



COMMUNICATIONS OUTREACH

Deccan Aviation identifies specific target markets to raise the profile of future travel.

The conclusion of the joint Wijeya Group-Deccan Aviation promotion saw 10 winners treated to a private air transfer and an all-expenses-paid vacation in the Maldives. Over 10,000 entrants participated for the 10 seats available. "What we wanted was to create awareness about our operation among the general public – and judging by the unprecedented number of entries we received, the results have exceeded our expectations," says Mario Stubbs, Head of Corporate Communications for Deccan Aviation Lanka, elaborating on the company's communications outreach programmes in Sri Lanka and the region.

"We wanted them to experience truly private aviation, the way high-net-worth clients and corporates are increasingly travelling – in true luxury, on their very own aircraft or helicopter. We also wanted to address one of our main challenges, which is the perception that such services do not exist in Sri Lanka, after another airline suspended its air-taxi operations. Last year, we flew Wijeya winners to Galle – and this time, we have raised the bar considerably," he asserts.

Deccan Aviation (Lanka), a leading domestic and regional charter airline partly owned by India's Kingfisher Airline Group – while engaging in above and below-the-line marketing – is also aggressively advertising its services in the Maldives, where Stubbs feels the airline has immense potential. "We are using PR initiatives and also the resorts to get our message across. We are currently working on a package with the resorts to promote a day's excursion from the Maldives to Minneriya and back," he elaborates. Stubbs is also working on a communications outreach to visitors from Europe, one of Sri Lanka's largest tourist generating markets.

"Using tour operators like Kuoni, for instance, we have employed both print and direct mail to create awareness among this target clientele. We also conducted a familiarisation of our product offer by treating a group of Kuoni agents from the UK to the experience of flying on our helicopter to Ahungalle for a day's excursion," Stubbs reveals. He explains that having built much awareness in the UK through various targeted outreach programmes, the positive feedback obtained – especially from Kuoni agents – is encouraging.



Mario Stubbs
Head of Corporate
Communications

Deccan has also begun using the Sinhala media as a part of its outreach strategy. "We initially worked through Lankadeepa, the most widely read newspaper, because we felt that there were high-net-worth individuals outside Colombo with significant disposable income," asserts Stubbs. He adds: "Not having hitherto tapped this market, we would like to encourage them to use our helicopter services, even if it's initially only for emergency travel."

But Stubbs is optimistic that once the trend of air travel catches on, people will begin to use it more often – not only for medical emergencies, but even for business trips from city to city or for holidays across the country. "Another area we are now publicising is the golf package, ideal for those golf aficionados who find travelling from course to

course rather tedious. We will take them over four days or so to all four golf courses in the island – giving them hassle-free travel, absolute convenience and the opportunity to experience different courses," Stubbs promises.

While creating awareness for Deccan is achieved primarily through the print media and billboards, Stubbs acknowledges that because this is a niche market, it is important that the targets are identified and direct-communications outreach campaigns conducted.

He elaborates: "We are cognisant of the fact that this is not a mass-market product. Our communications must have the appropriate flavour and style to attract the right kind of customer. For instance, tying up with a leading international credit-card company, we are gifting around 1,000 high-net-worth customers in that company's portfolio with a chic leather wallet as a memento. We also sponsor high-profile corporate events to ensure top-of-the-mind recall among our target clientele."

Stubbs also details the strategic partnership that Deccan has with the Sunera Foundation, under which each customer-feedback form returned to the company will initiate a donation of US\$ 3 towards the Foundation.

– Savithri Rodrigo



MEDIA SERVICES PHOTOGRAPH (DECCAN AVIATION)