

THE MAKING OF A TOUR: IN CONVERSATION WITH WARREN D'SOUZA, SOUND.COM



SOUND.COM's execution of the Yo Yo Honey Singh tour reflected a touring philosophy built on teamwork, synergy, and streamlined rig design

*Concert Tours are a burgeoning business in India, a fast-moving, high-stakes world where precision, people, and perseverance decide who thrives. At its forefront stands **Warren D'Souza**, Director of **SOUND.COM**, a name synonymous with large-scale live event success. As one of the pioneers who helped shape the modern touring landscape in India, D'Souza's experience runs deep. **PALM Expo Magazine** team sat down with him to unpack the realities of touring in India, from logistical to human factors that make or break a show, and to understand the hard-earned philosophies behind his long-running success.*

When asked about his core philosophy on delivering across multiple events during a tour, **D'Souza** makes it clear that touring, especially in India, is still a relatively new concept. It is staple to the US or European markets, due to the infrastructure available.

He goes on to draw a stark comparison between the state of touring in India and more developed markets. "The US market is designed for efficiency. Each state is as big as a country, and everything is designed to facilitate large-scale events, be it the size of the stadiums, the audience capacity, or the parking facilities," D'Souza explains. However, when it comes to India, the situation is far more challenging, in that we don't

have the infrastructure that they are working with. "We don't have good venues, except a few and far between, we don't have good roads, and we don't have good rigging & safety standards," D'Souza highlights. He explains that in India, a typical show setup involves hurdles that do not exist in more developed touring markets.

Logistical Challenges of Touring in India

D'Souza emphasises that logistical challenges account for about 80% of the difficulties, leaving the acoustic challenges to make up only 20%. The limitations of the infrastructure in India often lead to significant delays and complications. "Most of the venues lack the infrastructure; they are flat ground with no toilets. Portable toilets are set up, as well as VIP decks, bars, barricading and stages are built from ground up," he says. In contrast, international shows often benefit from infrastructure already in place, such as roofed rigging systems and steel ground support along with plant machinery to rig it.

D'Souza enlightens us about the concept of "leapfrogging," which is central to touring logistics in India. It's complex nature is attributed the fact that each stop of the tour unfolds simultaneously across multiple locations, while one is dismantling, another is running, and a third is being set up. In this scenario, the logistics team must manage an incredibly tight schedule and constantly coordinate between cities. "If I go from one city to another, I need to ensure that while city B is being dismantled, I can still set up in city C and keep things running smoothly," D'Souza explains.

SOUND.COM's Edge Over the World

While infrastructure may be lacking, D'Souza is quick to highlight how the advent of technology, particularly advanced mobile phones and GPS, has improved the touring process in India specifically. "Trucking quality has improved a little, but what has really helped is the **Digital India**. The government's push for innovations like UPI. Apps of aggregators for flights, hotels and online ticketing, quick delivery and shipment tracking have made logistics much easier," he acknowledges.

Teamwork and Logistics: Backbone of Successful Touring

D'Souza points out that the success of a tour is not just about the equipment or even the skill of the sound engineers. "Success in touring does not

D'Souza attributes his success on the Arijit Singh tour to knowing his team inside out and anticipating the client's needs before they arise



“India's changing in such a way that there will come a time where artists will not be able to come to India and do a show only in Mumbai and call it a day.

come from owning kit only," he asserts. "It comes from the backend team, your logistics management, tour accounting, your prep crew, and your ability to manage the immense pressure of multiple, high-stakes events."

Managing a successful tour requires a well-coordinated team spread across multiple locations. "When you're doing a **Diljit Dosanjh** show on Friday in Chandigarh, then Hyderabad on a Saturday for an **Arijit Singh** show and then a leapfrogged Diljit Dosanjh show in Kolkata on a Sunday is simply mind boggling for rental house who hasn't done this body of work in the past.

Moreover, D'Souza emphasises that a strong, well-equipped team is essential for handling these large-scale operations. "A company has to have width and depth in both gear and the ability to manage logistics. If you are moving 700 loudspeakers across three cities in one weekend, that literally means 23 trucks are on the road. You require bandwidth to manage that," he says. He also notes that while managing multiple events, **SOUND.COM** is also responsible for shows like **Ed Sheeran's Mathematics Tour** of Bhutan and India along with **NJSM Pro** a part of the **SOUND.COM** family another hallmark tour in India.

Aspiration, Trust, Fear

According to D'Souza, the reason why artists and organisers book **SOUND.COM** for major events boils down to three key factors: Aspiration, Trust, and Fear. "They book you for Aspiration, because they want to work with the best; trust, because they know you will deliver; and fear, because they worry somebody else might mess up," he states confidently.

In the high-pressure world of touring, strategic decision-making is crucial. According to D'Souza, "We carefully select our projects, weighing factors such as financial viability and artist profile and the stability of the promoters." D'Souza emphasises that this discernment is a key aspect of **SOUND.COM**'s business strategy, built on loyalty to clients.

He elaborates, "Touring may appear glamorous on social media, but behind the scenes, it's a complex juggling act involving logistical coordination, compliance with local regulations, and adherence to sound level laws." He attributes the company's success to meticulous planning and execution, noting, "Our reputation for delivering high-quality events is what attracts major tours to partner with us."

D'Souza's philosophy is rooted in the idea of tonal consistency across all shows. For him, it's not just about the equipment or the sound system; it's about ensuring that every show, no matter the location, provides a consistent auditory experience.

Understanding the Artist's Vision

The artist's vision is crucial in shaping the sound of a show, and D'Souza stresses that understanding that vision is the first step. The driving force behind the sound design could either be the artist or the engineer. Sometimes it's a collaborative effort, but other times, the responsibility lies solely with one or the other. For example, when working with Diljit Dosanjh, the brief might be to create a nightclub-like atmosphere/sound, whereas with **Honey Singh**, the focus could be on a heavy sub-bass experience. This level of detail underscores the importance of tailoring sound to the specific needs of each

artist and/or his FOH Engineer, rather than just relying on generic solutions.

D'Souza highlights operational efficiency as a crucial factor in ensuring the profitability of a sound rental business. A key aspect of his strategy involves meticulously managing tour logistics, encompassing transportation costs, crew productivity, and technical considerations.

D'Souza emphasises that his success on the Diljit Dosanjh tour stems from his ability to know his team and predict the client's needs.

He illustrates the importance of logistical planning with an example: "When utilising a 20-ton vehicle, we can maximise capacity, resulting in a transportation cost of ₹1,20,000 for a trip from Mumbai to Delhi. However, opting for a 12-ton vehicle would require two trucks due to payload issues, doubling the diesel cost and subsequently increasing the total transportation cost to ₹2,40,000."

D'Souza emphasises that the sound rental industry is characterized by numerous logistical complexities, including vehicle capacity, crew efficiency, and equipment payload. By focusing on these minute details, Sound.com achieves operational efficiency, thereby maintaining cost-effectiveness and profitability in an increasingly competitive market. This attention to detail on hidden costs has enabled the company to sustain its growth and success.

Learning from Experience

D'Souza's approach is a result of years of on-the-job experience. He started his career by working with some of India's biggest artists, such as **A.R.**

Rahman, learning the intricacies of production along the way. Over time, he moved on to manage tours for other top artists like Arijit Singh, Diljit Dosanjh, Honey Singh, **Harris Jayaraj** and others, continuously refining his understanding of what it takes to create successful tours.

"India's changing in such a way that there will come a time where artists will not be able to come to India and do a show only in Mumbai and call it a day," he points out. D'Souza sees the emerging trend where global artists now need to perform in multiple cities across India, just like **Ed Sheeran**, who made his rounds across the country. This shift is not only in terms of geography but also in terms of the opportunities that India offers in terms of social media exposure.

Social media has become a powerful force reshaping the touring business in India, and D'Souza highlights just how much it matters. He explains that artists today recognise the immense value of the Indian audience, not just in terms of ticket sales, but in the digital boost they can gain. "Two major artists do one song together and then a collaborative post on Instagram, 30% of their fans will start following each other overnight," he says, underlining the vast impact a performance here can have on an artist's visibility and reach. With India's strong digital presence, touring in the country offers artists the chance to gain hundreds of thousands of new followers, which sometimes outweighs immediate financial returns. D'Souza points out that a well-established artist might even drop their performance fee, if they see the potential for long-term exposure and brand growth among Indian fans.

Thinking Beyond the Show

For D'Souza, success in the sound rental and touring business is not just about the technical aspects of sound but also about strategic thinking. Strategy involves understanding the market needs, competitive pricing and packaged services offerings of competition. While some rental companies had newer equipment, they lack the necessary experience. Others that have the experience may lack the latest gear. D'Souza, on the other hand, over time garnered both experience and the necessary gear, making him the clear choice in the eyes of the production management.

When it comes to preparing for large-scale tours, D'Souza is clear about his approach. "Preparation is very different, right? Everyone has clearly assigned roles, everything is demarcated very well," he points out. This includes everything from the team prepping the upskilling of the crew members responsible for setting up and ensuring the smooth execution of events. "It's working like a well-oiled machine, less talking and focus on the actual job in hand" he asserts. This level of organisation ensures that there is no room for error, allowing the team to focus solely on delivering a flawless experience.

Innovation and Adaptation

The entertainment industry, especially in India, has changed signifi-

D'Souza points to rising touring demands in India, crediting acts like Ed Sheeran and Diljit Dosanjh for proving that full-scale tours are not just possible, but thriving, across the country



cantly over the years, and D'Souza understands that staying ahead of the curve requires constant innovation and adaptation. In the past, owning equipment was the key to success. Today, however, there is much more to it: the ability to think strategically, educating your staff, manage logistics effectively, and tailor the sound experience to the specific needs of the artist and the audience. In India, the market is still evolving, and many players are still learning the ropes of the industry. D'Souza believes that it's important to have a broader vision, to see beyond the horizon, and to ensure you have the scale and the crew to handle the complexities of modern touring.

"You must have the mindset, the scalability and the crew. You need the ability to see beyond the horizon," he explains, outlining the qualities that sound rental companies need to succeed in India.

D'Souza reflects on the evolution of the sound rental business, contrasting the older generation's focus solely on delivering good sound with his own broader, more strategic approach. "People have not evolved in every aspect of what they're doing," he asserts, emphasising that this lack of adaptability has caused many businesses in India to experience peaks and troughs.

However, D'Souza is clear in his belief that SOUND.COM is on upward trajectory an assertion made out of a deep understanding of the industry's dynamics. He is not simply focusing on acoustics; he is looking at the bigger picture, investment patterns, customer relationships, and future projections.

Importance of Industry Knowledge and Relationships

The key to D'Souza's success lies in his ability to think beyond the immediate needs of a show. "I'm processing the numbers and thinking of how I'm making my investments," he reveals. He is acutely aware of the flow of money in live entertainment, citing his insights of companies like **BookMyShow** and **District by Zomato** and how they are raising funds each year for live events.

One of the core elements of his success is the commitment to fostering growth within his company. "If you start working in this business like this, you start creating an environment of growth," D'Souza says. He insists that, in his company, there's no room for infighting or office politics. The focus is solely on the work at hand. This business philosophy not only ensures productivity but fosters an environment where the team can thrive and deliver excellent results.

Building the Sound Infrastructure

D'Souza's insights extend to the technical aspects of his company's operations. He stresses that India's sound rental market is fragmented, with too many small players offering limited gear for smaller shows. As a result, when larger-scale projects come into play, only a few companies can meet the demand. He explains, "95% of the vendors are set up to do shows with a optimum coverage of 250 feet in a Greenfield event." However, when tasked with a show that requires over 350 feet, as D'Souza has often been, the option narrows significantly to barely 5% of the key players. For events requiring massive sound systems, only a handful of vendors in India are equipped to handle such a scale. This challenge, however, presents a key opportunity for major companies and, emphasizing the importance of scalability and the ability to provide top-notch systems for large-scale shows.

The Business of Multiplication

Looking ahead, D'Souza predicts a major shift in India's sound rental market, where large companies that can scale will grow exponentially. "Big companies will become super big, and mid-size and small companies will not really evolve that much in scale whilst they can maintain gear quality," he says. Although India's live entertainment scene has made strides, with 15 companies now able to handle major band setups in Mumbai compared to just a few five years ago, D'Souza notes that the country is still catching up to global standards. He foresees a future where massive international tours, like what Coldplay did and what **Taylor Swift** can do will set the benchmark, moving the focus away from smaller events.

D'Souza places great importance on the role of sound rental companies like SOUND.COM in the concert economy. "For us, being conduit between the artist and the audience, makes the sound company a very important stakeholder of the show he says." He explains that when the result of a show is impactful, the ripple effect is immediate. "You start creating an environment of growth and focus." This focus on quality and consistency is key to SOUND.COM's ongoing success. He states that, because of their commitment to quality, clients keep returning. "Why are they not talking to any other vendor for the next milestone tour/show? Because we are translating an emotion and not merely delivering a sound."

Growth of the Indian Touring Market: Coldplay as a Catalyst

When discussing the future of touring in India, D'Souza points to Coldplay's hugely successful concert in Mumbai as a turning point. "Because of the success of Coldplay, everybody wants to now come to India and do a tour," he asserts. "This success has pushed the industry forward, showing that international acts can indeed draw massive crowds and generate significant revenue." he states with conviction.

D'Souza's optimism about the future of the touring business is clear: "Unbelievably good." He believes the market will only continue to expand, as both domestic and international artists see India as a prime location for large-scale tours. But while D'Souza expresses enthusiasm about the future of touring, he has a more reserved view of the current state of the pro audio industry in India. According to him, the market is still far from where it should be. "I don't think it's strong at all. I think everybody's living

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in a fallacy, thinking that they have achieved a lot," he says. He adds, "We've not achieved that much, so there's still a long way to go for the industry."

Investing in Quality

For D'Souza, the consistency of sound quality across multiple performances is paramount. He recalls a specific incident during the Ed Sheeran tour, where he invested into a significant quantity of **d&b Loudspeakers** as tonal homogeneity was paramount for the tour production, we practically replicated the same Mains rig and variable outers and delay rigs in all cities. Tour class gear only stands in top-tier productions, any compromises here get exposed on tours.

Strategy, Branding, and Leadership: The Human Element

D'Souza places strong emphasis on the human side of his business, from staff operations to client relationships. "Today, every metric counts. Where are you geo-positioned? Who's your crew? How are they geo-positioned? What do they say about your brand/company?" he explains. His holistic approach blends marketing, human resources, and team psychology. Leadership, he believes, is about managing people, not just resources. "In our company, 90% of the staff are aligned to our vision, so everybody's successful," he shares, highlighting his focus on building a collaborative culture to work and learn in unison

Evolving with Times: An Adaptable Entrepreneur

For D'Souza, adaptability is key to success. The ability to pivot when necessary, especially in times of crisis, has been a crucial part of his journey. He recalls the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, during which his company had to make significant adjustments. "By August of 2020, we started recalling staff and were paying people subsidised salaries," he remembers. Despite the setbacks, he ensured his team was not lost to international competitors, even though the industry as a whole was struggling. "We never lost anybody to Middle East based companies whilst others literally saw an Exodus," he proudly asserts.

Looking ahead, D'Souza is ready to face new challenges with the same strategic foresight that has guided him so far. He stresses the importance of understanding the multiple layers of business. "You're challenged at many levels, at a multi-dimensional level," he says, acknowledging the constant evolution of the industry. "As good as an attack we possess, we also have to create a defence," he concludes.

A Long-Term Vision

D'Souza's approach to the touring business is rooted in a long-term vision, built on the foundation of quality, consistency, and forward-thinking strategy. As he continues to navigate the evolving market, his emphasis on systems, metrics, and the human element of business ensures that SOUND.COM remains a leader in the field. The road ahead may be filled with new challenges, but D'Souza's philosophy remains clear: success comes not from running fast in the short term, but from playing the long game with discipline, strategy, and relentless pursuit of excellence.