

“Self-respect has always been a core value”

HDFC Standard Life's VP Marketing Sanjay Tripathy speaks to Bindu Nair Maitra on advertising and marketing

PROFILE

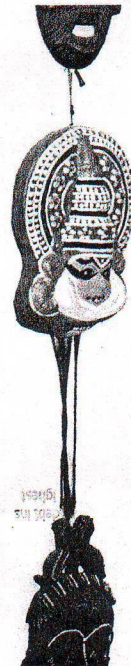
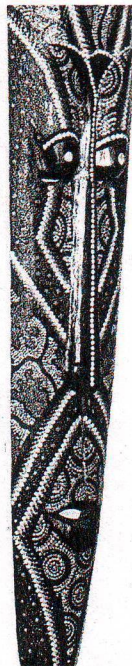
Ask Sanjay Tripathy, executive vice president—marketing, HDFC Standard Life Insurance about the best training ground that he experienced in his career, and he is loath to stop at only one.

“I would have to say there are two. My first job at Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) made me realise the importance of an effective distribution system and in understanding consumer needs. It served as the foundation for my latter jobs. My stint at Frito-Lay after that was an important lesson in entrepreneurship, about building a business from scratch and having to worry about each and every single problem that came up,” recalls Tripathy.

“My learning in the early years was to realise that one needed to always think from the customers’ perspective; what their needs are and provide products and services from their standpoint. If you understand customers’ needs and position a product relevant to their needs, then selling the product becomes a cakewalk. The overall role of marketing should be in unearthing customer insights and creating products based on that rather than depending only on the communication to do the job.”

It was a natural progression for Tripathy to join GCMMF after passing out from the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA), since MNC companies were not allowed to recruit from the campus. His first assignment saw him being sent to Kerala with a sales mandate with the company. “Since the institute had been set up by Dr Kurien with a vision towards providing quality Indian management talent for Indian companies, getting recruited by GCMMF at campus was a dream assignment and I was delighted to get the job.”

Tripathy says the early days



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taught him a lot about competing with a better distribution strategy. “In the FMCG segment, you have to compete daily. You need to match demand creation with the supply chain. One thing that I learnt early on was that customers don’t like re-launches. You need to get it right the first time,” he adds.

Tripathy joined Frito-Lay after his stint with GCMMF, to kick start the foods business, which was nascent at the time.

“Food as a category is one that is extremely high involvement and therefore very challenging. Look at Kellogg’s, they took time to change the breakfast habit in the country. At that time, PepsiCo’s food business was nascent and had to be built from scratch. This taught me how to increase consumption in an impulse purchase category by understanding the snacking habit of the TG.”

The lowdown

2004 onwards Executive vice president – marketing, direct sales channels and corporate communication, HDFC Standard Life

2002 Head-marketing, international retail business, Reliance Infocomm (Reliance Communications)

1999 Manager – marketing, planning & trade marketing, Mattel India

1995 Regional sales manager – East, Nepal & Bhutan, PepsiCo (Frito-Lay)

1992 Area sales manager, GCMMF (Amul)

After Frito-Lay, Tripathy went on to work at Matel and later Reliance Infocomm. “I was fortunate to work in the early days with people who encouraged me to put importance on learning how marketing could make business bigger. My time at Reliance especially taught me about building scale through marketing.”

It was in 2004 that he joined HDFC Standard Life as head of marketing. In 2005, the company embarked on its *Sar Utha ke Jiyo* campaign, which went on to create significant brand recall.

“We did some qualitative research among our TG and realized that one of the key concerns was that people do not want their family to depend on anyone after their death or to be a burden on anyone post retirement and wanted to be able to provide for their family even if they are not around. We arrived at our core brand thought of ‘Sar Utha Ke

Jiyo. Self-respect has always been a core value for all Indians. Life insurance is a critical solution to ensure financial independence and self-respect is maintained at all times. HDFC Standard Life, therefore, promises to help customers live their lives with dignity and self-respect,” recalls Tripathy.

He feels that what differentiated the *Sar Utha ke Jiyo* campaign from other category players at the time was the fact that most players were used to doing tactical campaigns that encouraged customers to make investments to save tax.

“Brands were only talking about category benefit. They were not talking about what their product was offering to the consumer. How will we build emotional quotient? How can the strength of the HDFC brand translate into equity for this particular category? Deliver consistent value to consumers.”

“People need to invest in life insurance for the right reasons i.e. be invested for the long term. The challenge in the life insurance category is to make people realise what are the right reasons for taking life insurance. Most of the time, they look at life insurance as a short term wealth creation asset, which is not the case. It is a financial asset that one needs to buy keeping their long term objectives in mind, including protection and their life stage needs” says Tripathy, explaining the challenges behind communicating for a category such as life insurance.

He further adds, “We wanted to capture the Indian value mindset. They want to be independent, at the same time they respect family and elders. Our campaigns were based on a strong consumer insight. We have reinforced this brand value ‘Sar Utha Ke Jiyo’ in all our communication, by finding relevant ways to touch a chord with consumers across their life stages and link it back to this brand idea. Our differentiator was that we provide need based solutions”

HINANSRU PANDYA