

**Publication:** Brand Equity (The Economic Times)

**Date:** February 13, 2013

# Changing Its Stripes

From talking about saving the fast dwindling tigers to spreading happiness by giving a little extra in its new brand campaign, Aircel has gone through some radical shifts

**Amit Bapna**

These are tough times for most mobile operators. The category, among the most marketed and advertised, has players grappling to upsell and increase the bottomline. A tough job given that India is thought to be nearly saturated on the subscriber-end and stagnating on the new acquisition front. Every player worth its salt is looking at adding to revenues by slicing and dicing the existing user-base. While Aircel tries to form the connect by using teeny bopper college kids, Vodafone seeks to 'Delight' with its tallormade offers and Idea tries to spread the Honey Bunny virus to an entire nation, the fifth largest player in the market Aircel has opted to go the route of selling extra benefits to the customers. The campaign is striving to establish a human connect for the brand, according to Praseon Joshi, chairman, McCann WorldGroup India.

The campaign titled 'Joy of a Little Extra' consists of three 30-second commercials depicting various slices of life situations that range from grown men jumping with joy on getting an extra run in a friendly neighbourhood match, to a classroom of kids feeling elated when their teacher gives them a few minutes more to complete an exam. The third ad shows the joy felt by a housewife on getting an unexpected bonus while shopping for vegetables. Joshi adds, "Simple joys of life are the most precious ones to cherish and the brands that deliver are the ones that the consumers will love. Hence there is a conscious attempt to dial up the 'human connect' of the brand."

Research revealed that the starting point has to be growing the voice-business revenues by attracting new Aircel 2nd or 3rd SIM owners. Further insights on multi-SIM owners showed that they display value-seeking behaviour. Thus the cellular brand, which sees its brand demographics comprising of students and young working professionals, decided to come up with this campaign. Says Anupam Vasudev, chief marketing officer, Aircel, "We are a challenger. In this multi-SIM market the wallet share is important to us and with this campaign we are looking at driving up consumption and hence increasing the value-share, as well."

The current execution is in line with the brand's simple messaging format that has been in place since the pocket internet days featuring ace cricketer M S Dhoni to the recent launch of the 'One India tariff plan — One nation one rate' campaign. While it may not give the brand distinct imagery, it may just help Aircel climb up the value-chain in the short-run, feels the agency head on a leading telecom player on condition of anonymity. The challenge for the brand which is relatively a late-entrant is to play the value game without being seen as cheap or vice provider, a trap that some players have got sucked into, according to Girish Trivedi, co-founder & director, Moch Consulting, a research and advisory firm. According to the figures (source: TRAI), Aircel is seen predominantly as a South brand is one of the few operators that has managed to show positive net additions during the last six months of 2012. The brand has been for some time focusing on value rather than the number of customers. For instance, its partnership with Apple was a step to lift the brand image and get high end subscribers. With this campaign it's looking to cement an association with its loyal user base as well as to generate new trials and hoping that the 'human touch' would help achieve a lasting, deeper connect.

Sourabh Mishra, national planning head, bates finds the campaign a little cliched, and it reminds him of many similar ads across categories. The cliché is both in terms of the story it tells as well as the way it is told or the treatment, he feels and in a category that has some well etched brand communication like Vodafone, Idea, Airtel and DOCOMO, this counts as a wasted opportunity.

Whatever be the case, the reality is that the telecom market is at the tipping point and the bright story of the last few years is becoming exactly that — a thing of the past — with the pressures on the margins and the topline. For all brands, the growth has to come from other revenue opportunities. The game is changing fast and in this changing landscape all telecom brands need to get their act quickly in place, else the 'Rule of Three' (famously propounded by Prof. Jagdish Sheth and Dr. Rajendra Sisodia) that has happened in other industries may soon lead to the next wave of consolidation in which only the fittest (or the richest) survive.

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