

In conversation with Mr. Manuj Agarwal
CEO - Percept Live | SIMSR Alum Batch 1996-98



Q. What has been the most memorable event in your professional life so far?

- A. My life in terms of career has been in media and entertainment industry. I started off with television and then moved on to Percept as I am passionate about sports. The most memorable moment for me was in 2008 when I entered four bids for IPL and we got Sahara in the next year. The launch of Sunburn was another memorable moment for me. As the CEO at Balaji Telefilms, the launch of 'Bade Acche lagte hai' was another memorable moment as it took an effort to get the cast to work and the serial took the channel to number one spot.

Q. Sunburn, Bollyboom, 'Eat Play Love' and many more, how does Percept Live constantly manage to come up with unique ideas and stay relevant in the industry?

- A. We have identified from global studies that live engagement and music concert is an essential part of the economy from the viewpoint of the target audience. These are not telecasted, so for entertainment purposes, live engagement is the only space where you can meet your friends and new people. It helps to gauge the attitude of people by mapping them, seeing their consumption patterns, what are their entertainment options, how frequently they are visiting it and how much they are spending on it. Sunburn was initially developed for the premium and international audience and later we took that aspirational product to the mass audience. When Sunburn was started, it was a single event in December but now it comprises of 100 events across 40 cities in India. It has a reach of more than 50 million on various online platforms. So, now it's more of a live media asset that people buy. We are also branching out to non-music IPs of which 'Eat Play Love', is one which is based on a simple format traditionally known as 'Melas'. So, this is a chic version of melas where you have food, music and kids section held in premium locations.

Q. Percept Live is a pioneer in event management with Sunburn being ranked as one of the top 10 festivals in the world. How do you manage to overcome the plethora of legal restrictions in organizing such a world scale event?

- A. India is a nascent country when it comes to live audience. So even authorities find it difficult to project the arrangements that they have to do. We work very closely with these people. There are restrictions in India as people want to pull down anything that is going up. Sunburn faces the same issue, it is so large that everyone feels that something can be taken out of the pie and hence spread negative publicity. But the IP has stood there. We are getting good support from the tourism boards and the government as it gets a lot of tourism for the economy.

Q. What matters more today - good content or good marketing?

- A. Content is always required. But with good content, you require good marketing. Unless you identify your target audience and reach them through the right platform and at the right time, good content does not matter. There were so many festivals similar to Sunburn which have had better engagements, better experiences but they were not marketed well. That's where Percept's media background and advertising comes into the picture. So we need to reach out to the right audience.

- Q. With the new generation now inclining more towards Netflix, Hotstar and other popular web platforms, do you think that the Indian TV industry will take a hit?**
- A. Traditional TV industry is not going to die as they can change the formats. Catering to the young audience, which prefer content on the go and at their convenience, TV will move from pay per view to the D2H kind of angle where you can get what you want and when you want it. So it's not going to die. Moreover, the traditional TV will move on as we are a large country and we have various challenges in terms of reaching out to various parts of the country. So it will take some time for people to adapt to the new platforms.
- Q. Corporate world is ruthless, how do you cope up with the stress and unwind?**
- A. You have to get used to it. In my industry, where you have to be out on most of the weekends, most of the time organizing events, you need to have a lot of control. I am disciplined that way as I tie myself to go to sleep on time. I make it a point that self-discipline is the only way to fight stress.
- Q. As Percept organizes events at such a large scale, what steps does it take to keep the surroundings clean and prevent wastage?**
- A. We plan our events in a way that we have less wastages, like we have reusable glasses so when a customer is buying a drink, he pays for the glass as well. So if one wants a refill, he needs to have the glass. In terms of construction, we try and avoid a lot of material which is not reusable. On the hospitality front, we have a campaign of volunteering where we ask our audience to stay back and volunteer to clean with us. We have also tied up with the garbage disposal team and we ensure that we get the certificate that we have disposed of the garbage at the right time, right place and the right way. We are the only ones in the industry following these measures as it adds to costs.
- Q. Is there any social cause close to your heart? If yes, how do contribute towards it?**
- A. We have time and again worked with various social causes. We work for the causes through our partners. We are currently focusing on the education of children. We have partnered with Magic Bus. The first event we did with Magic Bus was 'Guestlist' which was done by Hardwell, the World #1 DJ. We have also contributed 7 crores towards this. We also do annual events for the same.
- Q. What are the significant learnings you had in your two years at SIMSR?**
- A. The biggest learning I had was that I could decide on which way I want to go. Before coming to SIMSR, I did not have many options as to what I want to do and where I want to go in the future, that's where I got down to media entertainment and marketing side of the play. Also, it was more to do with the Institute and the people I met there. Management is more about the people you team up with and the institute. So the institute plays a major part in the kind of people they bring in.
- Q. What would your advice be for young alumni and students starting their career?**
- A. You have to be open-minded and it's important to understand your passion. Don't go with the trends. Today the market has opened up with so many options. Meet as many people as possible just to understand the brands they are working on and how the market needs with the new businesses coming up. Try and do that and find your passion. At this age, don't shy away from exploring.
- Q. Rapid fire questions**
- a. Favorite Television Show – Gumrah
 - b. Favorite Holiday destination – Italy
 - c. One word for our planet Earth - My World
 - f. Favorite hangout spot in SIMSR– SIMSR Foyer
 - d. Books v/s Movies – Books
 - e. Role model - I try to learn from everyone

Interviewed and Drafted by –
Ishita Gulati, Shreyas Bhaskare & Smruti Thaker

Imprints – SIMSR Alumni Newsletter – April 2018 Edition