between the top towns and middle India is reducing very fast due to mobile internet and growth in e-commerce.

MARKETING**What's the toughest part of being a brand marketer?**

To uncover or invent truly meaningful customer insights, especially in the personal technology category where unique opportunities can easily get drowned in new launches and hardware benchmarks!

Name the biggest professional hurdle you faced recently.

It's not recent but moving from FMCG to technology five years back was a bigger change than I'd imagined. What helped me was to first truly accept the difference and then adapt.

As a marketer, what is your biggest nightmare?

Fragmentation in thinking and planning, that comes along with growth in the digital ecosystem and myriad options. Marketing teams run a risk of becoming too tactical.

ADVERTISING**What is your lead medium of communication today?****Which medium do you use least?**

Digital is our lead medium. Over the years, usage of print has significantly come down for us.

Are the best creative minds still in advertising?

Creative minds cannot be tagged to one field or one industry. That has always been the case and creative path-breakers can be found not only in advertising but in arts, music, cinema, science and even in sports and entrepreneurship. Creativity is a quest and a mindset.

Are you open to paying agencies a pitch fee?

This cannot be a binary question. It totally depends on the context and the brief.

Do you wish you could work with just one full-service creative agency instead of multiple creative minds?

I used to, but not anymore. On Lenovo in India, for example, diversity of agency cultures has actually made work more enriching and joyful.



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