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Anupam Vasudev: Chief Marketing Officer, Aircel



Aircel India has adopted an aggressive data-centric approach to enhance its market share in the country. With 3G spectrum in 13 circles, the company has recently rolled-out innovative data offerings. A few months back, the telco also launched 'One Nation, One Rate' roaming plan that offers users one rate for voice, SMS and data in home circles and on roaming.

The company also possesses BWA spectrum in 8 circles. Like other operators, Aircel has also adopted a precautionary approach and is in no hurry to roll out its 4G network.

Aircel's Chief Marketing Officer Anupam Vasudev, who was also a speaker at Light Reading India's 4G World India, talks at length about the company's data-centric strategy, initiatives for 3G uptake, marketing initiatives and 4G plans:

What will be your key points-of-focus this fiscal year?

Aircel is a data led telecom player, offering innovative products and services in data space. In 2013, we are betting big on data, with the voice market maturing. In fact, our data revenue doubled in the calendar year 2012 over 2011 and subsequently our 3G subscriber base also grew four times last year. Our innovative products and services that have been launched in the recent past have garnered great response from our subscribers. Going forward, Aircel plans to keep this momentum going and will continue to find innovative ways to deliver value for money products and services to our subscribers.

What will be your strategies to strengthen your footprints across the country?

We have two different market play because there are some circles where we are new and other circles where we are well entrenched. In the circles where we are well entrenched, our plan is to be among the

top two players. In other markets where we are new, we want to get profitable and not chase rankings. Aircel is, therefore, looking at a profitable growth model to deal with high operational costs and to increase profit margins. Data is the future market and Aircel, as a brand, has taken a position to play the data game. We intend to increase our share of non-voice revenues and data, and VAS will lead this segment from the front. We are also looking at tapping the rural potential in our country.

How is the company doing on the data front? What makes your data offerings better than that of your competitors?

Since the inception of the company, Aircel has remained consistent on 'innovation' and 'affordability'. We started off with Pocket Internet in 2G and created a new category (when mobile Internet users were less than 1 million in 2009 to about 40 million by end of 2011). Aircel took the first step in making 3G affordable for the masses. We launched Smart Pocket Internet data plans which truly changed the way mobile Internet was perceived and consumed. Today, as a new age brand, we are focusing on the youth and betting big on data.

In the recent times, we have developed products and services keeping in mind the specific needs and requirements of our target segments. For instance, our recent offering PI-24 has been designed for the first time mobile internet users who are not too comfortable with using data on phones and fear overspending.

What is the company doing on the MVAS front?

The rapid growth of VAS and data is expected to contribute an important share in the revenue stream of the telecom industry. We have taken note on the shifting subscriber usage pattern and have devised many products and services especially in our data-VAS segment. Last year music and games continued to grow at a very strong rate for us. Games alone contributed to 25 percent of the data VAS consumption in 2012, followed closely by videos and music at 22 percent and 20 percent respectively. Overall, the data VAS segment has been doing its bit to generate revenues and has emerged as one of the fastest growing revenue segments for us.

What is your strategy to compete against other 3G operators? Is Aircel doing anything different to improve data usage on 3G compared to traditional voice business?

We were one of the first telecom operators to realize the potential of data services in the country. Our aim still is to provide our customers with differentiated and redefined user experience through our innovative products and services. We wish to work towards making these affordable and available to all.

We are enabling our customers to experience and experiment Internet on their mobile phones at economical rates. We are launching products and services keeping in mind the specific needs and requirements of our target audience.

How many 3G subscribers does the company have at present, and what is the market share?

3G has been doing extremely well for us. Our data revenue doubled in calendar year 2012 over 2011 and subsequently our 3G subscriber base also grew three times last year. Aircel's 3G subscriber base has grown four times in the last one year and is growing at more than the industry average of 12-13 percent and the user base is over 1 million. We are witnessing a huge traction and growth in this space.

Have you done anything different in terms of sales and distribution for 3G?

We have undertaken a few different initiatives in sales and distribution to drive 3G. First we have put a lot of focus on online sales. For 3G packs sold through online channel we provide additional benefits or at a discount. We introduced a long validity dongle FRC [first recharge] to induce uptake for dongles and this is doing well in the market. We have also completed a retailer education program where the benefits and uses of 3G were explained in detail to the retailers.

What are your marketing initiatives to retain customers—premium and normal? What initiatives have you taken to improve your quality of service?

We relentlessly work towards finding innovative ways to deliver value-for-money products and services to our subscribers. We are only one quarter down in 2013 and so far we have undertaken many initiatives to serve our customers innovatively and in turn drive growth and profitability. These include, building on our commitment to our CSR initiative 'Save Our Tigers' by unveiling the limited edition 'Save Our Tigers' calendar 2013; taking a giant leap in the voice market by dropping all roaming charges across Aircel networks with the industry first revolutionary product 'One Nation, One Rate'; launching our recent campaign 'Joy of Little Extra' wherein we offer products and services that give a little extra in value and delight for its subscribers, be it 'Extra SMS', Extra Talktime or Extra Data. Subsequently we launched our mobile banking service – 'Mobile Money' between Chennai and Tirunelveli and recently announced national consumer initiatives around the Chennai Super Kings.

Are there any plans to provide bundled services in near future?

We are exploring data, devices and content-based services. We believe that subscribers are now looking for integrated solutions rather than piece-meal services. We are working with handset manufacturers, content companies and leveraging our Pocket Internet brand to provide bundled services in 2013.

How will you cope with competition from the operators who have Broadband Wireless Access (BWA) spectrum? How does the launch of 4G services in India change the equation for players like you who do not have this spectrum?

We have BWA spectrum in eight circles. In fact, we have one of the largest BWA investments demonstrating our commitment to delivering leading services to our customers. However, we must understand that delivering a successful 4G experience requires a whole ecosystem including handsets, new fiber optic networks as well as new electronics at sites. We are putting the ecosystem in place for 4G.

-Danish Khan, Correspondent [Light Reading India](http://www.lightreading.com)