

Publication: The Hindu Business Line

Date: January 10, 2015

## Aircel surfs sports wave to increase connect with users

Offers talktime, data card for promotions

VINAY KAMATH

Chennai, January 9

In the last IPL season, telecom operator Aircel, a sponsor of the Chennai Super Kings, came up with unique ways of engaging with its customers. The brand has a pre-paid package for ₹164, which offers full talk time for this amount.

"During the IPL, we give a small twist to make it more engaging for customers," says Sankara Narayanan, Business Unit Head, Aircel, in Chennai. If CSK scored more than 164, Aircel users got that much talk time extra.

A similar tactic was shaped

around Aircel brand ambassador and CSK captain MS Dhoni. A ₹35 pre-paid card was launched for the IPL where users got full talk-time. For anything he scored above 35, the same amount would get credited to users automatically in their account.

"Then Dhoni's score got watched. It created a lot of engagement, awareness and following for the brand and an association with the IPL team," says Narayanan.

### Sports sponsorship

For the telecom brand, association with CSK gives Aircel high visibility and also serves as a constant reminder medium as the Aircel brand is emblazoned across all the players' T-shirts. As a brand, Aircel

spends one-third of its advertising budget on sports sponsorship.

Apart from the CSK team and title sponsorship of the Aircel Chennai Open, Aircel has also taken on the principal sponsorship of football team Atletico de Kolkata in the Indian Super League. Sports sponsorship, says Narayanan, is central to Aircel's marketing strategy.

"Three or four things are very central to people's lives, particularly young people: sports, entertainment, jobs and careers," he says, adding that Aircel wants to be in this sphere of engagement.

He points out that even those who are adults would have spent a substantial amount of time engaging

with sports in their younger days, which today translates into watching sport.

While cricket and football gives it the mass connect, tennis, says Narayanan, has more of an urban, upmarket and affluent audience. Its sponsorship of the Aircel Chennai Open for the sixth year running helps connect with this audience.

### Customer interaction

Aircel has taken the Aircel trophy around colleges, malls, tennis schools in a specially branded van to get people to touch and feel the trophy. There have been short and quick quizzes for the audience with prizes.

Serving in tennis is all about high speed and Aircel

has sought a connect there. "We are a telecom brand; so how do you connect speed of our network. As a business leader, we know in most parts of the city we are twice as fast as other brands. But, we can't shout that out from top of rooftops," says Narayanan.

Aircel took the speed challenge to a mall where they made people serve with a tennis racquet and registered their speed.

They immediately gave them data cards to experience the speed of an Aircel connection. This speed challenge continues at the tennis stadium as well. "We offer 4 mbps connections, which is faster than what others offer," he adds.