Disrupting the market with innovation is in our DNA: Nipun Marya, Vivo India

**Marya, Director - Brand Strategy, talks about building the brand through IPL and giving cricket-crazy consumers unique differential experiences**

 **Published** - [13-February-2019](https://www.exchange4media.com/articles/2019-02-13.html)

From investing in sports to disrupting the market with new technology, Vivo has been riding on innovations to stay afloat in the competitive smart phone market in India. Nipun Marya, Director - Brand Strategy, Vivo India spoke to exchange4media on the dynamic smartphone market in India and the marketing strategy that works best.

Edited excerpts:

**We have seen lot of changes happening in the smartphone landscape. There has been saturation and competition. How has Vivo re-strategised its marketing game?**
As a brand, it has been 14 years since we've been in existence worldwide. Right from 2004, our focus has been very clear and it has been on keeping the customer first and getting the fundamentals right. In India, we started in 2014 and right then we were very clear what our strategy would be and how we wanted to  approach the Indian market since, all said and done, it is the world’s second largest smartphone market. It is a market which is so huge in potential and opportunity that you need to have a solid fundamental and foundation to really go a long way.

Having a good sales and distribution network, and a good after-sales network is very important for us to live up to the promises we make to our consumers. We have put our focus and force on all these things combined. That apart, there is innovation, which is something we truly believe in. If you look at the last one-and-half years, we have innovated in so many ways. The Nex dual display for instance is an industry-first technology that we introduced, and the rest of the market is now trying to catch up.

**Apple took a hit on sales recently. How does it affect other smartphone makers. How has it favoured your growth and sales?**
If the question is only about Apple, then my answer would be that Apple has so far focused in the extremely high priced segment. If we look at the last two years specifically, we'd see that they have only focused on the Rs 50,000-plus segment and this is not where our focus is. If we are talking of what we offer and at what price, the question then shifts to value proposition of Competition vs Value proposition of VIVO. The customer doesn't buy features when they buy a phone or the price. They buy the brand. They put their money in a brand and the brand value justifies the price they pay for it.

For us to do well in the market, we need to have good value proposition which means good word o features good quality, goodf mouth and good after-sales service. The combination makes us a good brand that people want to invest in.

**The market constantly sees disruptors in your segment. How do you keep yourself agile?  What are the three biggest challenges smartphone makers have today?**
In technology, disruption is the name of the game. If you are not disruptive or innovating, it becomes very difficult for you to survive. Our research, investments and our thinking are all targeted towards how we can innovate and bring the innovation to our customers. Just to give you an example, we have the Vivo NEX pop-up camera or another example is of the upcoming V15 Pro which is the first to feature a 32-megapixel pop-up selfie camera. These are the features, which we launch first in the industry in specific price segments or across price segments too sometimes. Disrupting the market with innovation is in our DNA.

Talking of challenges, I see opportunity in every challenge. To start with, a consumer changes his smartphone every year-and-half and in a family every three to four months there is a new smartphone that is purchased. The challenge to make them buy your phone is an opportunity to sell your brand more.

The second big challenge and opportunity is the level of consumer awareness. We have to treat consumers as equals and give them the best because they know what they are looking for and who can make it available to them at the price they are ready to pay for it.

The third challenge and opportunity is competition. The market is filled with young, agile and disruptive brands. Competitive scenario is dynamic and not forgiving. You really have to be on top of your game all time to do well. It keeps pushing us to not settle at any point. We are constantly innovating and moving forward.

**Coming to sports now, over the years you have mastered the art of sports marketing and associated yourself with almost every big sporting tournament. You obviously give the innovation route an upper hand against the traditional marketing tools. What is the brand’s thought around being so heavily involved with sports?**
Our marketing is based on being experiential and driving on a passion point. Passion point marketing is what we really believe in. We focus on passion point marketing because in the age of Instagram and other similar platforms people have the choice to follow their interests. It is so much about the passion point rather than bombarding people with information that they do not seek at all. Cricket in India is a big passion point, especially when cricket and entertainment come together the proposition becomes very good. For the 45 to 50 days when IPL is on, we see great fun not just inside the stadium but also outside it. In places like sports bars and anywhere and everywhere actually you go, you see people talking about the tournament. We are now also associated with the FIFA World Cup. We do Pro-Kabaddi League. We market ourselves through all those platforms that excite people, that people are passionate about.  Like any other marketing tool, this also helps us understand our customers better.

The two major events people are looking forward to this summer are the Lok Sabha elections and IPL. Do you think there would be a big clash in captivating interest from the people who are both consumers and voters?
We are ultimately part of a democracy and we have to go by the rules of the land. Once the Election Commission announces the dates of the elections, BCCI will do look at it. It is between the Government of India and BCCI, I don't think there is a clash. Rules will be followed and the natural course of action will be taken.

**You paid a whooping Rs 2,200 crore to retain the IPL title sponsorship for 5 seasons. How do you plan to make the most of this investment and recover the money from it?**
To start with, Vivo is here to stay for a long time. If Vivo has to stay here for the next 10 or 15 or 50 years, we have to invest in everything that works for us. Another example to demonstrate our long-term plans is how we already have one manufacturing unit and we have opened another one. We are looking for long-term investment.

As for how do we recover the money, recovery is expected in two fronts. We are building our brand through IPL. We give our cricket crazy consumers unique differential experiences. We've done this in the past and we will try to do it in the future as well. A lot of activities around IPL which you will see will be centered around customers. Like last time, we did a perfect fan contest where you have to participate in digital engagement and some participants get the opportunity to watch the VIVO IPL match in the VIVO IPL BOX which is a property created and designed by Vivo. It is a Vivo property inside the stadium. Not just consumers but our retail partners and distribution partners are also excited about these contests. Then we take the IPL trophy for tours to let people see it. There is also the Vivo IPL fan park. A lot of cities don't get to experience the match inside the stadium so what the BCCI does and what we participate in is the VIVO IPL fan park. These fan parks are properties we have invested in. The parks have huge screens and gives a stadium like feel to the 5,000-7,000 people who can be accommodated at one time. So, it is not about investing X and getting back 5X. It is about creating a brand value and a brand recall.

**Do you see hike in sales during IPL?**
This is a phase we are at the peak of our brand activations with new set of communication. We also generally launch a new product around this time. It is a combination of new products and new set of communications that sees a hike in sales during these 40-45 days.

**There were talks of Samsung being in the limelight when they came on board with Mumbai Indians last season. What do you have to say about it?**
As title sponsors of IPL if any brand gets maximum visibility it is US. Right from the name of the tournament to  the ticket to the boundary rope to pretty much everything you see it is Vivo. If we say IPL, the brand that comes to mind is Vivo. So we see no threat to visibility.

**Are you looking at investing in any new sports?**
With PKL, FIFA and IPL, we feel we are quite well covered. Having said that, we are always on the lookout for new opportunities. But it has to make the right business logic for us. If that happens we are ready to invest in it.

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