

Reviving family conversations, and print-packaging economy

Battling the pandemic has prioritised the outlook towards our near and dear ones and this time should be utilised to reinvigorate family conversations and to rethink ways of bringing the economy up again, according to Manish Bhatia, managing director and CEO of DIC India

Printweek (PW): How have you been leading your organisation through this once-in-a-lifetime crisis? Describe a typical day? How much has been altered?

Manish Bhatia (MB): A typical day starts early morning at 5am, with a walk and exercise in park with my pet – a golden retriever. Then I get to reading close to five newspapers in the morning (I love reading the hard copy), and the time that would earlier be spent on travelling is utilised in doing household duty of mopping and cleaning the house (apart from being a helping hand to the family, it is also a good exercise). The emphasis is also to use the time that we have managed to save to spend with family for having conversations, which got impacted

due to work and travel schedules. Work-wise we have seen a significant shift in time being spent in confirming safety and security of our supply chain. This is routinely followed by connecting with our colleagues in Singapore and Japan on more strategic matters. I have tried to keep the daily routine same as pre-pandemic (barring the travel) and managed to keep some time aside to connect with our customers, vendors and employees.

PW: We're in an extraordinary moment. As a leader what are you telling your team now?

MB: We are focussing on three top priorities: safety first, sustainability of cash flow and security of our supply chain.

PW: Is it different messaging for different teams? For example, department heads, factory supervisors, admin staff, shop floor experts, logistics and support staff?

MB: The core message remains the same, however, the interpretation can be different. For example security of supply chain for manufacturing will mean compliance to plan, increased productivity and no downtime. For a salesperson it could mean a more detailed and precise customer demand plan so that the factories, which run at reduced capacity do not have any wastage. Similarly, for a procurement team member it would

too long. The initial lockdown period in April was spent in re-skilling employees on their product knowledge and making them to attain higher digital proficiency. We have actively organised stress management workshops for our team and functional leaders to cope up with the changes they are going through. We are learning to adapt to the way we interact with our customers, employees and vendors. Few of these initiatives will be permanent. Apart from re-skilling we are also laying a strong focus on driving a personal connect across the organisation.

PW: Have you been re-negotiating deals with your customers? From a position of strength? Or is it the same old same old?

MB: Our principal focus has been to ensure sustainability of supply chain so that our customers don't have production losses. We have been more or less successful in that. The Covid-19 crisis, the geopolitical situation and the need to have enhanced focus on safety has led to serious challenges to supply chain, both in cost and sustainability of operations. We have reached out to our customers and few large customers have also reached out to us. Our methodology has been to find a common approach to solve these issues. We launched an initiative in April called DIC Kconnect – the few fire incidents in ink/chemical plants and printing presses was an eye opener and we felt it was





DIC plant in Noida

with banks and financial institutions to proactively react to potential bad debt or supplier solvency issues.

PW: Is your factory ready for what's next? How have you been empowering your team at the bottom of the pyramid?

MB: In the last 18 months we have had a series of initiatives. For example, 'living our values call' with all employees where management encourages employees to come up with ideas and suggestions for improvement (even anonymously if they want), and 'coffee with CEO', which is an informal connect with CEO and is open to all. I also believe that empowering comes with knowledge and a strong process. DIC India has laid a strong focus on improving process and to automate most of them (with clear accountabilities down the line) and skill improvement.

PW: Any specific steps (sanitisation, plastic partitions, physical distance, air vents, and WFH) to keep your office healthy and psychologically safe?

MB: We follow a strong safety protocol at our manufacturing plant. We have infact created a short video to share with our customers. In the video one can see how we maintain the protocols. Our employees are provided company transport with social distancing norms. They go through thermal screening before entering and are issued fresh three-ply masks every day with gloves and a sanitised face shield. The restrooms and the facility are professionally sanitised regularly during the day and in-between shifts. There is also a company doctor on site to address immedi-

PW: A personal question: How has Covid-19 changed the nature of what you are working on, your own resilience and self-renewal and how do you do it?

MB: Working from home has brought upon its own challenge, the timelines between personal and professional tend to blur. Also, for most of the day you are interacting with a monitor. I am blessed to have a family who have been a great emotional support. I spend couple of hours in morning with my pet, which allows me to self-renew.

PW: In what way has your team prepared for WebEx or Zoom or Skype usage? Any creative ideas?

MB: We adopted MS Teams in December, and I initially felt a huge resistance simply because people felt they were missing on a personal touch. However, I must say I am surprised and pleased at the speed of adoption. It has now become a way of life for us. Employees have taken small initiatives such as using chat rooms to have private conversations. We have even done a few e-drinking sessions, which to my surprise ran into a good few hours.

PW: Any final predictions about how, as a leader, you can harness digital technology for good?

MB: I think digital technology has a great role to play in enabling learning and enhancing productivity. We never imagined we could sit in our offices and advice customers on how to troubleshoot issues. DIC India is also the first manufacturing company in India to conduct its AGM

PACKAGING TRENDS

Q PE-PE laminate for the detergent vertical while for food packaging BOPP-CPP laminate will become prominent. Can we use this period to preempt the changes in our society to come out with new product concepts?

If flexible packaging players amend the structure, we have suitable inks to offer. Also, our development work for new products for this year is on track and they will be launched as per schedule.

Q How can our industry re-engineer manufacturing practices so that we can offer packaging solutions to those who operate outside the main grid?

We work closely with brand owners and converters to innovate packaging, be it flexible or aseptic packaging. We understand a strong emphasis is being put by major consumer companies in bringing what is outside the main grid segment into the overall organised business ambit and DIC is working closely with many of them to provide suitable packaging solutions.

Q Based on your interactions with the FMCG and food majors, which packaging prototypes do you anticipate a boom – and why?

India has a very low adoption of packaging across various sectors, owing to which we will see growth across various packaging segments. However, with a greater adoption in rural India, I believe small flexibles will see higher growth relatively.

Q Going forward, is there a solution that can be worked out with brands to boost online packaging applications with customised and virtual solutions? Basically, minimising the need for multiple test runs...

Our DIC Konnect programme has been actively advising converters especially those in mid segment, to improve productivity including by avoiding multiple test runs. We have received a very good acceptance and appreciation of our programme from the converter community. All this has been achieved while working from home (WFH).

Q What happens to the debate on single-use plastic now?

I recently wrote a detailed article on *LinkedIn* titled *Plastic packaging and sustainability in today's uncertain times*. The current usage of plastic to prevent the pandemic has brought out the need to look at the discussion in a different light. I think the world has to appreciate the role plastic, including that of single use plastic, has played in our lives in the past few months.