

## Audio advertisement in TOI creates a huge buzz

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Talks about Volks populi. The Times of India became a talking point on Tuesday, quite literally. Lakhs of readers across six cities reacted with surprise, wonder and even shock when they discovered sound coming out of their morning paper just as they unfolded it.

The world's first "speaking newspaper", a creation of TOI and Volkswagen, came with a speaking device that started playing a pre-recorded message on the new Volkswagen Vento the moment readers opened the four special pages of content that the paper was wrapped in.

While the innovation startled most readers, many found it interesting and arresting. But it had some unintended consequences as well. At many places, calls were made to the police with people suspecting the device was a bomb. Mahim in Mumbai witnessed a scare after a pedestrian heard a "beeping sound" coming from a garbage bin and alerted the police. A bomb squad reached the spot, near S L Raheja Hospital, and found that it was the audio-ad. "Someone had thrown the black audio device into the bin," an officer said. "We took it as part of our readiness-and-alert drills."

In Delhi, too, the police were kept busy.

Apocryphal tales surrounding the ad did the rounds of TOI offices across the country. According to one, a maid thought there was a ghost in the newspaper. At one centre, a carton of the speaking devices overturned, leading to hundreds of them babbling together!

The device became an object of prank for some. Once readers figured out what the ad was all about, the paper quickly became a collector's item of sorts. Bhaskar Das, executive president of BCCL, called the talking ad a "huge leap for newspapers".

He said it was another feather in the cap of the TOI group and enhanced the group's relevance quotient in this new age of dynamic media.

Lutz Kothe, head of marketing and PR, Volkswagen, was equally upbeat. "The advertisement has created a great amount of curiosity about the car in the market. I think a campaign like this has been attempted for the first time in the world and it took people completely by surprise. We received huge enquiries for the car. I do not think we went over the top with the campaign as our target was to create interest for the car," he said.

The ad world too took notice. Adman Alyque

Padamsee said he was surprised "when my newspaper began to talk to me". He, however, said VW should have put a little sticker on the gadget with instructions. "It took me 15 minutes to find a way to get the thing to shut up. As far as the campaign is concerned, it was unusual, and therefore very noticeable."

Santosh Desai, another adman found it very noticeable "as it jumps out at you and you have to notice it". But he thought the ad wasn't suited for a car company. "It is like using a large hammer to swat a small mosquito," he added.

Prahlad Kakkar said the ad was "intrusive and unwelcome". Many readers wrote in, some with praise and others with complaints. Bangalore resident Rani Venugopal wrote, "Although the idea is novel and original, it is very irresponsible for Volkswagen to have included lakhs of these gadgets in the newspaper. These will finally end up in the dumps polluting the environment. TOI promotes green initiatives. What happened to your judgment here?" Another Bangalore reader, Ravi Achar, criticized the campaign for adding to the bomb scare. Subhash Chandra said it had put many reader in shock.

