

Is a declining regional media affecting PR growth away from India's PR hubs?

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After a decade of boom time growth for regional media-especially for newspapers - we are now witnessing slower growth. The year 2012 is being seen as a watershed year where regional newspapers growth rate slipped by half to seven percent. While market watchers expect 2015 to revive growth even as large media groups introduce regional editions in smaller towns; the current reducing media base has affected PR professional away from the major hubs of Delhi, Bombay and Bengaluru.

Divya Singh an account manager with 20:20 MSL has studied media management from Chennai and chose PR over journalism as a career. Now based in Pune, Singh says that, "A key challenge is that the media basket is very small here and with publications like 'DNA' and 'Mid Day' shutting, it is even more challenging to secure good amount of coverage for local clients."

Singh adds that while many agencies are opening Pune offices growing the business is not as easy as in larger cities as, "Not many corporates are based out of Pune and business development is usually a challenge. Even if we manage to get new business, the clients are not willing to pay much."



Companies in Pune often mix up PR with advertising: Divya Singh at Ramdara temple in Pune

Credibility is another challenge. Atreya Paul, from First Idea PR, is a young PR professional living in Kolkata. According to Paul, "PR in Kolkata is growing fast but there can be a lack of professionalism among the few PROs - which creates major service issues. This results in a loss of client's faith in other PR professionals."



Atreya Paul says a handwritten press release was actually distributed at an event by a freelance professional.

Budget, Talent Challenges

Falguni Patel, consultant with Simulations Public Affairs Management Services living in Ahmedabad points out that small budgets is a major issue, saying, with permanently restrained budget; clients want PR agencies to handle everything for them – PR, content management, marketing activations, ad copy – all at the cost of the PR brief. If one agency vows to be professional, the stringers who provide services at dirt-cheap rates spoil the market. There have been umpteen incidences where after sharing complete strategy, client walks off with another agency for lesser rates & gets execution done on the same strategy. “

The talent challenge can get magnified in smaller towns.

Says Patel, “English language as a medium to communicate is not the strongest forte of Gujarat. Hence, recruitment is a major issue from the operational perspective. Finding that one resource that reads well, writes well and communicates well – not only with the client but also with the media is a herculean task.”

Prasanna SR who is associate partner, Genesis Burson-Marsteller, has worked at both Bengaluru and Chennai. Currently in Chennai he says, “Right from hiring people who are well versed with the local culture and language to keeping them motivated is a challenge since they are constantly looking to move to bigger cities.”



S Prasanna in the G-BM Chennai office: “Corporate headquarters of most MNCs are located either in Gurgaon or Mumbai while Chennai is more off a manufacturing and healthcare hub. As a result, there are limited opportunities when it comes to growth of business.”

Would you move to another city?

Singh feels at some point she will have to move cities, saying, “ I love tech PR and I guess one doesn't have much scope here in Pune for it. I would eventually move to either of these cities.”

Prasanna SR doesn't see himself moving out of Chennai soon as the city has, given him the opportunity to lead Genesis BM's local office. He says, "From being a part of a large team in Bangalore to now managing a small set-up, I have learnt to do everything myself, right from providing strategic advice to executing the communication programme."

For Patel the answer to moving out of Ahmedabad is no. She says, "I would rather educate the clients and be the change maker here in Gujarat than be lost in the rat race in the metros. I am in a challenging but happy space."

By Paarul Chand