

“Ladies, you don’t have to be a superwoman all the time”

CMO *Slambook*

Swati Rathi, head – marketing, Godrej Appliances, being candid on the presumptions of marketers, women in marketing, and more.
By Priyanka Nair

What has kept you going at Godrej Appliances for 12 years?

Many believe Godrej may not be agile, and old school practices are still around. The appliances business is a very competitive space. Considering Godrej’s record, we are far ahead of the curve. There is never a dull day. People move out mainly due to boredom, or lack of responsibilities. I get enough freedom and that keeps me excited.

What are you doing differently in your current role?

There are certain category codes that most of us follow: the difference is in the context. As a team, we view things through a different lens keeping in mind the rich heritage of the company, and the difference it is making.

Often there are debates around why there are not enough women leaders in marketing and advertising. What are your thoughts on this?

It is sad we are still talking about it. The problem is people often just look at the work, and not who is behind it. I am not part of a feminist brigade, but want to ensure there are enough chances for everyone, everywhere, and not have prejudices in place. Once you start looking at work, merit automatically shines through.

I do appreciate the need for a gender balance because women and men tend to approach the same thing differently. There are companies trying to consciously bring more women on board, which isn’t wrong, but it should

not be one above the other. It is a matter of mindset change. Hopefully, in a few years’ time, we may not have to address this as an issue.

Indian advertising is full of tropes of women as the balance keeper of the house. What’s your take on this?

You are right. In the traditional setup, there is a lot of balancing to do. Some of it, women have brought on themselves. I don’t understand why there is a constant need to be the best at everything you do. Women should take it easy. It is okay to not excel in everything. You don’t have to be a superwoman all the time. The pressure is unnecessary. If some things need to take a back seat, it’s okay. The balance also applies to men, especially in evolved setups.

The toughest decision you have taken at Godrej?

The ones where the heart is involved. We had to let go of a very bright resource due to some unavoidable reason. It was emotional to a certain level. From a marketing perspective, we are competing with brands that have far deeper pockets. There’s lots to do with only so many resources. We have to be brutal when it comes to picking ideas. You have to drop other great ideas to

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reach a conclusion. That’s what life is all about, isn’t it?

What part of an agency pitch puts you off the most?

When agencies come with promises of ‘return on investments’, especially in the digital universe. You cannot promise that to a largely offline brand like ours. I know my business much better. These promises may have worked for e-commerce, but you cannot always present a one fit for all solution.

Which is the one consumer segment you’ve learnt a lot from?

Segmentation looks great in theory;

a convenience to make our lives easy and to market our products. In reality, things are blurry, and it is very important for marketers to step out of segments and view individual consumers as who they are. We tend to not do that, and that’s a mistake.

For me, entry-level consumers, ones buying for the first time, are the richest in terms of experiences and learnings. They surprise me all the time.

Any advice you’d give a younger you

Most young people I meet in my team and outside, appear to have their priorities straight and are more sorted than most of us were. Their lives go beyond work. So, I’d tell myself to relax and have more fun (laughs).

If not marketing, then...

Music.

How do you unwind?

I have two kids, who keep me on my toes and make me forget about work.

What makes you log out of social media?

I am mainly a Facebook person, and the blind faith and following in politics is a big turn off for me.

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