

Brand Equity (ET) ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RING

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Forget the international MBA degree. For many of India's sharpest marketers, the best training ground is the advertising industry

on the OTHER SIDE OF THE RING

Sruthi Radhakrishnan

IF ever ad folks have any fleeting doubts hovering in their minds on the decision to move to the other side of the fence, they should look to Sanjeev Chadha, CEO, PepsiCo India for inspiration. From a sales job, Chadha joined JWT to get a taste of advertising world. During his stint at the agency, Chadha played a role in pitching for a client he would eventually join — PepsiCo. Chadha will tell you that making the transition from client to agency and back to client is a wide curve one. It isn't an easy decision and jumping from agency to client involves a lot of learning and unlearning.

In the course of talking to ad professionals who made the switch to the corporate world, we came across different reasons for jumping the fence. Take the case of Praveen Sharma, head - agency business, Google India who recently moved to the technology giant from Madison realising that digital is the road he should pursue. "My move to Google was prompted by an obvious realisation that digital media was going through a different growth trajectory both on media consumption and media investment", he says. Sharma may have found his calling recently, but in the case of Rameet Arora, who moved from Leo Burnett to McDonald's India as senior director - marketing, the switch is something he was always planning to make. Even when he was in the agency, Arora says he would spend days at the clients' office and factory working with them. "It was more than communication; we would work together on product design and pricing strategies. I was always a passionate ad guy, but I was also instinctively a marketing person," he says.

Quiz them on the learnings from an ad agency and the unequivocal response is that their respective stints readied them for the corporate battlefield. "The way you slog in an agency in the initial years helps you understand the sort of work they do," says Sheran Mehra, head - marketing and communications, Dhanlaxmi Bank.

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Mehra's stint in the ad world took her to Lintas and Ogilvy before joining HSBC, followed by Barclays and finally at her present role at Dhanlaxmi bank. "In an agency, one has the good fortune of working with multiple industries. So, one learns the ropes with any sort of brand." And the stint in an agency gives these professionals a sense of what to expect from an agency when they have moved to the other side. Nita Kapoor, EVP - marketing and corporate affairs, Godfrey Phillips India says that knowledge about an agency's style of working is a double edge sword. "The positive side is that I can anticipate agency issues with my experience of working at Mudra. When an agency comes up with a 360 degree marketing plan, I can anticipate what will work and what will not. I know how integrated or not the agency is," she states. On the other hand, Kapoor says she can sense creative fatigue. "I know what the creative person has told the servicing person when the work hasn't happened. I also know when the agency gets locked up in the execution of an idea and not just the idea", she says. With the constant temptation to do something new, Arora from McDonald's says his experience at Burnett helped him rein in the desire to deliver everything a consumer wants. "Instead, we focus on delivering something that the consumer will pay an extra rupee for."

But having witnessed both worlds, there is a sense that agencies

have some catching up to do to match up with brands. Sharma of Google says that there is a need to have a closer working relationship with the agency community to serve an ever-growing advertiser base. "The development of a robust agency ecosystem is critical to the growth of digital business in India," he says. Kapoor from Godfrey Phillips laments about the kind of talent agencies are hiring. "Most of them are unable to go beyond the 'here' and 'now'. Also, when people like us move over to marketing, servicing becomes redundant. Agencies need to figure out what they want their servicing teams to deliver."

Sometimes the challenge is to balance between the two experiences. Arora of McDonald's says the real challenge of handling the move is to look beyond TVCs (or print ads or radio spots). "It's tough moving over — sometimes you feel guilty playing the other role. But, when you start thinking how advertising can affect business, you start thinking marketing," Arora says. "I've come a long way, from being a communication expert to a business manager. I'm far more comfortable with all aspects of business now. Advertising doesn't teach you that and ideally, it shouldn't", says Kapoor. It goes without saying that marketing side is typically a lot more remunerative. And of course, there's the cheap thrills that few will admit to — the opportunity to lord over one's former colleagues and peers.

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Nita Kapoor
From Mudra
to Godfrey Phillips



Praveen Sharma
From Madison
to Google



Rameet Arora
From Leo Burnett
to McDonald's



Sheran Mehra
From Ogilvy
to Dhanlaxmi Bank

CROSS OVER

THINKSTOCK

