

In conversation with Mr. Lloyd Mathias

SIMSR Alum Batch 1986-88

Head - Marketing, Consumer PC's, Asia-Pacific & Japan at HP Inc.



Q. You have been named among the Top 15 International Marketers of the Year and are a well-known name in the industry, how do you go about developing a marketing strategy and executing it?

A. The starting point for any marketer is consumer insight- understanding what the consumer knows about your product, figuring out what your consumer wants. The second step is to look at the overall business objectives- to grow the market, to increase your share, maximise profits and revenue. Only when you have worked on these two determinants and the competitive scenario in terms of number of players, you can go about determining your marketing strategy. A good strategy should address the customer needs and clearly articulate strong customer benefits, should make sure the pricing meets the business and profitability objectives and should have a strong component of communication to get the message across to the consumers to create a desire in them. That's the core of a good marketing strategy.

Q. What have been the turning points in your life?

A. I always wanted to be in the marketing domain. The first big turning point for me was when I joined PepsiCo – then in its early stages in India. I had moved from my previous sales job to a large global brand that was keen to become the voice of Indian youth. I travelled the country, was closely involved with Pepsi's tie up with cricket, and worked on brands like 7up Mirinda, launched Mountain Dew in India & brought some of India's music acts. The learnings were immense. Another one was my switch into technology, when I moved to Motorola as India CMO, after spending about 12 years at PepsiCo. At Motorola after 2 years leading marketing, I moved to head-sales and that was an interesting phase of building distribution channels, and starting enterprise sales.

Q. You been associated with various industries like electronics, FMCG, Telecom, etc. How difficult has it been to switch industries?

A. I have been largely associated with two industries, one FMCG (Pepsi) and technology (Motorola, HP). Tata DoCoMo was an interesting stint in services, with telecom, that touched both consumer and enterprise. FMCG is about repeat purchase; one will buy a soap, soft drink or packet of chips again and again, while mobile phones, laptops are

long term purchases-consumer durables. The consumer life cycles for both are different. Sale of soft drinks are based on impulse driven points-no one wakes up in the morning and decides to have a can of Pepsi. It's about touching the consumer at various points to get his attention. Whereas technology is selling a more rational value propositions, there is price, there are features, and there is a reason why a customer wants to buy a mobile phone or a laptop. If one stays focused on understanding consumer behaviour and consumers motivations – the switch is easy. It's just that in technology one has to keep learning and unlearning news products so it helps being a geek!

Q. What is your view on the giant mergers and acquisitions in the telecom industry happening in India and around the world?

A. Every industry goes through a phase of expansion and consolidation and consolidation primarily boils down to a few major players who then start focussing on their bottom-line. In 2006-07, there were more than 14 telecom players in India: Airtel, Vodafone, Idea, R-Com, Tata DoCoMo, Aircel, Videocon, MTS, BSNL/VSNL and Uninor which is now consolidating to around 4-5 major players. With the Jio launch last year, we are bang in the middle of this consolidation when 4-5 large players will emerge. The government strategy also plays a major role – because spectrum auctions & licence fees are a big source of Government revenues. Hence, consolidation, merger and acquisition are a normal process in any industry's growth and stabilization.

Q. What are your views on disruptive business model adopted by companies these days for e.g. - Jio? Will it work in the long run? Does giving freebies now will garner loyal customers?

A. I think disruptive strategies help invigorate the market and help consumers. Reliance Jio is deploying bold pricing to rapidly gain market share and become a major player in a crowded space. They are playing off the deep pockets of the mother company-Reliance Industries. RIL makes huge profits from its core petro chemical business that can sustain not so profitable business like Telecom & Retail. They want to build the Jio business to a certain scale and market share, bleed competition and after the market consolidates, they will make sure they focus on the bottom line. So I think it's a process where they ensure that the competitors are pushed to a corner and you can see the competitors reacting by mergers and drop in price. It's similar to how Amazon leverages its global scale to disrupt local e-com players like Flipkart and Snapdeal.

Q. You co- founded Green Bean ventures in 2012. Can you share more about it?

A. After completing 20 odd years in the industry, I wanted to give a shot at entrepreneurship. I linked up with two friends Parikshit Bhasin and Sanjeev Sharma, both of whom were the MD of Nokia India at different points in time, and set up the company. The objective was to work with technology start-ups and support them. These are young entrepreneurs who have a technology idea and have got some degree of seed funding. We helped them scale up their business, advised and supported them on go to market strategy, on building up their business, recruiting and hiring talent and looking at their business dream. The business model worked very well. I chose to come back to the industry because I found consulting was not my primary skill. So, my two partners continued running the venture and I stepped out in 2014 to join HP.

Q. What will your advice be for young entrepreneurs?

A. In the early part of your career it makes sense to join a midsize or a large organization which can serve as a learning ground to understand how companies run.

During this period you get the benefit of a whole support system-you can learn, you can make mistakes, you can experience different environments. If your long term ambition is to turn entrepreneur, early to mid-thirties is the best time, since you have a more seasoned approach to building a business by then.

Q. We see that that people from the industry are generally not so much into you publications. However, you have been actively involved in publishing in various journals and magazines. Do you enjoy doing research and publishing papers?

A. I certainly enjoying reading and sharing my thoughts. One of the challenges for a marketer is to stay relevant and keenly observe his environment. I have written a few articles in the Economic Times and other business publications. I also did guest lectures at MICA, IIM Bangalore and IIM Ahmedabad. I tweet actively, sharing largely about marketing and technology, which is the space I am in today.

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

A. Those were the days when one went straight from graduation to MMS. I didn't really have any work experience. But my two years on campus was excellent. Those were the early days of SIMSR, so we didn't have an independent building. We worked out of two floors of the arts and Commerce College. Our student body was small; the class size was around 44 people. It was an interesting mix of people from various parts of the country with more than 50% being hostellers. Mr. SK Somaiya himself was involved with building the institute and there was a lot of active encouragement and support from the trustees. We certainly made friendships lasting a lifetime; I'm still in touch with most of my batch mates.

Q. What will your advice be for the young alumni starting their career?

A. These are two great years of your life and some of the learning that you get on campus cannot be replaced. A lot of the concepts are relevant, the value of which will be realised much later in life while working in large organizations. It's also a great place to build lasting relationships with colleagues who are equally motivated as you are. Read all you can. When you start working- always actively seek-out a frontline role. For people wanting to start out as a product manager or a consultant, my advice is to do a frontline sales or a frontline customer service role first. Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty and get some ground experience. For the first few years, it's not about the money that you make, it's about the experience that you gain, which you can use to build your career on.

Rapid fire-

- **Favourite movie:** *Dil Chahta Hai*
- **Favourite book-** *The Story Of My Experiments With Truth* by Mahatma Gandhi
- **Favourite holiday destination-** New Zealand
- **Favourite Quote-** Some of the best things in life cannot be seen or touched, they must be felt with the heart.
- **Role model-** P M Sinha- Chairman, PepsiCo. I regard him as a mentor and have learnt a lot about management from him.
- **One word/line that you say the most-** Never give up!

Interviewed and drafted by ALCOM Members-

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