

AlumSpeaks

In conversation with Mr. Reuben Pandian

SIMSR Alum Batch 1993-95

Head-Planning and Merchandising - Tata Unistore Limited



Q. What was your most memorable moment at SIMSR?

A. It's difficult for me to tell one particular memorable moment, but the overall experience of having been in one of the largest campus amongst Management Institutes in Bombay itself is memorable. In a couple of weeks, I figured out that what you have in SIMSR is better than anything else that you could possibly have in Bombay.

Q. What have been the significant learnings you had in these two years on campus?

A. You learn every day. Meeting a whole set of new people from across the country and learning new perspectives was a significant learning. We had people from various states of our country like Madhya Pradesh, Chennai, Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and a significant chunk from Bombay. It was a fabulous learning experience overall and we had a wonderful Director Mr. Pyarelal Arya back then. I never planned to be in the Management space. Suddenly to make a shift and go to Management was an experience in itself. Every day was exciting for me.

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

A. There have been many turning points. Day 1 Campus recruitment was like the beginning of a new trend in life. I think I was the first to get placed on campus back then in 1995. I was recruited by Wipro, post which it's been an exciting journey. I've been in some kind of start up in all my turning points. From Wipro, I moved to Dabur. It was an interesting experience because the packaging used to happen in Nepal, our sourcing used to happen from US - California, Australia and a bit from India. Reprocessing used to happen in the factory, partly in Nepal, partly in Sahibabad. After that I moved to Pepsi, down south in Coimbatore.

Beverage industry is a highly recommended industry. It's extremely hectic. Every minute is a training ground. I was in a zone where Pepsi was dominant than Coke in India. The beverage industry exposure helps you absorb and learn ground level business dynamics. To me this

was where I learned execution of Marketing and Sales – distributor market, the whole sellers, logistics and more. The passion for the brand in this industry is extremely high.

Q. How was your experience in Reliance Retail while stepping into multifunctional roles (Strategy Head, Business Planning, Business process IT integration)?

A. The good part about Reliance is the scale at which they work provides you an exposure to different developmental opportunities. That is how I managed to upscale from one assignment to another. Across retail, I think I touched upon all aspects of retail – front end, back end, technology, interfaces, product manufacturing & sourcing and software integration. Reliance is one of the best companies in terms of execution. In Reliance, there is freedom to do things the way you want. Business process IT integration is close to my heart. It is the fundamental and future for anything scalable, controllable, and monitor-able.

Q. Do you think Tata CliQ's - *phygital marketing* be the key differentiator compared to its competitors?

A. If you had asked this question to me 15 years ago, the answer would be - Absolutely! Today technology is changing rapidly. Anyone who gets the first mover advantage gains from it. The faster we roll it out and execute it correctly, we have an edge for a period of time. Nothing in the phygital space is not replicable. Everything is perpetually connected. So technology has to move up, you may get a first mover advantage but then the brand takes over at some point of time. Here, speed will be the match winner.

Q. How important role will technology play for creating this 'one-of-its-kind, Omni channel' marketplace? Will this boost the jobs in data analytics sector?

A. The word Phygital /Omnithat is being used in different contexts is nothing but multi-channel. To define Omni channel is basically to get anything anytime when you want it. We are connected to mobile phone device wherever we go and whatever we do! Like connect to an e-commerce site, walking into a store, on social networking platforms – the mobile is connected to you. Digital is an evolving space. This power creates requirements.

Q. What is your opinion on the Tatas entering the E-Commerce and Retail market at such a late stage after many entrants have come?

A.I don't believe Tata is a late entrant because the market is still evolving in the E-commerce industry. Bulk of the industry is still electronic, which works on pricing. Brands like Apple that are controlling prices have a scale at which they roll new products for consumers. Consumers are now looking for lifetime value that can potentially translate the subject.

Q. What impact can Demonetization in India make to the retail industry?

A. It will impact liquidity. The grey area of liquidity, the undocumented money will all get aligned. The infrastructure is not ready to handle that kind of traffic for now. But people have adapted so quickly that everybody now is using UPI and Paytm to transfer money just at the click of a button. Technology's advantage is to innovate. Demonetization is a behavioural change. You find a way of operating your money with less liquidity in hand. Retail industry will be impacted, but it will adapt. At the end of the day, it operates on consumption of consumers as long as funds are available. Liquidity issue is a deterrent for couple of months but eventually the system will adapt to this change.

Q. What is your advice to SIMSR students?

A.I can give perspectives not advice (laughs). There is no right or wrong but there are perspectives. Life is now! Live the moment right now! I would suggest keeping your integrity

– being someone who is whole and complete. For instance, a cycle does not stop if one out of its fifty spokes breaks. It will continue to function but with lesser efficiency. So just holding on will not help, you have to take a step back, correct it and get going.

Q. Any suggestions you would like to give to the Alumni committee to increase the Alumni association with their Alma Mater?

A. Unfortunately I have not engaged with the Alumni committee actively and was not able to attend the last event I was invited to. But I would recommend you to invite Alumni for guest lectures or through webinars on the website if it is not possible to be physically present. I would like to visit the institute for conducting guest lectures in the future.

Interviewed and drafted by ALCOM Members -

Parul Pathak

Aditya Sankhe