

Lodestar Universal focus on training for growth

Nandini Dias, COO, Lodestar Universal, speaks to Payal Khandelwal about today's media planning challenges

HEADLINER

When the company is defined by the activities that you do and where you have the power in your hands to effect a change, why would you think of leaving such a company? asks Nandini Dias, chief operating officer of Lodestar Universal. It often surprises many people that she has been a part of an agency for a long span of nine years in the dynamic business of media. Dias has been the face of the company for most of the clients of Lodestar. She dived into the media buying business after a short stint with an advertising magazine and then with a small advertising agency.

Now that she has firmly planted her feet in the media business, she is geared to face the new challenges in the media buying and planning environment. "New technology will give consumers more control of what they want to watch. Due to this, media planners will need to accommodate and track the multi-media, multi-tasking, time controlled youngsters and find ways and means to reach out to them and then engage them in a conversation," says Dias. "Another problem is the growing media landscape and the increasing touch points on one hand and lack of databases on the other hand. This leads to an inability to measure the influence of all touch points which go beyond traditional mass media." The third major challenge she highlights is that media will now be elevated from its traditional role of creating awareness to the enhanced position of driving brand equity through engagement.

Dias lists out Lodestar's plans through which it will combat these issues. "In terms of reaching the multi-tasking multi-media consumer, we have invested heavily into segmentation studies with both the largest TV and press media. Toogle' is an exclusive property developed by us in association with TAM which



Dias... "the mobile base is already larger than the number of homes with televisions"

works like the search engine Google on the TAM database." She further adds, "Lodestar's Brand Engagement Analyser which won a gold at Emvies this year, is a methodology to gauge how to measure media engagement impact on brand equity. 360 media, surround effect, 24/7, involvement, engagement. Each of these words, if not quantified, is just a feel good word without any substance. Currently a large body of work is limited to quantifying involvement/ quality of media exposure/attention spans. Consumers no longer only receive messages. Media now enables consumers to 'Participate' in events, promotions or sweepstakes; 'Share' the experience through web links, mobile messaging; 'Feel' the brand through its packaging or sampling. The objective of the study is to provide a measure of the level of en-

The lowdown

- 2004** Media Head, Lodestar
- 1999** National Media Director, Interface
- 1994** Media Supervisor, FCB Ullka
- 1990** Senior Media Planner, Lintas
- 1989** Trainee, Interpublicity

gagement that results from all communication efforts based on the impact on the brand's equity."

Dias is extremely focused to tap the emerging areas of digital media and new age media. "The mobile base is already larger than number of homes with television in the country. For mobile to take the big leap, the industry needs to answer questions like, what are the factors that best drive success of the campaigns, whom to target and what should be the campaign. In short, to allow the marketers to leverage the medium, by designing best-fit campaigns targeted at the right audiences and a predictive measure to calculate return on investment," she says. Thirty live mobile campaigns across 4 metros- Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore- were tested for reactions and responses. Using the research,

Lodestar is now working with one of its clients wherein it will promote a single SMS code to contact the company. If the user sends an SMS to the short code number, it will be directed to the closest dealer, who will then personally get in touch with the customer. Dias boasts of a big team which has been put in place to work on the new media space. "This year, we conceptualized, designed and hosted a site for Kansai Nerolac which won a silver for best digital innovation at the Emvies 2007," she says.

In a scenario where the media buying business is getting tougher by the day, Dias attributes the success of Lodestar to its focus on adding value to its clients' business. "When the concept of AOR and media buying came into the country, a lot of advertisers were fascinated and changed media companies every two years. At that point, we took a decision that advertisers will expect the best rates but they will value us only if we value add to their business. This is the reason why we set up *labcenter*, a revenue generator to fund the agency to invest in and develop localised tools."

While Dias cites lack of trained individuals as one of the key problems, she takes pride in the fact that Lodestar spends its maximum time and energies in training its human resources. "Our aim is to be the best in the industry. We can be the best only if the organization across all levels performs," she says. Lodestar trains young recruits fresh from campus for three months during which the trainees go through classroom sessions, practical session and sales training. "But training is not only on media planning and buying skills. We take a lot of trouble in grooming these people into well rounded personalities."

"Do the best work and the best people in the industry will work for you", that's the thought she leaves us with. She also excitedly looks forward to her long awaited vacation in November. when she will be off to US for a month.

CHATTER

"Everything today and everything increasingly in the future is going to have a digital component to it."

Omnicom CEO John Wren

"The tournament would be held with six foreign players in each of the six teams in fray. The selection process of these teams would be transparent and grounds for the matches is not a problem for us."

Kapil Dev, on the Indian Cricket League

"We are gung ho about South Indian cinema, especially Tamil and Telugu films, which, we feel, are well-received worldwide."

Ronnie Screwala, managing director, UTV

"Things were happening in stops and starts in media and creative, but I think this is the tipping point. These hubs will really take off now."

Shashi Sinha, CEO, Lodestar Universal, on the O&M-Lenovo arrangement

"Human heroes can falter and they eventually die. Mythical heroes, however, are immortal. Which is why, there is a strong emotional attachment to them, that cannot be explained by cold reason."

Alyque Padamsee