

DESI ADS

True, we got the concept of advertising from our Western counterparts. But after quite a few decades into the business, the Indian fraternity has come up with its own interpretation. Today, Indian advertising is exploring a unique language that is as Indian as international. Few notable minds from the business deliberate amongst themselves about this factor of “Indian-ness” in the home-bred industry. Here is how the conversation carried on.

● **CG:** Indian advertising industry, as we know it in the modern context, has grown after its western counterpart. How much of it is, today, indigenous in thinking?

Naved Akhtar: Advertising is part of a larger marketing plan, which depends on what the consumer expects out of the product/service. Over the years, consumer behaviour in our country has matured. Consequently, the marketing ideas have evolved. Today, there is a lot of Indian essence in our advertising as the consumers have grown up to accepting Indian ideas.

Achuth Nair: Indian advertising has grown out of the western residues. Today more and more work is getting made in Hindi, or other vernacular languages, instead of English. As an industry, we are waking up to our culture. And that shows in the thinking.

Nitesh Sah: A lot of it. More than anything else, it has been a call of our culture. To talk to an Indian, we need to think like an Indian. If it is not, forget international markets, our advertising will not even work in our own country.

PK Anil: Our advertising ideas have always been indigenous. To connect with Indian consumers, we have to talk their language. We can't be using alien insights to touch the hearts of Indians. Therefore, we have always been Indian in our advertising.

Richa Sinha: Modern Indian advertising owes its thinking to myriad influences – the books we read, the experiences we have, the movies we watch, the places we travel to, the conversations we have etc. The nature of all this is quite diverse, and so are our ideas. As long as the idea touches a spot in the audience's heart, it's all that matters ←

● **CG:** So what has been the key learning from our Western counterparts?

Naved Akhtar: The very phenomenon of marketing per se, is a Western idea. In India, we have taken after the entire process and structure of the industry. Of course, it has helped us to grow, learn and mature. With time we are breaking a lot of rules and suiting the process to our own culture and sensibilities. Indian advertising, therefore, can be termed truly “Indian” now.

Achuth Nair: The key learning has been creating an enduring, endearing idea that can build and sustain a brand. India, with its multi-cultural, multi-ethnic population poses a challenge to come up with one idea that cuts across the whole country. That's why, today, we can see many regional works on national brands unlike earlier, when we had just one ‘Lalitaji’ for the whole of India.

Arnab Biswas: The key learning has been simplicity. Not trying to say too many things, but focusing on a single minded brand proposition, is what the west has taught us.

PK Anil: We have learnt a lot in terms of execution from the west. We have borrowed the style, the designs and even discovered new mediums from them. Anybody can come up with ideas but to take it to next level, you need technological support.

Richa Sinha: It has to be the art of ‘packaging’ ideas. As Indians, we're master storytellers. But to craft those stories in a manner that they become endearing, is what we need to learn from the westerners ←



Naved Akhtar. He is one of the most awarded and renowned art directors of the country. With his partner Freddy, he set up The Shop Advertising, a creative hot spot.



Richa Sinha. She is currently the Executive Director at M&C Saatchi, New Delhi.



Arnab Biswas. He has been working for top advertising agencies for the last 10 years. Presently he is the Creative Head (Art) of Rediffusion. He has won numerous national and international awards.



Nitesh Sah. A BFA graduate from Banaras Hindu University, landed his first job with Mudra Delhi. Currently Creative Head (Art) of Rediffusion Y&R, he has worked with top ad agencies, creating many award winning works.



P K Anil Kumar. He has over 15 years of experience in advertising churning out many award winning works. Presently, he is a Creative Director at an ad agency in Mumbai.



Achuth Nair. He is currently the Associate Creative Director at TBWA\India, based out of their Chennai location.

CG: In present circumstances, how much of traditional Indian design and ethos are getting featured in Indian advertising?

Naved Akhtar: In today's time, being Indian is an 'in' thing. The youth has completely accepted the Indian cultural ethos and ways of life. Therefore, advertising has also become Indian in nature and character. Of course it changes with certain products where internationalism is the requirement.

Achuth Nair: The overriding mindset of Indians is emotional. And that gets featured. But, traditional Indian designs are being ignored. Warli art, Madhubani painting style and a little bit of Tanjore painting have started peeping in, but in negligible density. Also, the humour being employed is very western.

Arnab Biswas: Design in Indian advertising is still in its infancy. Even if the ideas are great, we sometimes fail in execution owing to many cultural restrictions. More often than not it's the non-supportive role of our clients.

Nitesh Sah: Today, Indian ethos is getting mixed with modern, global values. Advertising has to be relevant to this new culture and country. It has to mirror this change. However, it is more important to tickle the human values and instincts. As, cultures change, but human emotions are universal.

Richa Sinha: Indian advertising has always had this shimmer and lure for the Western world. It was only in the last decade that we woke up to the huge potential lying dormant in our culture. We suddenly realized that instead of shying away from our ethnic roots, it actually pays to flaunt it. The result is for all to see ←

CG: But the world is changing to be one modern, global entity, isn't it? So, is being 'Indian' still relevant for Indian advertising?

Naved Akhtar: 'Indianness' is relevant to the modern youth of India. We are still comfortable with traditional Indian belief system and cultural choices. Therefore, an 'Indian' form of advertising is relevant. And it is going to help create a unique identity for the industry.

Achuth Nair: It depends on the brands and its target audience. As the audience and market change, the context and communication get tweaked. There are multiple Indias in India. You need to decide which one to showcase in what circumstances.

Nitesh Sah: We cannot take a puritanical approach and say that our ads should look like how it used to be two decades ago. Our ads should be able to converse with our globalized audience. Still, it would be foolish to think that any globally acclaimed ad would work here. It doesn't, because it will have values that other countries may not be able to relate to.

PK Anil: The modern, globalized world is still divided into different countries. Suddenly we have not stopped touching our elders feet, we have not started eating Pani-Pooris with a fork and knife etc. Our 5000-years-old ethics, traditions and culture are not going to change. So, we are just well connected globally but Indian advertising will always serve the industry well.

Richa Sinha: No matter how modern or technologically superior we become, we'll still be left with certain innate 'Indianness'. Our cultural nuances are very different. Therefore, no matter what we do, we can add Indian grammar to our communication to strike a chord ←

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CG: Finally, how should we bring in more "Indian" flavour and character to our practice and business?

Naved Akhtar: One should go back to the roots. There are umpteen resources and lessons in our own culture and traditions to help us come up with unique, original ideas. This will help us understand our lives better and derive more 'Indian' insights, which can be turned into good advertising.

Achuth Nair: Showing Indian faces does not make an ad truly Indian. It needs to showcase the cultural nuances and sensibilities interwoven with the brand message. The more we dig deep into our culture and our rich philosophy we are bound to find gems of ideas that will have distinct characteristics, which will make Indian advertising famous and proud.

Nitesh Sah: All we need to do is observe and take note of the world around us. Let us overhear youngsters talking in colleges. Or make small talk with our next door neighbour. Let us ask someone else to use the remote at their will. And let us go for movies which different masses like. Once we know what India likes, it won't be difficult to come up with an ad for it.

PK Anil: We can't force ourselves to become a particular type. I feel we are as Indian as we should be and a sensible piece of communication would never try to be western just for the heck of it. But having said that, we should try to incorporate more of 'Indianness' in the areas like fashion, automobile and technology.

Richa Sinha: There's no sort of pressure to be Indian. In advertising, the pressure should always be to be relevant. If for a category, the need is to connect with the audience via the plains of Punjab or via ruins of the Colosseum, so be it. The effort is not to be Indian alone. The effort is to be effective. Ideally, we should have advertising which has an Indian soul with a global execution ←

What's your opinion?
Do write in to us at Knock@CreativeGaga.com with 'Indian Advertising' as the subject.



The artwork, Virtuality is new Reality, was designed to represent the transformation in the advertising industry. We have come to a standpoint where the lines between the virtual and the real world are quite blurred. Advances in technology have made everything user-friendly and interactive. The task was to show this transformation from one age to the other. The artwork depicts the journey from the birth of paper leading to print advertising, moving to TV and radio, then to the digital media, finally culminating at social media and more.