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# RITESH GHOSAL

Chief Marketing Officer | Cromā, Infiniti Retail

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## PERSONAL

### Who is your biggest professional mentor?

In the course of my 23 years of professional life, I have worked closely with some iconic leaders in market research, advertising, marketing and business. But my biggest mentors are my peers.

### If not a brand marketer, what would you be?

A professor. My inclination, when I finished my bachelor's degree in Economics, was to pursue a higher degree at Delhi School of Economics and then a career in teaching.

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

McDonald's. I have come across their outlets in various countries and have experienced a very high degree of consistency in the service design and delivery. It takes a strong brand and strong organisational processes to be able to manage this for such a long period of time.

## CATEGORY

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

As we enter new catchments and recruit new customers, our biggest challenge is to make these stores profitable in the shortest possible time. Historically, new stores would take up to 30 months to become profitable, but now we target between 6 and 12 months.

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

What has changed is the time it takes a customer to feel the need for change and the emphasis on price as the reason to close a purchase. This is due to shorter product lifecycles, rapid innovation in consumer applications (smartphones especially) and feverish attempts of online marketplaces to close a sale without due consideration.

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

Not much. Croma is a catchment business. Whether in tier I or II markets, we seek out catchments with an audience that can support a Croma store. So our largest effort is on signing up a great location. That serves as an advertisement in itself.

## MARKETING

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

The marketing profession has been broken into little silos – marcom, PR, digital marketing, SEO, SEM, product marketing. All these sub-divisions create an identity crisis for people like me. People building careers within one of these silos will face an existential crisis when the silo becomes irrelevant.

### Name the biggest professional hurdle you faced recently. How did you tide over it?

The biggest challenge I have faced has been moving from being seen as a specialist in one discipline of marketing – the mining of consumer insights. I overcame it by consciously moving roles and organisations.

### As a marketer in the digital age, what is your biggest nightmare?

Digital media has created tools which sometimes even the creators do not have full appreciation of. As marketers, we are engaging with a set of young rule-breakers from outside the marketing ecosystem. While we enjoy the upsides, we're also grappling with the reputation risks that come with the territory.

## ADVERTISING

### What is your lead medium of communication today?

#### Which medium do you use least?

Print has been our lead medium, till last year. This year, we are experimenting with TV as the lead medium. Outdoor is a medium we use sparingly, because our stores are our best hoardings. We invest in acquiring the best locations, so it makes sense to let the store speak for itself.

### Are the best creative minds still in advertising?

The creative minds in advertising are still very much there. But if one is referring to the low quality of output, then I agree with the observation. However, the problem lies elsewhere. I believe the quality of briefs being issued to advertising agencies has seriously dropped. The growing fetish of valuation-driven thinking has brought with it mechanical briefs, with objectives like "grow brand awareness". There are organisations that have hired CMOs against a job description of "increasing ToMA (top of mind awareness) and ITP (intention to purchase)". What do you expect as output then?

### Are you open to paying agencies a pitch fee? Why/why not?

In principle, yes. But agencies need to also accept that the output of the pitch then belongs to the client. Frankly, I do not think clients or agencies in India have matured to a stage where this can work.

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

Ideally, I would like to work with a single brand custodian who can translate my marketing agenda into a coherent communication platform, co-own my marketing calendar share, my accountability to the business, and bring creative excellence in each medium.