



# 'Jaquar is balancing AI push with dealer-led sales model'

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MUMBAI

**N**early four years ago, Jaquar Group launched a series of ads about an entirely new business it had entered: lights. For a company synonymous with bathroom fittings, it was a difficult campaign to pull off. The company's advertisement campaign—a series of videos depicting people expecting bathroom fittings in unusual spaces only to be surprised by Jaquar lighting instead—went on to win several awards.

But now, as Jaquar pushes ahead with its global ambitions, it is navigating a marketing landscape increasingly disputed by artificial intelligence (AI). The situation is complicated by a unique feature of Jaquar's core industry, where sales are made not directly to customers but via an extensive dealer network.

Sandeep Shukla, vice-president and head of marketing communications and global operations at Jaquar Group, told *Mint* how the company is navigating these changes while harnessing AI for its sales and marketing.

*Here are some edited excerpts from the interview:*

**Jaquar has been known for its bath fittings in India, but you have spent years moving to newer price points and now a new category with lighting. How has your core consumer changed?**

The whole understanding of the home interiors category has evolved drastically post-covid. People like to spend more time at home and builders are now providing homes with fitted interiors, so the home interiors business has become a very high-involvement category.

What fittings go into a home has now become a joint decision involving even the children and elderly members of the family. Besides, after the covid pandemic, the health and wellness theme is strong, so people are increasingly



looking to build wellness spaces at home. This is no longer a luxury.

Architects, interior designers, and contractors and dealers do have an influence on what is purchased, but more directionally, interiors are becoming a consumer product.

**A few years ago, you formally transitioned your mainline ad campaigns from just bathroom fittings to lighting. How well do you think that business expansion has landed with your customer?**

Lighting is a difficult category, but transitioning from bath to light was a natural progression. The most natural things in the world are water and light, (which are also) the two most integral parts of the home and living category.

In fact, lighting has been more complex than bathroom fittings. Also, there are many kinds of lighting on offer—from architectural to

facade, outdoor, and others. There is no one brand mastering it all. We are the only Indian company to offer complete bathroom and lighting solutions. No other company offers such a vast portfolio.

We have been able to build an aspirational aspect to lighting. We may not be the leader in lighting like we are in bathroom fittings. But we are one of the few brands able to carry the trust.

**For Jaquar and others in this business, the dealer network has been central to sales and marketing efforts. How has that relationship changed as marketing itself becomes heavily disrupted?**

The authorized dealer network is very important to us. We are not retail-

ing; we have experience centres that are only for educating customers about our offerings. We do not sell from there. Today, we have a 60% market share and don't want to create unnecessary conflict between dealers and showrooms. So, we don't give multiple dealers the same catchment area. Our efforts have paid off in the long run. The fourth generation of owners are taking charge in some of our Jaquar showrooms. The promoters have always felt that the dealer network is an extended family.

We have been using technology to drive store footfalls to our dealers. For example, we run Google My Business campaigns to guide our customers to their nearest Jaquar showroom and dealer across India.

We are also using artificial intelligence tools to read through customer calls with our dealers and use that as feedback to improve our marketing campaigns.

**Speaking of AI, what other ways are you experimenting with the technology in your sales and marketing efforts?**

We are experimenting with AI search functions and using AI social listening tools to keep up with digital chatter on our brand and category. My agencies also use AI tools to turn projects around faster by reducing the time taken for market research and insighting, for example.



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**Sandeep Shukla**  
VP and head, marketing communications, Jaquar

But with generative AI, I think you cannot entirely lean on it for the finer aspects of visual marketing. For example, generative AI renders still look rather fake and plastic, especially renders of human expressions and water flow. I think you can use AI smartly for nudges rather than outsourcing to it completely.

Also, beyond the noise around generative AI, Google Search still holds 85-90% of search traffic. It may reduce over time, but you cannot discard traditional Google Search even now.

**M** INTERVIEW