

Set for a bigger leap

The merger will focus on digital media and emerging technologies

Last month, the listed entity, Pressman Advertising Ltd (Pressman) along with its promoters, signed a definitive Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Signpost India Pvt Ltd (Signpost). Media spends are now rapidly shifting from traditional advertising to new platforms in the digital space and therefore the combined entity, with its innovative offerings, will be well placed to grow at a rapid pace. The company has constituted a committee of directors to facilitate the process of merger, including the appointment of registered valuers, merchant bankers, legal consultants and other intermediaries.

According to the MoU, Signpost and Pressman propose to merge the two companies to create a larger and stronger entity, subject to statutory, regulatory and other approvals including relevant third-party consents and they have joined hands to pool their resources, which will be mutually beneficial to all the stakeholders.

“The proposed merger will help pool in the experience, expertise, resources and client base of the two companies; offer a larger bouquet of services in the areas of advertising and promotion with focus on digital media and emerging technologies. The proposed merger will result in streamlining of operations and cost-efficiency and together with the combined clientele of both the companies, should result in accelerated business growth,” says Dr Niren Suchanti, CMD of Pressman Advertising, talking about the rationale for the merger. “It has always been our endeavour to work in the interest of our shareholders and this alliance will enable rapid growth with a larger offering and the combined strength of the two entities will enhance shareholders’ value,” he adds. Pressman Advertising is one of India’s leading independent advertising agencies engaged largely in print advertising, public relations and digital advertising. Pressman Advertising has a particularly strong presence in financial and compliance advertising and has a very vibrant public relations division and a digital

advertising division. It has built a strong reputation over five decades and has a large number of blue-chip companies among its regular clients.

What is Signpost? It is an independent ISO certified digital out of home (DOOH) enterprise. “We have wide experience in implementing large scale public oriented projects including street furniture, transit, public bicycle sharing and an internet traffic monitoring system with over 32 government authorities across the country. We also serve more than 100 corporates, PSUs, tourism and MSME brands through our own network of 11 offices. We have earned recognition in national and international forums with 57 gold, 43 silver and 28 bronze awards like ABBYS, EMVIES, KYOORIUS, Dragon of Asia, etc,” explains Shripad Ashtekar, CEO and co-founder of Signpost, excited about working with Pressman. Son of an ex-serviceman, Ashtekar is a first-generation Indian entrepreneur.

Many firsts

Among the many firsts Ashtekar gave to the industry, are novelties like India’s first computer vision-based video analytics tool certified by IISc for traffic management and advertising intelligence as well as India’s first-ever airport with 70 per cent digital media inventory. “I pioneered the concept of ‘hyperlocal programmatic advertising’ to evolve individualistic character to media assets to bring about the demographic creativity unmatched even by print, smartphone or radio and set OOH in a parallel league. We created the largest digital billboard network in India in Mumbai showcasing hyperlocal programmatic content driven by defining first party real time data analytics, besides developed app-based electric bicycle share mobility solutions operating in three cities with continued sustenance – a rare quality demonstrated in a difficult business vertical,” explains Ashtekar. “We have been a pioneer in DOOH advertising as well as in several areas of emerging technologies and are confident that



our coming together will result in accelerated growth of business for the benefit of all stakeholders,” adds Ashtekar.

Signpost has blazed new trails in Out of Home (OOH) advertising and specialises in OOH media and digital innovations. It has leveraged digital technologies to initiate a trend of innovation in the OOH industry. It has a string of pioneering projects that include large format digital billboards and a traffic measurement system for digital media formats at Mumbai International Airport as well as a digital analytics project for coverage of traffic in the entire city of Bengaluru.

In fact, Signpost’s subsidiary EFlag Analytics Pvt Ltd, has developed a computer vision-based Artificial Intelligence-Machine Learning (AI-ML) platform to measure each exposure of traffic through image analysis, which has been validated by IISc Sustainable Transportation Lab of Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. It has implemented digital analytics for Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagar Pallika (BBMP) and Bengaluru Police for the Government of Karnataka with coverage of the entire city of Bengaluru. “Signpost also has



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Ashtekar and Suchanti: setting their sights sky high

a strategic investment in MojoBoxx, a smart device-based wireless solution that enables the delivery of in-flight services including multimedia content and engagement services. MojoBoxx comes empowered with AI-ML algorithms and is the future of travel entertainment and travel commerce on the go. It is the only Indian company to be approved by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), USA; Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), USA and Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), India,” adds Ashtekar. MojoBoxx is currently live across 102 Spicejet aircraft, and 1,400 rail coaches serving several million passengers annually. “Meanwhile, Signpost is building on further initiatives like Livebytes (a vehicle that reaches out to rural areas and offers real time interactivity) and Hinterland H2H, a learning and skill development programme run through secured portable high speed wireless media in the remotest villages in the country,” points out Ashtekar.

“The inception of Signpost was done by essentially looking at the changing infrastructures of bigger cities. We looked at the great opportunity in unlocking the void that existed

in these cities in terms of public convenience facilities, information channels and amenities. We have taken up various PPP model projects which not only provide a delightful experience to the citizens but also create revenue for the Government and have been successful in adding these new dimensions to various cities in recent times. The scope is really vast and we have just touched the tip of the iceberg. With our initial success in such projects, we are confident that there will be many such projects in the future,” feels Ashtekar whose Dynamic Digital Out of Home and Audience Measurement (his company’s in-house technology platform) is on par with international standards and has the unique opportunity of upselling and optimising revenues with hygiene and monitoring without human intervention.

Seamless integration

DOOH formats can be targeted to reach specific audiences based on real metrics. Digital has a positive impact on the landscape and has a host of social benefits, like one click content

broadcast in all cities along with social messages in between commercials (real time stock/traffic/weather updates). It offers seamless integration of the advertising media with the environment, enhanced aesthetics and further provides complete holistic experience to citizens at large and adds value by sharing audience statistics and attributes. “This is a step towards sustainable advertising and further enables integration of campaign for various cities. Leveraging audience measurement provided by DOOH campaigns enable calculative spends and control such as flexibility of time metrics of particular slots (rush/flexi hours) and subsequently towards programmatic advertising. Above all, we have been successful in bringing together a passionate and highly motivated and driven team with vast domain experience. They have helped the company in achieving the stiff targets that we set for ourselves. With the pandemic now behind us, we are back on track to set our sights sky high and work relentlessly to achieve our goals,” says Ashtekar.

As far as revenues are concerned, in FY20, Signpost reported a revenue of ₹425.40 crore and PAT of ₹17.63 crore, while on account of the severe impact of Covid in FY21, its revenue declined to ₹185.54 crore and PAT to ₹5.20 crore. Pressman is a debt free company with cash reserves of around ₹40 crore. It has consistently paid high dividends to shareholders since FY12-13.

Lastly, the merged entity will be listed with the merger of Pressman Advertising’s business into Signpost India, the company Signpost India Ltd. would get listed subject to statutory, regulatory and other approvals. Emulating the proverb into action “one has to take a few steps back before taking a bigger leap,” concludes Ashtekar astutely worked with smaller canvas of various formats of advertising opportunities, right from transit, conventional, and street furniture, by executing projects with a carefully engineered vertically integrated strategy to understand the nuances of trade that directly affects business matrices but have an underplaying role. ♦

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