

As competition hots up, SMEs turn savvy brand builders

KOMALAMIT GERA

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As competition becomes ever fiercer, even SMEs have realised the need for brand building, even though their small scale of operations and thin margins make this an expensive proposition.

But the prospect of registering their presence at the Indian Grand Prix scheduled in October-end this year has prompted them to participate in the second edition of Vodafone's 'Drive into the Big League' contest.

Twenty-one SMEs from Chandigarh, Delhi, Pune, Kolkata, Mangalore, Ahmedabad, Bhubaneswar, Visakhapatnam, Lucknow and Coimbatore were shortlisted as city qualifiers after three rounds of interviews.

Only one will get to display its company logo on the Vodafone McLaren Mercedes cars that will race in the second season of the motor rac-

ing event slated for October 26-28 this year.

The 21 city qualifiers will battle it out in an eight-part reality television series on a leading television channel. The series began earlier this month and will continue into October.

The final winner will be selected by an expert jury which will evaluate the 21 finalists after providing them with real-life situations that each of their businesses could face, and seeing how they work around those situations.

Tanay Agarwal, director of Kolkata-based Skipper Furnishings, believes that SMEs can earn rich dividends from brand building. They had tremendous potential to scale up their operations, and market support from large companies could help in a big way, he said.

Agarwal owns a retail chain with a wide product mix in the furnishings space. Present in nine cities in India, he had plans to expand into many

more cities and participation in such events can give his brand national recognition, he said.

Bijaya Kumar Sahoo, who runs an education business (Sai International), from Bhubaneswar, feels that challenges and competitions are aimed at eliciting the best out of individuals and organisations.

"My winning will inspire other entrepreneurs to build not only good but great schools. Education beyond excellence can be rightfully said to be the need of the hour and endorsement at an international sports event would be a big recognition," he said.

Ahmedabad-based Abhishek Kapoor, managing director of Aarkay Foods, a manufacturer of natural food ingredients such as food colours, spray-dried and vacuum-dried fruit and vegetable products and specialty ingredients, said that visibility and recognition for a company is

the primary benefit from such events.

"Equally important is the learning opportunity, since we will be facing an astute jury who will help us sharpen our thoughts and business acumen. We will be interacting with other participants who are equally motivated and passionate about their businesses and ideas," he added.

Kavita Nair, vice-president, Vodafone Business Services, said that by bringing SMEs into such an event, Vodafone hoped to reach out to a wider base of entrepreneurs who could benefit from the company's communication solutions.

"Displaying the company logo at a Grand Prix may be a dream for SMEs. Also, they may be able to reach a global audience. So, it's a win-win for both. The telecast of the competition rounds on TV channels across India is also a milestone for the 21 shortlisted SMEs," she added.