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## Innovation is the name of the game

By Vidya Iyengar, Bangalore Mirror Bureau | Sep 12, 2014, 07:55 PM IST



That's what the regional head of a top fast food chain says is necessary to keep up in the competitive industry

### Arvind Singhal (38) Regional Director - South, McDonald's India (West & South)

If there's one challenge that Arvind Singhal, Regional Director - South, McDonald's India (West & South), faces in every transaction, it's giving his 2,000-odd customers, who visit each outlet in Bangalore on a daily basis, an experience that reflects his company's tagline, 'I'm loving it!' "It's a painstaking process training employees at different levels to ensure that every transaction is smooth. And there's only one moment to prove that," he says.

In fact, his previous postings in Nokia (as product manager from August 2004 to November 2005) and Asian Paints (area manager from June 2000 to October 2002) have helped him greatly in his current job. For instance, when he worked at Nokia, Singhal explains that the customers' needs were 'latent'. "They knew they wanted something but wouldn't know exactly what. This meant that we would have to come out with something innovative.

That's how the idea of the colour screen and camera came about," Singhal says, when we meet him at the first McDonald's outlet that opened on Brigade Road in 2006.

It's the same logic when it comes to the fast food business. Singhal, who has been with the brand since 2007, is always looking to innovate and improve. This, he says, takes him to the 41 outlets in the city (including highway restaurants), where his team tries to understand the customer's needs firsthand. "When we first launched, our boards just listed out the menu. On one of our visits, we realised that customers were confused about what to order. We then made it more visually appealing, which would

aid in the decision-making process," he explains.

Another lesson he's picked up from his stint at Asian Paints was about customers' expectations and their constantly changing needs, apart from maintaining quality and consistency. This came in handy when four years ago, the McDonalds team found that many people were skipping breakfast, which prompted them to come up with the breakfast menu. "We realised that we needed to provide a breakfast that they could have in one hand while holding their mobile in the other," he says.

Even the introduction of drive-ins was based on similar learning. "It saves time. It's like standing at one signal for three-and-a-half minutes," he says. There are several crises that they come across regularly – from customers complaining about bad experiences (for instance, serving a vegetarian customer non-vegetarian food) or when certain religious groups create agitations across the globe which affects their brand. "But our starting point for such a discussion is that we haven't taken any shortcuts. Plus, at such times, we keep our communication channels open so that we can get rid of baseless rumours," he says.

Believing that the customer is king, Singhal says, is the only way to stay at the top.

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