

City of Child Dreams

KidZania, a real-life city which is miniaturised for 4-14-year-olds, is all set to launch its first Indian outlet in Mumbai come July. With six brands already on board, it expects the total to reach 20 by the time of launch.

Children love to imitate adults. And that is the central idea of KidZania, a Mexican company which has created a city-like theme park for children with factories, banks and even ATMs adapted for their size and ease. With a dozen such parks across eight countries, KidZania is all set to launch its first kids' entertainment centre in Mumbai in July.



A junction in the shopping alley of KidZania Cuicuilco



Hardware shop inside KidZania Jakarta



Theatre within KidZania Dubai



Open air restaurant in KidZania Koshien

ImagNation Edutainment India has got the franchise for India and it aims to launch the parks in Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru over the next three years. Each of these will involve an infrastructure cost of close to Rs 120 crore.

The park simulates the workings of a real city. Complete with buildings, paved streets, vehicles and recognisable role-playing destinations in the form of 'establishments', it will offer kids more than 75 role-playing options in its 60 establishments. Brands have a chance to partner with KidZania for each of these places. For example, the bank in KidZania Mumbai is a replica of Yes Bank, whereas the shopping stores are an exact copy of Central and Big Bazaar.

Kids will be able to don the roles of fire-fighters, journalists, bankers, doctors, chefs and more in any one of the role playing options. KidZania has its own functioning economy and currency (KidZos), through which children learn to purchase and manage their expenditure (open bank accounts and get a debit card).

This, the thirteenth KidZania centre in the world has already sealed partnerships with six brands and aims to launch in July, with at least 20 tie-ups. Each brand that comes aboard has to sign the deal for at least a couple of years, as the infrastructural changes are cumbersome to make.

The latest brand to come in is Mad Over Donuts, the retail chain, which has got itself a doughnut factory as well as an MOD outlet in the little city. Tarak Bhattacharya, chief operating officer, MOD says, "It's a win-win situation for both MOD and KidZania, since the core target audience for the two is same. The culture of cupcakes and doughnuts has been gaining grounds in India for some time now."

Bhattacharya expects 20 per cent of the total kids entering KidZania Mumbai, to go into the MOD store within. Also, he is optimistic that about 80 per cent of these kids entering MOD will be willing to go for role-play, while the rest would approach the store to eat. The fact of its participation in KidZania will be promoted in all MOD outlets.

Each brand has a slightly different take on what benefit its presence will bring. Akshay Mehrotra, chief marketing officer, Big Bazaar mentions, "There are two levels to the answer. First is that the consumers will touch our brand sometime in the near future. We are basically trying to create early brand evangelists. Another reason is that the kids (consumers) will understand the value of the people working in a departmental store, thereby increasing brand acceptance."

For Big Bazaar, kids have a special place since about 7-8 per cent of the total sales come from kids' products - clothes, apparels, toys, stationers and footwear. Mehrotra categorises them into three lots: first, as infants, when their parents buy for them; two, when they gain Pester Power, at which point visual merchandising drives sales and third, when, as teenagers, they have a mind of their own. It is children in the second and third stage that Mehrotra hopes to reach through KidsZania.

Birla Sun Life insurance is a brand whose presence is especially difficult to comprehend. Isn't the hope of catching them young being carried too far?

Responds Ajay Kakar, chief marketing officer, financial services, Aditya Birla Group, "I have been to KidZania's Dubai centre and have experienced how kids consume the atmosphere. Children are the best way to get to parents' pockets through their heart. Earlier, parents decided the careers for their children. Now, however, the kids decide it for themselves."

Interestingly, instead of a store, Birla Sun Life has a kind of employment agency for kids. Here, children can make their first-ever resumes. The brand intends to provide career solutions for kids through its employment agency. It will explain to children what options are available within KidZania and then, provide them with a report card, thereby helping parents to know the aptitude of the children in various fields.

Everyone agrees that marketing to children is a tough act. So, how does KidZania itself sell the concept to kids? Viraj Jit Singh, CMO, KidZania India, thinks that a brand like this will grow through word of mouth. He is counting above everything on the nearly 2.5 million people who visit R City Mall in Ghatkopar, where KidZania is located, every month. There will be mall activations across the city, apart from the traditional campaign that will be launched closer to the opening.

The campaign will begin with television as the main focus, even if it's a local brand, because Singh would like to create awareness across the country and create a buzz. Print and radio will come in next, so as to create focus on specific market.

While the primary target audience is children between 4-14 years, the secondary focus is on young parents between 25-40 years. While the kids need to get attracted to the KidZania concept, the parents must be convinced that the brand will add value to the child's life, reasons Singh. "The communication will depend on the medium we are using. If we are targeting both of them, the tonality has to be fun and the take-away must be edutainment. We believe if the child pulls the parents with pester power, he will visit the park once; however, if the parents are convinced, they will come back again."