



Show stoppers: Apparel brand Allen Solly got 100 live models to stand still at Noida's Great India Place mall, taking shoppers by surprise.

COST-EFFECTIVE ADVERTISING

**New crowd-puller:
branded flash mobs**

BY GOURI SHAH
gouri.s@livemint.com

MUMBAI

On a busy weekend at the Great India Place mall in Delhi suburb Noida, time stood still as 100 people dressed in Allen Solly's new range of casual clothing froze for seven whole minutes as passers-by gawked, poked and prodded the models to see if they were, in fact, real.

The human mannequins

were hired by the apparel brand to showcase its new collection in a disruptive way that would dovetail with the brand's "I Hate Ugly" ad campaign on mass media.

"It was (a) great idea for visual merchandising. All these smartly dressed models just froze in the middle of whatever they were doing at the mall. Whether it was drinking coffee,

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Crowd-puller: branded flash mobs

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applying make-up, talking on the phone or walking. So shoppers were a little startled at first, but figured things out when they saw the Allen Solly tags," said Vinod Vijaykumar, general manager (south and west) of Tequila, part of TBWA Group.

The flash mob strategy allowed the brand to showcase 100 different garment pieces at the same time, he added. "Something you can't even do at a fashion show."

A flash mob typically refers to a group of people who suddenly assemble in a public place, perform an unusual action for a brief period and then disperse quickly. Brands use flash mobs to reach consumers when they least expect it. Not only is it a cost-effective tool for brands looking to reach small but focused target groups but it can also be tactically deployed across locations to generate tremendous word of mouth publicity.

No surprise, then, that several brands such as Colors, Shoppers Stop, 7Up and Channel [V] have already used it.

Take Reliance BIG Pictures, for instance, which used flash mobs to promote its film *Do Knot Disturb* in New Delhi early this month. The brand hired dancers, all dressed like regular shoppers, to walk into malls and perform live to the music of the film. "The response was phenomenal, we would have touched close to 20,000 consumers across a span of three days," said Sweta Agnihotri, COO of BIG Music, which spent close to Rs2.5 lakh on the activity. The company also had a group perform small, live trailers for the movie across Mumbai. "We received close to three times



Star power: Allu Arjun promoted 7Up at Hyderabad's Central Mall.

our investment in media coverage," said Girish Shah, head of branding at the Reliance-Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group and chief marketing officer of the group's filmed entertainment business, explaining that the videos of the campaign, uploaded on Rediff.com, got at least 40,000 hits.

Similarly, Channel [V] hired a group of young dancers to take off their shirts in the middle of a mall (they were wearing branded T-shirts underneath) and start dancing. The idea was to communicate "Channel [V] is changing", said VJ Manish Anand.

While some people were impressed, entertained and some others completely flabbergasted that someone would pull a stunt such as that in the middle of the day, it served the basic purpose: It pulled in the crowds. The challenge then, is to deliver the message in a manner that is engaging and entertaining enough for them to tell their friends, experts say.

"It is a potent weapon when the proposition is leveraged properly. It (the flash mob and activity) should have an element

of surprise," said Praveen Vadhera, country head for 141 Wall Street, the out-of-home service division of Bates Group Ltd, citing the example of Kurkure, the Pepsi Foods Pvt. Ltd snack which used street plays to communicate its new range of spicy munchies by hiring actors who would burst into flames in the middle of a crowded street.

Colors, the Hindi general entertainment channel from Viacom18 Media Pvt. Ltd, had flash mobs in 20 cities in India to promote the third season of reality show *Bigg Boss*. "We had groups of people wearing the *Bigg Boss* eye masks get onto trains and walk through stations... at one point, it was quite funny to see women commuters getting off at a station wearing these masks, advertising our show for free!" said Rameet Singh Arora, head of marketing at Colors.

However, flash mobs can be a little difficult to execute as such large gatherings are illegal in public spaces, say experts.

In 2003, following a flash mob in the city, the Mumbai police invoked section 37(1) of the Bom-

bay Police Act to regulate any gathering or crowd in a public place without prior permission. Under the law, an assembly of five or more people construed as a crowd.

"In a mall (it) is different, but the minute it is on a road or (in) a public area, they would need permission to gather, which kind of defeats the purpose of a flash mob," said Javed Ahmad, additional director general of police, Maharashtra.

Cities such as Ahmedabad, Bangalore and New Delhi have also enacted similar bans within the city limits, according to media reports. Brands, therefore, tend to gravitate towards malls for such campaigns.

More recently, 7Up organized a flash mob in Andhra Pradesh to promote its talent hunt with actor Allu Arjun. Thirty dancers walked into Hyderabad's Central Mall and performed a song from Arjun's latest film. It took a few minutes for the crowd to realize that one of the dancers in the group was Arjun.

Experts maintain that advertisers are increasingly looking at such strategies to reach consumers. "Earlier, the percentage used to be dismal. Advertisers would spend up to 90% on ATL (above the line) advertising and 10% on BTL (below the line). Recently, there has been a skew toward BTL, with advertisers now looking to spend up to 25% of their ad budget on BTL," said 141 Wall Street's Vadhera, adding that the economic slowdown had forced advertisers to look at newer, more cost-effective ways of reaching target consumers.

According to industry estimates, hiring a troupe of six actors would cost a brand approximately Rs15,000 per day.