

Pitch

"Insurance marketing offers unique challenges"

One of the country's leading private life insurers, HDFC Standard Life has stood out for innovative and effective marketing. It generated Rs 5,565 crore in premium collections in the 2008-09 fiscal, registering 15 percent growth. With 595 offices and over 2,07,000 consultants, it launched 11 products last year and entered the fast growing health insurance market. HDFC Standard Life executive vice-president and marketing head Sanjay Tripathy shares his thoughts on the company's marketing strategies with Senior Correspondent Onkar Pandey. Tripathy wears many hats at the company, handling marketing strategy, and brand planning, advertising and communication strategy, corporate communication, customer analysis and segmentation, among others. Excerpts from the interview:

What are the changes the insurance sector has undergone since private players entered the fray?

The entry of private insurers has led to product innovation, better pricing, vibrant distribution channels, improved delivery mechanism, and better customer service. Customer perspective has also undergone dramatic changes since the entry of private players. Today, life insurance is not merely viewed as a tax saving



measure but plays a dominant role in an individual's financial planning.

At HDFC Standard Life, our focus has always been on designing solutions keeping in the needs of an individual across different life stages. These efforts resulted in us being the key contributor in creating the children and pension categories. We have managed to set a new standard in the domestic life insurance communication space too. We're the first private insurer to break the ice using the idea

of 'self-respect' instead of 'death' to convey our brand proposition with our *Sar Utha Ke Jiyo* campaign. **What are the key challenges you face in the area of marketing?** As the insurance market is marked by stiff competition, creating a brand identity, along with enabling customers to identify the best insurance product/solution that meets their needs, is the biggest challenge. In a nutshell, earning the consumer trust, building a distinct brand identity,

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ensuring consistent service delivery, and offering the best advice, are the other big challenges. **What is the cornerstone of your marketing strategy? How does marketing of insurance products differ from other BFSI products?** We were the first insurer to firmly position ourselves as a well-defined and differentiated brand. Life insurance is a critical solution to ensure family's financial independence and self-respect. We, therefore, promise to help customers to live their lives with dignity and self-respect, which is reflected in our brand philosophy of *Sar Utha Ke Jiyo*.

We have one of the highest brand awareness and consideration levels in the industry along with excellent brand positioning and re-call. The *Sar Utha Ke Jiyo* campaign has managed to redefine the way life insurance advertising has been done. This

radio, OOH, Internet, mobile, and on-ground initiatives.

Since life insurance is a long-term business, constant effort is required in terms of marketing initiatives to create consideration and awareness and build brand visibility and trust. In other BFSI sectors, marketing campaigns are tactical and short to medium-term in nature. **With so many confusing product variants, how do you address this category challenge?** Yes, there are diverse product variants keeping in mind the different needs of individuals. Solutions are tailor-made to suit the needs of each individual. As an individual's needs keep changing during the various life stages, the presence of several prod-



“The *Sar Utha Ke Jiyo* campaign has redefined the way life insurance advertising has been done in this market. This core brand thought was derived at after extensive research and consumer insighting.”

core brand thought was derived at after extensive research and insighting that an individual doesn't want to be a burden on his family and that he doesn't want his family to depend on anyone after his death and that he want to ensure financial independence and self-respect for the family.

We follow a 360-degree campaign to take our message through different platforms and intensify the brand experience. Apart from television, our campaigns are supported by print,

ucts leads to diverse options and the customer can make the best choice.

We offer plans that fit each of these needs—protection, investment, saving, pension, and health. **How do you look at rural markets?** We are still an under-insured market, and more so the rural markets. There is an urgent need to educate the rural masses on the importance of life insurance. Distribution reach, easy-to-sell-products and building trust and brand equity will be the key to

success in rural markets. We are present in quite a few tier II and III towns on a pilot scale and plan to expand over the next few years. Scaling up rural reach will take time and huge resources. **How has the slowdown impacted your business?**

The slowdown had an impact on the industry. However, we are happy that our new policies grew by 16 percent over the last year, despite customers reducing their annual premium commitment on new policies. Our renewal premiums posted a healthy growth of 34 percent. We are looking at breaking even in another one or two years.

What role does tie-up with a foreign partner play in marketing?

The domestic life insurance industry is still evolving. Foreign participation brings in expertise from relevant areas. Then strong brand name, exposure to matured market, global exposure, product innovation capability etc help in building trust and designing products faster. **As a high-involvement service brand, how have you leveraged the IPL platform?**

We are the associate sponsors and insurance partner for the Rajasthan Royals for IPL 2009. Their fighting spirit goes well with our brand thought. We've unveiled a new music video featuring Shilpa Shetty and the Rajasthan Royals team. The video propagates self-respect which is our brand essence. We are planning several events in the coming months along with the team like financial planning sessions for the players. ■
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