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**Dialogue of**Charulata
Ravi Kumar

Advertising and marketing services go hand in hand. Bates is an ad agency and 141 Worldwide takes things forward with through-the-line initiatives. The two teams function together to activate the brand. Activation means that the brand is not just talking through advertising but interacting with the consumer.

Charulata Ravi Kumar, Country Head, 141 Worldwide, and EVP and GM, Bates India

Charulata Ravi Kumar, Country Head 141 Worldwide, and EVP and General Manager Bates India, who has 17 years of experience, started her career with Sista's (now known as Saatchi & Saatchi). From Sista's she moved on to JWT, Clarion (now Bates) and Lowe while she was in India.

Then she moved to the Middle East with an offer from Grey. Thereafter, she moved to Bates (Middle East) to launch 141 Worldwide. She also helped in setting up 141 Worldwide in Kolkata in 2003. In December 2004, she was given additional responsibility to head Bates Delhi. **Sakshi Talwar** of exchange4media, talks to Charulata about her journey through the years. Excerpts:

Q. You have always been an advertising person. How is it that you ended setting up 141 Worldwide, a marketing services company, in the Middle East?

A. I believe in marketing services as form of communication. Traditionally, 90 per cent of ad spends have gone to above-the-line activity, mainly TV and print. Since you cannot put your money behind 70-odd channels, the main thing was how to use clients' money better without increasing their budgets. Everywhere in the world, companies started to feel that traditional ATL advertising alone is not sufficient for a brand. How to communicate the brand more effectively is where it all started. At that time, one of the accounts I was working on was British American Tobacco, which is globally handled by 141 Worldwide. So, in the Middle East, 141 Worldwide needed to be set up, and I had to drive the project through for the BAT account. Also, I worked in 141 Headquarters in London before coming to India, which gave me exposure to the new world of marketing and communications with global methods and innovative offerings.

Q. Why was it set up as a separate division of Bates? What has been its response?

A. It was set up as a separate division to reinforce the importance of point of contact with consumers. In addition, the kind of people who work in 141 Worldwide are not necessarily from advertising; they come from specialised backgrounds. Since everyone knows Bates for advertising,

to go and tell people that we have additional functions was not credible enough. 141 Worldwide has huge credibility globally. Its response has been excellent. We have won nine accounts since we set it up in 2003.

Q. How is it different from other marketing services companies?

A. 141 started in the West in 1992. It was different from other marketing services companies as it offered the entire gamut of marketing services under one umbrella. There were individual outfits that specialised in their own areas like direct marketing, event management, retail, etc. But in 141 Worldwide, we got all the services together.

Q. Can you elaborate on the kind of specialisation and services you provide with 141 Worldwide?

A. In India, we provide a lot of B2B activities, which include activating a brand and creating brand interaction with your trade and channel partners. We also have a CRM team which has a more personalised approach. It is often mistaken for direct mailing, which is only one part of CRM. It could be service at the retail outlets, creating a regular channel of interaction, etc. And then there are events and promotions. There is also a reference programme that we connect with our CRM programme.

Q. How do Bates and 141 Worldwide function simultaneously?

A. Advertising and marketing services go hand in hand. Apart from advertising, how do you take the values of the brand into various other functions that still interact with the same consumer? Bates is an advertising agency and 141 Worldwide takes it forward with through-the-line initiatives. The two teams function together to activate the brand. Activation means that the brand is not just talking through advertising but interacting with the consumer.

Q. Why is it described as 'through-the-line' marketing division?

A. When we talk about through-the-line, people automatically start putting advertising into outdoor, radio, poster, etc. It is a lot more of scientific thinking than just putting it into media other than TV and print. Given the increasing fragmentation of media, it is a judicious mix of below-the-line and above-the-line that help brands connect with the target audience. For example, we have a dedicated BTL team and an ATL team that work on Nokia. The purpose of providing this kind of specialisation is to ensure that the brand gets a well-rounded marketing strategy.

Q. Are the clients for 141 Worldwide independent of Bates?

A. Clients are independent of Bates but if clients of 141 Worldwide have advertising needs, we bring in team from Bates to work on it. There are clients exclusive to 141 Worldwide and Bates, and also clients that are common to both. In India, 141 Worldwide has clients like ITC, Nokia, Shell, Rupa Innerware and Star News.

Q. Is 141 Worldwide yielding profits? Will it be more profitable than Bates?

A. 141 Worldwide has been very profitable because in marketing services, margins are higher than in advertising. It is a very work intensive and lucrative area. However, we are looking at a 50-50 split, which means some revenues from both. That's also a reflection on the trend in the market that will emerge in terms of brand spends. Brand spends across the world have become 50-50 between

marketing services and advertising and it has started happening in India as well.

Q. What is the vision for the Bates group?

A. We want to take Bates among the top seven in 12 months' time. Bates does not figure among the top 10 agencies in India at the moment but we are very likely to get there considering the pace at which we are growing. This year the revenue of the Delhi branch has gone up by 30 per cent over the last calendar year. Not only that, we have been doing some great work on Indian Airlines, Nokia, Dabur and Indiatimes.

Q. What has been the biggest challenge of your career?

A. Every point was a different kind of challenge. When you are junior, even if you have brains and you are talking sense, it is tough to get your point across if you don't have the experience. Being a woman was also a challenge in this business. It is better now as things have changed, but it was a little more conventional in the early years of my career. And professionally, I have learnt to push my limits over the years.

Q. In advertising, do you think there is a trend towards attaching a social message to a brand?

A. It depends on the product. You can't give a social message for a lifestyle product. For instance, you can't say that for every Cartier you buy, a child's life is going to be saved. That is not going to get people to buy a Cartier. It might help people to buy Benetton as social messages have been a part of their brand image. It can't be a forced social message as it should be relevant to the brand. Human emotion on the other hand works across the entire spectrum of advertising. Putting children in ads works as a rule of thumb. Even if it is a very premium brand like Rolex, human emotions work always.

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