

Who cares!



Dhaleta Surender Kumar
Deputy Editor, Pitch
surender@pitchonnet.com

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Jaago marketer jaago!

Why are marketers losing opportunities in smaller cities like Shimla, which have people with high disposable income

Has the slowdown come in? That is the question everyone's been asking these days. While marketers tried to be optimistic and did everything to lure the consumers, the *bazaars* told a different story. While official numbers are yet to come in – except for the automobiles, which seem to be losing to costly fuel and rising interest rates – I'd like to believe that it's not as bad as 2009. I spent my Diwali in Shimla, a city (it's no more a town) with high disposable income and is certainly recession proof. The state (Himachal Pradesh) itself is recession proof. A majority of the people here are not private sector dependent for earning their income. And most of the agriculturists here are apple cultivators. Apple farmers, this year, had a good crop and got good rates in the market and they had every reason to splurge in white goods and automobiles, besides painting their houses – pink and blue – and getting new curtains and bed-sheets. But strangely, this Diwali, the city wore a faded look as compared to yesteryears. And Diwali is not the best of the times to find tourists in the city, as such. I popped the question of fewer crowd this year to many. Nobody had any clue. Probably, people here do not understand the meaning (or is it a feeling) of slowdown.

But I did try to come up with some reasons. In spite of bulk cash available after a good apple season, many people buy white goods on easy instalments – to save for children's school admissions in March. Few retailers offered goods on EMI or lucrative interest rates this year. Cars too were out of bounds – not because of the rising fuel prices but the Shimla city and the district roads have gone to the dogs in the last few years. The roads are the worst in the apple belt, and people are while shying from ruining their cars on dirty and bumpy roads, they think thrice of transporting refrigerators or televisions – safely to their rich villages.

Meanwhile, jewellers lure the local ladies with round the year '*kitties*', and the cacophony

around scheme offerings goes up during Diwali. While, the local gold market though is not dependent on the daily Bullion market prices, yet the prices though lower than Delhi – still were high enough this year to postpone the annual ritual of gold buying on Diwali. Even '*kitties*' have not been able to lure the women.

Interestingly, I also saw a considerable shift in the trend of purchase of *mithai* this year in Shimla. The preference was for exchanging dry fruits rather than *mithai*. Sorry Cadbury's, chocolates still are considered to be a kiddy affair in Shimla. The trend has been up for sometime now in Delhi, but in Shimla, it picked up fast and really fast this year. Not that dry fruits cost lesser or *mithai* rates soared the skies, but just for two reasons – one that you don't have to preserve dry fruits and over crowd your refrigerators; and two all television news channels were showing reports of spurious and adulterated *mithais* being made thousands of kilometres away in states like Uttar Pradesh or Maharashtra. And that's a reason enough to doubt the local *mithai* makers as well. Karishma Kapoor endorsed California Almonds though couldn't be found anywhere around, yet here's an opportunity for marketers to get this category organised.

Meanwhile, I again saw the power of digital, when Beygairat Brigade, a band of three boys from Pakistan became an overnight rage for its Aalu Anday - on YouTube - which directly questions the fundamentalism, hypocrisy, double-speak and the entire political system in Pakistan. The video has got over 4.2 lakh views and about 4,000 comments, since it was posted on October 16. The figure does not count the views/comments of duplicate videos reposted by others. That reminds me of the United Breaks Guitars song posted by disgruntled consumers a few years ago. And that's the power consumers have got. *Jaago marketer jaago!* ■

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