

Chowpatty. Earlier these six hoardings were occupied by ILL's Clinic All Clear ads. Now they are occupied by the agency Emaan. The contract of the agency expires at the end of June 2003. It is a violation of policy guideline 16-C which says no hoarding shall be permitted in the compulsory open space required to be maintained under the Development Control regulations of Greater Mumbai (DCR)

BS Photo : Suryakanth Niwate

company officials were informed of 20 casuriana trees having been cut to ensure its proper display. DSP Merill has also removed one of its hoardings.

"The onus of removing the offending hoardings also lies with the BMC as they themselves for all these years have been violating their own policy guidelines. If the corporates also abide by the

rules it would be very good," says Nayna Khatpalia, co-convener of City Space.

The hoardings on heritage buildings are a violation of policy guideline DCR, Rule 48 (3). The BMC will incur an annual loss of approximately Rs 70 crore following the high court order disallowing such hoardings. There are 633 listed heritage buildings

in Mumbai, and almost 50 per cent of them are covered with hoardings or billboards.

But there are still some corporates who have yet to abide by either the rule or the court ruling. Prominent among these are over 25 advertisements of Bharti Airtel on Worli Sea Face footpath. Bharti also has another big hoarding at Mahim Creek.

The legal action would not have been necessary if the Voluntary code, framed by late S P Godrej a decade ago, had been followed. It requests members to "ensure that there are no outdoor advertisements in close proximity to places of worships, monuments, buildings of architectural or historical interest, national or local importance. No hoardings in parks, gardens or maidans, no trees trimmed if obstructing the hoarding's visibility and no overcrowding of hoarding at a particular place to prevent visual pollution."

Mumbai, Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. As a service company, customer relations is a core area of concern for it.

To get closer to customers, the BPL Mobile management recently decided that their senior executives need to do some 'front-ending' - man call centers and retail outlets occasionally.

The objective is two-fold. One, bring the manager out of the ivory tower and closer to end customers, and two, take proactive steps to improve customer satisfaction. When customer satisfaction levels start sinking and the management realises its folly, by that time it can be too late, explains Bharat Chadha, BPL Mobile vice-president for marketing.

Hence, every quarter BPL Mobile's top management, including the chief executive officer, will do the rounds of call centers and retail outlets, taking calls from customers and try to solve their problems.

The BPL management also realises that simply asking their top executives to man these centers would not be enough as there is always the possibility of someone dropping out at the last minute. "It is easy to take such decisions and equally easy to forget about them. Sometimes some of the best initiatives remain on paper and we didn't want our programme to meet that fate," Chadha said.

Hence, the BPL management has decided to dole out incentives, link the attendance to this programme to individual compensation packages.

Chadha reveals that the programme has yielded tremendous results and the top executives are now able to drive marketing initiatives and other services much better and faster than they did earlier. "The feed-

To get closer to customers, the BPL Mobile management recently decided that their senior executives need to do some 'front-ending'--man call centres and retail outlets occasionally

Hence, it decided to benchmark its practices against other sections of the service industry, like the hotel or airline industry.

The company chose Singapore Airlines, the world's leading airline in terms of service. But benchmarking was not good enough. BPL Mobile executives needed to be trained by the best training school if they had to match up to Singapore Airlines' standards.

So BPL Mobile decided to hire those who had trained Singapore Airlines' crew. Singapore-based Service Quality Centre (SQS) was roped in.

Chadha says that one of the biggest lessons they learnt from SQS was to document the processes each executive has to follow while servicing customers. As a result, the processes to follow and the turnaround time taken to redress a customer's grievance were documented to the last detail.

"This helped us to create internal checks and balances, eliminating errors as much as possible. By documenting all the processes, we are now able to pin point the exact cause for any bottlenecks and even fix individual responsibility," Chadha added.

Professionals haven't made world better

Our Corporate Bureau
NEW DELHI, 29 SEPTEMBER

• ON THE ETHICAL AGENDA •

Indian professionals are worse than their international counterparts so far as ethical standards are concerned, says Madhav Mehra, president of the London-based World Council for Corporate Governance.

Mehra, a former bureaucrat who has been associated with the Institute of Directors and is well known in the rapidly developing corporate governance space, was in Delhi last week in connection with the global corporate governance meet organised by FICCI.

"The rot in ethical standards in India Inc began some ten years back with the beginning of liberalisation," Mehra told *Business Standard*.

According to him, professionalisation of corporates all over the world has not led to any improvement in ethical standards. "In fact, it has made matters worse," Mehra said, adding: "We have had cases in

the US where a company has given its chief executive a huge loan one year and waived it the next year, or another chief executive filling the board of directors of the company with his own people."

Mehra also agrees that stock options have played a crucial role in many accounting scandals that have come to light in the last few months.

"So long as the stock markets were good, it was fine with everybody; once the stocks took a tumble, the employees needed to do everything possible to keep the stock prices high as they had a vested interest with their stock options," he said.

As a result, Mehra said, he does not lay much store by the corporate governance ratings put out by the world's leading rating agencies. "At the moment, I am very sceptical about the corporate governance rat-



ings. Companies which were supposed to be the very models of good governance have gone into liquidation," he said.

Mehra's observations match with the findings of a recent survey of transparency in external reporting by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) which says that a vast majority of investors as well as financial analysts worldwide is sceptical of the short-term earnings reported by companies.

According to the report, titled "Communicating Value in the Telecommunications Industry", 87 per cent of investors and 50 per cent of analysts agree that companies have a great deal of discretion in calculating their reported earnings.

Though the survey covers only telecommunications companies, PwC functionaries say that the trend is true for all sectors, though there might be

some differences between industries.

"At a time when companies find ways to hit earnings projections by a penny per share every quarter, and restatements are commonplace, this investor view is not surprising," the PwC report says.

On their part, only 32 per cent of the corporate executives covered in the global survey admit that they have some discretion in determining the level of reported earnings in any given period.

The divergence in the viewpoint between investors and executives suggests that investors have a cynical view of the numbers reported by companies, the PwC report says.

"A majority of investors and analysts believe that companies have a great deal of discretion in calculating earnings," the Sydney-based PwC partner (technology, information, communications and entertainment), Nick Ridehalgh, told *Business Standard*.