



Photograph Shriravan Reddy

Marketing a Dream

Joseph Aloysius

For a person who started his career as a copy writer in the advertising field and eventually got into marketing, leading various marketing communication teams for Wipro Technologies, iGATE Global Solutions, Hyundai Motors, SSI and Medimix the choice of entrepreneurship came naturally. Meet Vinod Harith, Co-director and founder of CMO Axis, India's first Market Process Outsourcing Company. CMO Axis is positioned to deliver to fast

changing business and marketing needs. With a combination of business insights, strategic marketing expertise and execution bandwidth, CMO Axis is able to offer integrated solutions that make business sense to both business and marketing leaders. Mr. Vinod Harith shares insights into his life starting from copywriting to marketing manager and as a director of an MPO company. Excerpts from an interview on his entrepreneurial venture and the challenges he faced.

Since you graduated in Chemistry how you did get interested in marketing and communication? Who or what impressed you to choose this field?

I was very interested in writing. I wanted to become either a journalist or a copy writer. I wanted pursue Visual Communication in my undergraduate programme. Unfortunately even Loyola college didn't have Viscom at that time. So I did a credit course in Mass

Communication and journalism in Loyola during my UG. Eventually, I went into copy writing. I did my internship in an Ad agency and became a copy writer. That's how I went into marketing. I got into agency the side of marketing. Then I moved to brand management of Medimix and then Hyundai.

CMO Axis is the first Marketing Process Outsourcing (MPO) company in India. How did you get this innovative idea? Elaborate on the challenges you had to encounter to execute the idea and establish the company?

The pain that I was going through as a marketing person triggered me to think of this innovative idea. During the past 16 years before CMO Axis, I understood the marketing eco system. We have various agencies like Ad agency, PR agency, Content writing, online developers, digital marketing, etc. But none of these agencies take the bottom line responsibility of increasing business outcome. Project managers are dealing with too many people to get one task accomplished in marketing. But other functions like finance and accounting are outsourced by one single company. So it struck me that when finance and accounting can be outsourced, why not marketing? When we established the company one significant challenge we faced is lack of awareness of the possibilities of outsourcing marketing. We went through great pain to explain to our clients about what we were able to bring to the table. How it would be very different from what they were getting all these years. But now with the help of people like you (media) we are able to get across our message better.

You were heading the marketing and communications department for various well known organizations like Wipro Technologies and leading the marketing teams. How do you think that work experience has been helpful to you? In what ways do you think work experience in an organization will be helpful for an aspiring entrepreneur?

An entrepreneur needs training and experience to reach a significant margin in a market. If you look at us we are able to walk into any big organization and meet the CEO or CMO. It gives us the ability to say that "we have been 'there' and done 'that' in the past". The biggest problem today 90% of agencies has not experience or understanding about how big organizations work. So for them to walk into a company and talk about business results is really difficult. Because today all the large companies ask for past experience. The biggest advantage we bring to the table is that we have this so called experience.

To be an entrepreneur in the MPO field what are the unique skills and attitude one should possess/cultivate?

The most important skill for an entrepreneur is an understanding of how marketing can deliver a good result. So the understanding of how to run a marketing program that results in good business is critical. There are enough of specialized agencies out there. How can an MPO be different? The understanding of how to make an impact on the core of the business is the essential skill for an entrepreneur in the MPO field.

As it is a new alternative for traditional approach to marketing, how has been the response of SMEs and corporates toward this new trend set by you? How difficult or easy was it for you to garner clients?

In any organization there will be a huge focus on marketing and a small improvement in marketing can impact the bottom line of the company. People are constantly struggling to improvise and get better outcomes. Make marketing more efficient is every leader's agenda in an organization. So the biggest thing which is working for us is we go there and connect with them and tell them how we can run their marketing more efficiently to deliver better outcomes. So that makes people sit and listen to us. After the education none of our clients said we don't need help with marketing. The challenge for us is to come up with right engagement model and delivery model. We are dealing with large as well as SMEs and each organization needs different models.

What is the scope for MPO nationally/ globally? Would you encourage other young entrepreneurs to enter this field?

Yes, definitely we encourage young entrepreneurs and even seasoned entrepreneurs because as I said earlier the market is wide open and we need experienced people to enter this field. We produced two entrepreneurs during the last four years from CMO Axis. Regarding scope nationally we have generated a lot of interest. We recently entered global markets and have been active during the past six months. MPO has quite a lot of scope even outside India.

One of your interested areas is managing the online medium for marketing. Today for marketing why it is important to communicate through new media or to have online communication though there are lots of communication channels?

Actually we concentrate on all the channels of communication whatever is suited for

the client. If a business is predominantly done offline we won't suggest online communication for them. Online medium is required more as a support channel in most of the business areas. Customers today do research online like comparing, checking reviews etc before buying a product. We look at this medium as one of the important channel but it is not necessarily a 'must to do' function. We look at the marketing in a holistic way. We believe marketing has to be integrated.

Traversing the success path for four years, what major lessons have you learnt?

Initially we thought we understood customer needs from past experience. But we realized every client has unique needs. Marketing is looked as segments, which means people are trying to put companies and people into board segments. But later we understood every organization we were dealing with had unique requirements. This kind of generalization doesn't work. So today we respect each and every organization as an individual organization and offer marketing solutions.

Being siblings, entrepreneurs, co-founders and directors of CMO Axis how are you able to manage your personal relationship as well as professional relationship with your brother, Pramod Harith?

Though it's not easy I feel we are lucky that both of us come from the same back ground. Both of us have the same risk aptitude and vision. It is good that we both take a lot of things together to achieve. But at the same time we are strong critics of each other. That actually helps our business. Once we step into office we try to keep our personal aspects outside and try criticizing each other. The best part of it is certain things you can take from your brother and walk away, which you will not be able to take from an outsider. We look criticism more objectively. We are happy to share our vision together forever.

What is your message for upcoming entrepreneurs in the MPO field?

I want more to enter this field. We would like more young people to come to us, work and learn as well. That way we are very open because our vision is about focusing at a larger level. The market is wide enough for hundreds of other players. We want more people and will be happy to train them. We would like to be a part of an incubation centre for people who would like to eventually do something.