

In conversation with Prakash Nair
EVP & Cluster Head-Ogilvy & Mather Advertising
SIMSR Alum Batch 1994-96



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

A. My professional life has given me my most memorable event – finding my life partner! I met my wife here at Ogilvy & Mather. We work in the same office (although in different departments).

Q. You have worked on some iconic brands like Dairy Milk Silk, Comfort Fabric Conditioner, Dove and Westside. How do you manage to appeal to such varying customer segments? Also, what kind of research do you base your ad campaigns on?

A. These brands invest a lot of time and effort in understanding their clients and customers because if you do not know what your customers want, then your ad campaigns won't yield the required results. Like for Cadbury, chocolate is an alien/western treat. We had to find something that Cadbury could use to connect better with the Indian audience. Digging deeper into the Indian consumer, we found a huge cultural role that sweets play in day to day life – be it celebrating successes/good news or auspicious beginnings, sweets had a very important role. This simple cultural insight helped us unlock the 'Pappu Pass Hogaya' and the 'Shubh Aarambh' campaigns. These campaigns have managed to transform chocolate from being an alien treat to being accepted as an Indian sweet!

B. Research if done well, can provide you with good insights into consumer behavior/attitude. It also can be used to validate some of the creative ideas.

Q. Recently O&M reshuffled their management into clusters. What is your opinion on that?

A. As organizations grow, it gets tougher for one person to handle all divisions. Our clients need the right kind of attention which led us to believe that it was healthier to divide the organization into clusters. This allows everyone to focus on their core competencies.

Q. You've been a part of Grey Worldwide, Lowe Lintas and now O&M, how different are the work cultures in the three biggest Ad houses in the country?

A. I joined Grey Worldwide when it was still Trikaya Grey which had a different work culture than the Grey Worldwide today. At that time, it was one of the best creative agencies, some of the best writers and art directors. But then came the explosion of TV advertising, and agencies like O&M and Lowe Lintas capitalized on it while Trikaya Grey failed to transform in time. Work cultures at Lowe Lintas and O&M are quite similar with both pushing for creative solutions to client problems. However, I feel, O&M puts a bigger premium on quality of execution and this is a trait that runs across all the departments – creative, account management and strategic planning.

Q. If you have to use three words to describe the role of an EVP of an Ad house, what would those be?

A. Pressure, Pressure and Pressure: Monetary, People, and Creative pressures with the increasing customer demands and the tightening budgets of clients. And adding to this chaos is the new kid on the block – digital content/advertising. Clients think of digital as ‘cheap’ option to advertising. And this is putting added pressure on creative agencies. Also, media houses have started becoming aggregators of content which is adding to the now complex communication business.

Q. With such a demanding job, where late nights are usual, how do you manage work and leisure?

A. Being in service industry, your work life is dependent on someone else’s need which makes it slightly more difficult because there might be a need arising at any hour of the day. Having said that with the arrival of my son, I’m more protective of my weekends. Also, technology allows you to stay away from office but still be at work, if needed.

Q. How often does your work mandate you to travel? Do you visit ad shoots?

A. Research projects or clients that are based out of Mumbai compel me to travel. Apart from that, visits to ad shoots totally depend on the complexity of the shoot.

Q. Can you tell us about any recent ad which has managed to impress you?

A. Outside Ogilvy’s body of work, the ‘Mutual Funds Sahi Hai’ seems to very effective in getting people to reconsider this investment option. ‘INS Vikrant Bajaj V’ was an interesting ad as it was able to evoke emotions and pride in the minds of people.

Q. What are the significant learnings you had in your two years at SIMSR?

A. SIMSR helped me realize where I wanted to go ahead in my career. The environment was very collaborative, open. The culture at SIMSR molded me in a certain way, allowed me to pursue what I wanted to, and at the same time kept me in check on the right course. Prof. Arya was a big support pillar for us.

Q. What would your advice be for young alumni wanting to start their career in advertising?

A. Advertising might look very glamorous from the outside but it is very tough and straining, especially in the beginning, so be ready to be disappointed and be ready to bend your back. But, these formative years teach you the best lessons. For account management in advertising, you need to be brilliant at managing people’s egos as it is a relationship business. Overall, advertising is tough and not very rewarding, but if you have a passion for it, do pursue it.

Q. Some Rapid-Fire questions:

a. Favourite movie- Star Wars / Godfather I

b. Favourite book- Catch 22 by Joseph Heller

c. Favourite holiday destination- Any beach destination

d. Favourite Quote- “If you can spend a perfectly useless afternoon in a perfectly useless manner, you have learned how to live” by Lin Yutang

e. Favourite food-Any Red Meat

f. Role Model - Sunil Gavaskar, Prakash Padukone

g. One word/line you say the most- Awesome

h. Word that describes you the best -Solid

**Interviewed and Drafted by –
Smruti Thaker, Surabhi Singh and Neha Shaw**