

A candid tete a tete with Suresh Dinakaran, Group CEO, ISD Global, the Dubai headquartered branding agency

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Date : September 28, 2015



Our correspondent Neil Baptista caught up with Suresh Dinakaran, Group CEO of ISD Global, a Dubai headquartered New Age Brand Consulting organisation that is creating dominant footprints in multiple markets, both emerging and mature. In a candid tete a tete, Dinakaran articulates the vision he has for ISD Global and what keeps them propelling ahead as a future ready brand building organisation at the cutting edge of innovation, strategy, creative, technology and consumer.

After several weeks of chasing down, we at last got a chance to meet up with the reticent, elusive persona that is Suresh Dinakaran, Group CEO of Ideas Strategy Design Global (ISD Global) who has embarked on an ambitious expansion plan to grow and service brands across multiple geographies. He shares his thoughts in a free wheeling interview.

NB: You seem to love swimming against the current- when other players are compressing, diluting and downsizing, you seem to be on a completely different trip taking ISD Global to newer products and markets: could you please tell us what is the motivation here?

Suresh Dinakaran(SD): Firstly, many thanks for your follow up and my apologies for not being able to meet up sooner. Answering your question is not that difficult. At ISD Global, we are doctored to be going in for the jugular. That has always been our approach to business, the way we brand products, services or organisations. Disruption somehow seems to run in our blood- we call it the **HDL factor**- nothing to do with the good cholesterol but **High Disruption Level**. The tried and tested or should it be rusted does not suit us at all and we are fairly clear that it does not serve the purpose of the brands we engage with either. The conventional ways of realising relevance, recall and revenues is somehow not working anymore. In a constantly changing eco system, with loyalties being at a premium, brands just cannot take its customers for granted. They have to continuously demonstrate that as a brand they care, listen and love their customers. Hence the need for compelling, relevant brand disruptions have never been higher. We are just respecting this scenario and acting in the best interest of the brand/s we work with.

NB: Ok, got it, but do you think the market dynamics as it prevails now is conducive to both product and geographic expansion- you seem to be on a mission, on an overdrive almost- obviously you have seen something that the others haven't..

SD: No, no, please do not place me in the elite class of crystal ball gazers. That's too onerous a tag. We remain grounded and surrounded by reality. What we consistently endeavor to do is stay true to our ethos which is to be at the ever moving edge of ideas, strategy & design for brands wanting to create meaning in their customers' lives. As we say, we try to **KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid)** and collaborate with brands to help them be assertive and respected in their eco systems. Our approach to being a Global Brand Marketing consultancy is driven by the fact that markets are in a state of flux- mature markets have over matured leaving behind the heady days of irrational exuberance and anything goes. Emerging markets are trying to compress the learning curve by soaking in the experiences from mature markets and bringing those learnings into play. Intrinsically, we at ISD Global find comfort being at the intersection of these two sets of markets and are in a position to offer to brands the best of both worlds, if you will. Our move to develop our IP products or to different markets was not blue print driven but conditioned by brand pulls that emanated from these markets. So necessity, indeed was the mother of invention.

NB: Could you please tell us a little more about the recent media brands that you have launched?

www.crowd-nine.com

The idea behind [crowd-nine.com](http://www.crowd-nine.com) is ' people powered brand energy'- wherein we offer brands a global creative community to work on campaigns rather than have one agency do the job- the brand gets more variety, better quality and a global perspective-at no risk- the brand pays only if they like/accept the work submitted- on the flip side, the vast creative talent pool gets the opportunity to work with really global brands and earn cash rewards upon approved submissions. Very two-way, its a disruptive anti-agency model being launched by an agency!!

www.brandknewmag.com

The go to destination that provides a holistic perspective on the world of brands and branding that offers a distilled essence of actionable intelligence to brand owners, business owners, CEOs, CMOs, Brand Managers, Advertising Agency Professionals, PR Practitioners, Media Community and Corporate Communication professionals. Real time, insightful content that keeps you on top of the game.



NB: Could you share with us some of the experiences that you have had in the markets especially the likes of Vietnam, Mauritius etc?

SD: There is huge thrill in being a nomad. We are forever exploring, researching and finding out either by design or by accident. But what works for us is understanding the local pulse, the consumer & market insight which these dynamics bring in. It took us a while(almost a year) to fully understand the Vietnam market, but the day we found our footing, we bagged two huge re branding contracts from the leading conglomerates there, one of which is the No 1 company listed on the stock exchange in Vietnam in terms of market capitalisation. It was worth the investment, the wait and yes the stress. On the other hand, we got invited into Mauritius through our body of work- so in that market our setting up operations coincided with kicking off the first complete re branding project for a leading group which was into Higher Education. Our experience of working with top notch Education brands including the **London School of Economics, University of Bolton** etc in the markets of UAE & India helped us immensely- there was already proof of strength & competence- the entry was easier, smoother, faster.

The UK is a completely different kettle of fish. Over exposed, been there, done that, seen it all DNA. Our CEO in Europe Sagar Patil comes with a management consultancy background and has worked in the UK/Europe market for several years. He also has a thorough understanding of the business landscape as it exists in UAE, India etc, so in effect, there was an opportunity to cross pollinate market and consumer insight to tailor make our offerings as a branding consultancy to suit the diktats and biases(if you may) of the UK market. It has been an extremely successful stint for us and we are planning to expand the manpower in our London office to service the increasing requests and referrals we have been getting. And Sagar is leading the charge brilliantly. As we speak, he is already in talks with brands in Switzerland & Netherlands to see in what way those luxury brands can benefit from ISD's non conventional avante garde approach to brand building.

We now have a solid presence in India through our operations in Bombay & Bangalore and very soon we are looking at setting up base in Delhi and Chennai as well. Its said that in modern times, **geography is history**. For people like us at ISD Global, there cannot be a bigger incentive.

NB: If you were to asked to describe in one line what does ISD Global do best, what would that be?

SD: You know, we create taglines, baselines for the brands we work with on a regular basis. It comes with the territory. Brands expect that of us. One of our very recent one was for a Dubai based Corporate Car Rental & Leasing brand called **Shift Leasing** wherein we coined the tagline ' **Where Leasing is Pleasing** '. But, if you ask me to describe in one line what we are most adept at, thats really throwing a challenge. Its like designing an Annual Report for a Fortune 500 company in 6 pages!!! Having said that, we pride ourselves in being **an Ideas company**- Ideas that work, ideas that stimulate, ideas that inspire and ideas that bring investors in the form of consumers, stakeholders etc to the brands we work with. We doetail ideas with

compelling strategy and aesthetically appealing creative communication(some of which you can access from our creative showcase on www.groupisd.com) to ensure that these ideas find a permanent home in the customer's heart and minds.

We build, nourish & grow brands. And, our core task remains connecting the soul of the brands we work with to the hearts of the customer. At ISD Global we call it ' State Of The Heart Branding '.

NB: I saw somewhere where you call yourself a brand farmer, brand cultivator- very unusual again but I guess there is some serious thought behind that as well- could you care to elaborate?

SD: Brand Farmer, cultivator sounds and reads so ' old worldish ', isn't it? A lot of people have asked me why, what, how.....its very straightforward...building & growing a brand is so much akin to growing a crop- identify the right land, make sure the soil is fertile, sow the seeds in a timely manner, protect it from both man & nature and reap the harvest at the right time and ensure the cycle continues- brand building is like bringing up your kid, you need to instill the right values, the right discipline, embed the skills and get them ready for the real world...so however agrarian these may sound, this is the ground reality, if you allow me a pun!

NB: Going forward what are ISD Global's plans?

SD : We always seem to have enough & more on our plate. We are currently occupied with the recently launched brandknewmag.com and crowd-nine.com

Then we have the **Film School** concept coming up targeted for a last quarter of 2015 unveiling. Our UK office is working on a few interesting concepts that will be unveiled by the 1st quarter of the coming year.

There are some more products in the pipeline that our teams across different offices are busy with and over the next 18 months you will see a flurry of launches coming through from the ISD Global stable.

NB: So it indeed it is miles to go before you sleep...

SD :In an era where we have to run hard to stand at the same place, being in sleep mode is almost extinct...we will remain focused on bringing smiles to all the brand owners that we work and want to work with across the globe, and add more mileage to their brand equity. When CEOs, Brand Owners, Brand Managers, Marketing Managers, the Creative Community etc smile, we feel we have been rewarded for the work we put in.