

## **Host**

Digitization has brought with it blurring of cross border boundaries. Small towns have become a driving force for ecommerce companies, OTT platforms, FMCG, telecom and more. Yet in the COVID world, brands and companies have been reticent in communicating with their stakeholders in these cities. We at Mrigashira spoke to communication experts, working closely with brands in tier one and two cities to find out if small towns are the future of PR in 2021.

On today's episode, we speak to Alice Guram, CEO of Media Pulse PR. 22 years back, Alice was perhaps the first woman founder who set up her communication firm to bridge the gap between the regional and national levels of marketing communications after a stint in journalism. She has been managing marketing communications work in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh for television channels, Ott platforms, hotels, sports leagues, celebrities and more.

Our second expert Shailesh Goyal setup simulations public affairs two decades back with a vision to help brands in need of public relations programs. The firm today has evolved into one of the leading proponents of reputation management consultants in India, based out of Ahmedabad, Shailesh Goyal also known as the doyen of Gujarat.

And lastly, Shishir Somani, CEO of Archer communications from a background in engineering, Shishir developed a new identity for himself and worked on long term relationship programs without expecting quick response from the media. Archer communication strengths lies in managing repetition programs for high profile companies in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

## **Host**

Hi, Alice, welcome to the show. PR in small towns is far beyond product launches, how has the communication landscape evolved in these last few years in smaller cities. With a large chunk of the consumer sitting in these cities, what are the opportunities to look out for?

## **Alice**

For the smaller cities and PR in the smaller cities, we've always tried to you know, actually keep changing things and keep trying to make ourselves suitable to the environment, the marketing environment to make people know that we are you know, smaller cities really have a lot of consumers too. When I started the business, I remember having gone to various agencies and you know, people looking at the face and saying, our consumers don't live there. We have now reached a stage where you know, mostly the most in places like Punjab and Chandigarh and things like that. Cutting a long story short COVID has really brought us to think rethink, and to really look at how we can make ourselves more suitable to the current environment when corporates don't have that kind of money to spend.

## **Host**

What's your perspective, Shailesh?

## **Shailesh**

The interests of the people in the smaller cities or towns, they are interested in more of a hyperlocal nature actually. So they are more keen about what's happening around and how it impacts them immediately and directly. So, about the national affairs or national brands and all, actually it doesn't make much difference if it is not connected with some local stores or some local promos. So if they

find key, okay, in the town on X or Y store, as they started keeping this brand, then they feel key Okay, okay now I can access to this brand, which he or she has been aspiring for is available in my town also, and I can look for it. So that's where they would like to read about that if it's only if it is connected with his surroundings or her surroundings.

**Host**

Over to you Shishir? How has the landscape evolved over the years?

**Shishir**

Well, smaller engagement media is getting important every next day. Every new day is a better day as compared to the last one, because each and every brand is looking out to reach out to the final consumer, which is which is Tier-2 cities now, Tier-1 cities are mostly saturated. And now the focus is coming to cities like Indore, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Pune, Raipur likes. I've been observing that these brands they were mostly influenced by The Times of India's of the world and Economic Times of the world, but then they realized that getting into Dainik Bhaskar's of the world and Dainik Jagran of the world is also equally important, because there was an impact whatever positive was built, because of these newspapers interest and whatever negative impacted them. So, in last one month and a half, two years, it has been recognized that it is very important to reach out to regional and smaller media also.

**Host**

Are there enough opportunities with the New Age media?

**Shailesh**

While the Print still continues to rule the smaller towns, the addiction to the digital platforms also has grown and it has grown significantly in the, during the pandemic. So, this is, this is making them addicted to the certain sites and social media platforms actually, but the consumption is still largely on the most convenient medium like what app, SMS which makes them easy to forward and we need to see that so that is being used as a new age medium is in a larger context actually, yes, yes, the Facebook, Insta are there for them also, and people are now getting exposed to that and started using that, but it's like earlier tiktok was there. So, those kinds of that make them more attracted to and is to operating easy to see. So, these platforms give them better opportunities actually for the brands and consumer oriented.

**Alice**

Here newspapers that really helped us also by allowing the digital platforms available to us at very minimal cost for PR and advertising. So, we have really moved into getting onto the digital sphere of even the print media, papers like Ajit, Punjab Kesari which are very important for us in our markets have really lower their rates on the digital platform viz a viz the print, print is not, no longer so important as much as digital in this post COVID area. See, we have to move digital now we especially in our market, which is a more educated market, and which is a market which has a large computer influence, digitally we are moving forward with brands like Amazon, Flipkart, we are moving forward, even with the TV channels like Colors, Sony. These are my regular companies so digital is what needs to go hand in hand, if not more, than just the very conservative PR that we were doing earlier. Getting a little snippet in a newspaper doesn't really hold that much anymore as much as it is if it is available on a digital platform. YouTube, Instagram and these kinds of social media platforms

are really making a large dent, at least in my market. And they're much cheaper when you look at it compared to what print advertising comes for.

**Host**

National bloggers, instagramers have redefined communication and specifically for fashion and beauty brands. Are local instagramers as influential in the smaller cities, or do people prefer to follow National instagramers.

**Alice**

Oh, yeah, yes see our market of what is peculiar about Punjab and Chandigarh is the fact that you know, we have a very educated and a very young audience. Hence Instagram, even tik tok. I mean, we had just too many tiktok people in this area. So instagramers our local influencers are a very, very big chunk of what we are now moving working with is what's the word I should use, for not only fashion and lifestyle, even food, even restaurants, even five-star hotels, even TV. We are working in close proximity with a local influencer.

**Host**

Okay, but do people follow National instagramers and local instagramers both.

**Alice**

It depends on the sector. When it comes to travel and tourism, national instagramers are really looked at well here, when it comes to it really depends on segment to segment, as I said, when it comes to food and all that its local when it comes to again, when it comes to TV, when it comes to lifestyle, national instagramers if I, if I can use a couple of names, for example, if Kareena Kapoor Khan is you know, talking about a particular product and a local instagramers talking about it the local instagramers here will have a more impact than Kareena Kapoor Khan if it is a local restaurant or a local you know, something like that.

**Host**

okay

**Shailesh**

So there are two things one is the aspirations, so everybody will have an aspiration what Deepika Padukone is using, what cosmetic is she promoting, that is there, but that is that they can see and feel the televisions and other mediums also. So, if anything is connected with the local influencer the nature of the product should be such that it it's not like a large cosmetic brand which suddenly there local influencers that will use so that that will actually not connect with them. But if it is something which is farm oriented or let's say food grain or food service and for that matters, that kind of things and the salon service which is opening in the local market that kind of services or products if the local influencer are used, then we will probably value that more likely.

**Host**

Historically, the PR industry has been dominated by women in the metros. This has not been the case in tier one and two cities. Any tips for more women to take the lead from these cities?

**Alice**

No see here women in tier-2 cities no, not as much even now. I've been here now for 20 years, it is a different ballgame then it still is very tough. Honestly, for a woman if I even look at a lot of other agencies that have come in there are hardly any women, you can count them on your fingertips. More so because women don't even feel that being given that you after what it's not, you know, you don't really get that kind of money as much as you get in a tier, in a metro, hence it, but you know, it's not as if to say that the media and the consumer does not accept you. I was welcomed with open arms 20 years back, I didn't know the language, I didn't know anything I was really taught by the very people I was addressing, and also it is for women to be able to take up the challenge. The market is very welcoming. It's just that, we don't get that kind of remuneration as much as you would get in a metro that is a fact because I moved from a metro to a tier -2 town and I would still turn around and say that their remuneration is not commensurate to the effort that you put in.

### **Shailesh**

So, the opportunities for the both men and women are plenty in this industry. But yes, as you rightly said, traditionally, women have been more into the public relations industry and rightly so, this is this can further penetrate down in the smaller and medium cities also. And the opportunities are more because of the local service centres, local products and local shops and super stores need this kind of services. So, they can have 2,3,5 times local clients and service them accordingly providing them with good content and providing them digital PR as well as the traditional wherever possible. And they can be these PR's also, which, which, and I've seen that that's happening in some of my ex-colleagues also they have started just doing restaurants PR or they are just doing the lifestyle PR just doing healthcare PR. So, it helps them to focus and get expertise and specialization in one particular two particular domains of industry. And this helps in penetrating in the smaller and medium towns also.

### **Shishir**

When it comes to strategy when it comes to creating communication, we can call even influencing people by means of telling the stories I feel female employees are, female team members are good. But when it comes to going into field meeting people, convincing them for something I personally still feel in my team of nine people in Indore you have three female employees and three female team members and most of them are working on strategy, communication strategy, they develop presentations, they develop SOP's, questionnaires everything but mostly we don't encourage them to go in the field.

### **Charu Raizada**

Some new opportunities waiting to be explored beyond the metros. While before we drop the curtains on today's episode Radha what antidotes and coping mechanisms, we communicators adopted to overcome the pandemic strain this year.

### **Radha Radhakrishnan**

You know, Charu, one of the things that hit us hard this year, during the pandemic was isolation. And to kill isolation, people started becoming busy, busy with work, busy at work at home. And to, to some people, it was even binge watching, movies on Ott platforms, serials on Ott platforms, and whatever. And secondly, I think it's the realization for all of us that a virus can teach us a lot of things, and, and one of the things is that hit us hard was how you can lose control over your life overnight, it was not even something that you knew was coming before, there was absolutely no

preparedness, and they just hit us and, and everything just went topsy turvy, right. And we got to a situation where, even if you had a neighbour with whom you had a rapport, and a friend, all that stuff, but you just couldn't walk across to your neighbour and say, Hello, and we were all sort of clambered up in that sense. And the key benefit of staying home, I think, is flexibility. Many of us have used our time effectively to pursue hobbies and interests. In fact, this whole idea of Mrigashira and the podcast came about because I wanted to do something more than what I was doing and, and pandemic sort of set me actually put these things into action. While I always thought that I wanted to do something different, but I don't think I ever got down to doing it and, and 2020 and the virus, in fact, in a way pushed me towards, towards this and it has somewhere also brought in that sense of, you know, feeling that we are in control, whatever activities that we did with time and with the effective use of time into our hobbies, it just made sure that we are in control. And I think another important lesson we learned was the joy of sharing whether it's conversation and, and gratitude, I must say gratitude, because suddenly, we were not in a position to go out, we will not in a position to, even buy the simpler things in from the next-door store. But then you had somebody delivering it to you had somebody ensuring that you have food, you had people calling you up and asking you whether you're okay, and these are small things. But I think that is the one that held us together, conversations between families, friends, colleagues, they have all helped us relieve a lot of stress. And we must be grateful for what we have. And these are like, some of our antidotes and coping mechanism, and these underlying one critical thing that is the resilience of humans, you know, per se, and I think it's time for us to raise a toast to that.

#### **Charu Raizada**

No, absolutely. I completely agree with you. I mean, the way we've all adapted and the kind of gratitude which we feel this year never felt like this. Certainly, a toast to human resilience. And you know, I'm going to just say that, you know, now is the time to stop waiting, stop sitting around, stop procrastinating because this is our time because this is the time of for the communicators and of the communicators because the best is yet to come.

#### **Radha Radhakrishnan**

Oh, absolutely. absolutely. I think this is the time for us to celebrate together as a as a family celebrate together as a fraternity. And also look forward to lots of exciting things in 2021. And we will in Mrigashira, the entire team will be back in 2021 with a lot of exciting episodes.

Keep listening to Mrigashira, and we promise we will not let you down.