

The Anatomy of Rebuilding & Recovery

A CEO LOUNGE INITIATIVE

The Travelling Salesman of Marketing¹

Finding a billboard on the digital highway

In conversation with



Ajay Kakar

Chief Marketing Officer,
Aditya Birla Capital



Karan Kumar

Senior VP & CMO, DLF



Neeraj Kumar

Managing Director,
Beam Suntory, India



Rana Barua

Group CEO, Havas
Group India



Sanjoy Mukerji

Group CEO, Dr Batra's
Positive Health Clinic

Associate
Partner



Support Partner

BLUE DART



The Travelling Salesman of Marketing¹



The marketing domain is never new to the idea of disruption and dramatic changes. As the power of social media shaped choices, marketing became more personalised. Known to be a communication channel with the target consumer, successful marketers have found their voice through digital marketing ‘mind tools’ and positioning their brands in consumers’ devices. With consumers tightening their purses, and waves of uncertainty taking over during the pandemic, marketing strategies, media mixes, and all Ps have been redefined. CEO Lounge brings together some of the country’s best minds to discuss innovation and trends during this massive behaviour building exercise.

Words by Divya Sista

“Don’t blink, you might miss something”

- Tim Horton,
The Travelling Salesman

The marketing function is wading a complex maze. With the ubiquitous presence of technology dictating choice, and choice shaping the marketplace by the minute, the marketer is on a hot seat. From guerrilla marketing to moment marketing, social marketing to using analytics for a hyper-personalised content feed — marketing is both

evolving and changing. The forces shaping the marketing world today are starkly different from what they were a decade ago — social media influencers occupying equal pedestals with celebrity brand endorsers, sophisticated AI (artificial intelligence) and data analytics helping market research cater better to their target audience and capturing new revenue streams through a brand-new value matrix.

SERIOUS PLAY: INNOVATION IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Marketers and brands do not deny the effectiveness of new-age marketing techniques or the need for a social presence. However, the pandemic has brought to fore perils of sudden and forced behaviour changes, which threw all trends and channel predictions off-track. Adaptability though is not a new playground for the seasoned marketer. He discovered new baselines and strategies that capitalised upon the state and empathised with consumers — a winning formula.

“Conversations spread and stories sell. Especially those about positive experiences and quality. In our case, the message of community living, of how residents were being taken care of, how they are we being attended to, how the elderly were not left to feel alone and insecure because there’s somebody constantly checking on them — all of these stimulate a certain demand into the residential sector, which was largely a physical space. In times of crisis, people tend to get conservative and steer towards buying inventory from brands that they trust, brands that have a legacy

of delivering on their commitments. This period has shown us that more than mass media advertising, say, a newspaper ad, which has a larger reach, conversations with individuals or smaller groups — clusters of your current customers and prospective consumers — have more impact,” explains Karan Kumar, Senior VP & CMO, DLF.

The pandemic brought in new challenges for marketing. For a function that relies heavily upon capitalising on every opportunity, delivering a great customer experience during pressing times without compromising on quality is a priority. In a recent survey, 80 per cent of consumers agreed that a good experience was as vital as the product or service itself.² That said, providing this experience was no child’s play even for industries on the upswing such as healthcare and wellness.

“We went online overnight,” informs Sanjoy Mukerji, Group CEO, Dr Batra’s Positive Health Clinic. For an organisation that was 100 per cent retail, this was no less than an achievement. “We also established a courier system to get medicines delivered to our patients. Most importantly, we established and



“Whether it is a high-touch or a hi-tech space, the ground rules are the same — tailor-make the experience for the consumer and not the brand”

Ajay Kakar
Chief Marketing Officer,
Aditya Birla Capital





“Social media and digital marketing are a fair-game field, like skating on thin ice. Consumers are unforgiving of brands that try to be cheeky or profit from a crisis. They appreciate brands that are sensitive and genuine in putting out certain communication”

Karan Kumar
Senior VP & CMO, DLF

communicated the idea that we were there for them. Standing up and doing the right thing, that is, reaching out to people in this crisis, is what has worked and will continue to work. With the rising focus on immunity, we focused on building conversations around it, and reaching out to people,” Mukerji adds.

FINDING THE RIGHT MARKETING MIX

The focus of marketing is always on increasing value through multiple channels. With an increase in the number and variety, the function has witnessed a trend popularly known as ‘phygital’³ — technology bridging the gap between physical and digital worlds through interactive experiences.

“In industries where there is need for discretion because of regulatory constraints or otherwise, digital marketing channels and personalised marketing can be a blessing. How the marketer envisions his marketing mix, consumer touchpoints, and how his plans to get the message across to consumers become crucial factors,” says Lloyd Mathias, Angel Investor & Former APAC Marketing Head of HP.

Social factors, global trends, lockdowns and vaccination drives have all played significant roles in messaging. As physical consumer interactions are slowly on the rise, industries like hospitality, travel and alcoholic beverages have begun increasing their ad-spend.⁴ The focus of messaging for many has shifted to premiumisation.

“When you represent a powerhouse portfolio, which has stood for over 200 years, there is a legacy and trust associated with it, which turn into conversation starters. In a time when some sales channels went down prompted by global events, we have sprung up and been recession resilient. When we look back at the first few months when the pandemic struck, large parts of the channels got shut. Bars and restaurants, the whole GTR or global travel retail — airport duty-free — where the retail theatre happens, got locked. If that’s shut, what do you do to launch or to continue to sustain? So, the awareness and equity of our brand then became our key focus, as we figured out what touchpoints of consumers now matter and what threshold of investment would those new touchpoints need,” asserts

Neeraj Kumar, Managing Director, Beam Suntory, India.

RULES, SCHMULES AND NEW NORMS OF MARKETING

The rules and traditional marketing models had taken a backseat even before the pandemic hit the world. The web, with its first and middle names, “world” and “wide”, became the new marketplace to grab consumer attention. The popular adage ‘think globally, act locally’ reverses itself in the marketing cyberspace, with local messaging having global impacts on brands and organisations.

“Before getting into the marketing mix, we must have a clear understanding of our target segment. There are three principles we believe we should always be guided by — one, who your customer is, second, who your competitor is, and third, why should the customer choose me. We view ourselves as a pan financial services player, and we go to the consumer as that — a solution provider for all things money. We ask consumers what they want, do not tell them their needs, following Steve Jobs’ dicta, that it’s our task to read things that are not yet on the paper. We have also taken the time and made efforts to reach out to existing customers, answer their

questions, understand their inhibitions and fears in this time of crisis and cater to them. Our preferred medium for consumer reach is where they spend more time today — social media or email and not mass media. There is no prescriptive medicine that we can give to all — and personalised messaging that social media enables us to offer is a brilliant solution here,” says Ajay Kakar, Chief Marketing Officer, Aditya Birla Capital.

Marketers view the new cross-channel coordination as an extension of the marketing-mix theory with a twist.

“We are witnessing a lot of tweaks in media and communication objectives when it comes to marketing. In marketing, disruption has always bred buzz, and innovative, new strategies springing from creativity are always lauded, which makes this whole digital economy and disruptive digital marketing a new chapter,” explains Mathias.

Cross channel coordination is highly dynamic and on the fly where personalised messaging is constantly evolving, driven by consumer actions. Paid advertisements based on dynamic Google searches being the most prominent example of this phenomenon. While digital marketing is the rising star,



“Digital has taken a much larger scale of conversation, the central point is content — whether we do it as one-on-one, or through an emailer, podcasts, radio, TV, or even webinars. Content is going to keep driving the conversation”

Rana Barua
Group CEO, Havas Group India





“When things came to a halt, the awareness and the equity of our brand became our key focus. We figured out what consumer touchpoints now matter and what threshold of investment would those new touchpoints need”

Neeraj Kumar
Managing Director, Beam Suntory, India

traditional channels have not entirely lost their limelight.

“The marketing work was constantly on and the conversations with clients kept happening. It’s just that the platforms have changed. Media engagement, however, transformed on a larger scale, because a lot of the product launches and new announcements were postponed or halted. While we do see a lot of conversations around the world of digital, it doesn’t mean that television and other media forms are going out of the window. In fact, they are all coming back. Lockdowns have prompted television views and newspaper reading. What we are witnessing is the rise of multitrack digital and nuanced campaigns based on consumer behaviour. The focus is on meaningful engagement and not a blanket advertisement,” says Rana Barua, Group CEO, Havas India.

THE FUTURE IS PHYGITAL — IT ALL ‘ADS’ UP

In a space that constantly challenges the status quo, it is no surprise that phygital — with the power of being able to use various channels in varying combinations is catapulting brands and organisations to marketing success. Purchase paths, personalised journeys and platform

(technology/social media) are making their mark on the P-space of marketing.

“I don’t think marketing is about the channel. It has always been and will be about the consumer. The choice of a marketing medium is driven by consumer behaviour — whether it is one-to-many, or one-to-one. Consumers have the power of choice, and it is up to them to shop in a physical store or through e-commerce. Whether it is a high-touch or a hi-tech space, the ground rules are the same — tailor-make the experience for the consumer and not the brand. You must stay agile, blend in and take the omnichannel experience to its next level,” says Kakar.

That brings us to the whole idea of moment marketing driven by the FOMO (fear of missing out). With every brand and business rushing to capitalise on a moment — from stay-at-home safety to the Olympics, it questions the validity and effectiveness of the whole idea.

“We must remember that it is not us, but the consumer who is the smartest. We cannot mis-sell, misrepresent or be dishonest in the name of advertising. Social media and digital marketing are a fair-game field, like skating on thin ice. Consumers are unforgiving of brands that are trying to be cheeky or trying to

profit from a crisis. On the other hand, they also appreciate brands when they are sensitive and genuine in putting out certain communication. Suddenly, brands that have never spoken about immunity or are not naturally associated with that ecosystem of knowledge or attributes, are also jumping onto the immunity and wellness bandwagon. My straightforward advice would be to just be genuine and authentic," advises Karan Kumar.

Crises are times where the consumer, in general, feels vulnerable. It makes the whole art of messaging touchy, a need for brand tone and voice to be sensible and sensitive.

As a result, businesses have also explored other areas of marketing apart from advertising.

"While the lockdown brought us to a grinding halt, with airport duty-free and on-premise sales like bars and restaurants being closed we revisited our priorities and explored options like reaching out to our channel partners, collaborating with them, helping them sustain finances and up-skilling bartenders and other staff through online learning. We have also taken this as an

opportunity to gather consumer insights to determine the pulse — in terms of outreach, price and architecting brands," informs Neeraj Kumar.

It has also been a time of creative solutions sparked by necessity from snackable content to gamification.

"Digital has taken a much larger scale of conversation, the central point is content — whether we do it as one-on-one, or through an emailer, podcasts, radio, television, or even through webinars. Content is going to keep driving the conversation. We are looking at new media habits fuelled by the pandemic. Only time will tell if consumer behaviour will go back to previous ways or this is a permanent change. We are looking at experiential marketing and OTT content, new digital forms, and even culturally-driven high impact conversations. The show must go on so, we must keep moulding ourselves and adapting to what the need is," propounds Barua.

These are interesting times and marketing is in an exciting space — maybe advertising is dead, but we can all hail and cheer — Long Live Advertising.⁵



Standing up and doing the right thing, that is, reaching out to people in this crisis is what worked for us and will continue to work. We established and communicated the idea that we were there for them"

Sanjoy Mukerji

Group CEO, Dr. Batra's Positive Health Clinic

TAKEAWAYS



1. The pandemic has been a huge behaviour building exercise — and it has driven marketing to new tracks with speed.
2. The consumer is better informed and does not hesitate in shifting loyalties if the brand messaging seems unauthentic or shallow.
3. Digital marketing powered by analytics and data is on the rise, but traditional media channels are here to stay.
4. Personalised messaging, meaningful conversations and programmatic advertising are on the rise.

¹ <https://www.wired.com/2013/01/traveling-salesman-problem/>

² <https://www.salesforce.com/form/pdf/state-of-the-connected-customer/>

³ <https://searchcustomerexperience.techtarget.com/definition/phygital>

⁴ <https://www.livemint.com/industry/advertising/alcohol-advertising-to-exceed-pre-pandemic-peak-by-2023-report-11621831212665.html>

⁵ https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Advertising_is_Dead.html?id=Tph5QgAACAAJ&redir_esc=y

Presented by



Associate
Partner



Support Partner



Founder & Publisher : **Deepak Yadav**



Editor : **Hari Govind Nair**



hari@ceolounge.net

Deputy Editor : **Amit Ranjan Rai**

Feature Writer : **Shivanshu Nirupam**

Senior Designer : **Santosh Nirala**

Our Other Initiatives

collective



Manifest



springboard



No part of this publication can be reproduced without prior permission of CEO Lounge. All trademarks and trade names mentioned belong to their respective owners.