



# **DB Corp Ltd**

“DB Corp Limited  
Q4 & FY'24 Earnings Conference Call”

May 22, 2024

**Moderator:**

Ladies and gentlemen, good day, and welcome to the D.B. Corp Limited Q4 and FY24 Earnings Conference Call. As a reminder, all participant lines will be in the listen-only mode and there will be an opportunity for you to ask questions after the presentation concludes. Should you need assistance during the conference call, please signal an operator by pressing star then zero on your touchtone phone. Please note that this conference is being recorded.

We have with us today the senior management team of D B Corp Limited, Mr. Pawan Agarwal - Deputy Managing Director; Mr. Girish Agarwal - Non-Executive Director; Mr. Lalit Jain - Chief Financial Officer; Mr. Mushtaq Ali - Senior Vice President (F&A); and Mr. Prasoon Kumar Pandey - Head Investor and Media Relations who will represent the D.B. Corp Limited on the call.

The management will be sharing the key operating and financial highlights for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 followed by a question-and-answer session. Please note that some of the statements made in today's discussion may be forward-looking in nature and may involve risks and uncertainties. Documents relating to the company's financial performance have already been e-mailed to you and are available on the website of the stock exchanges and the company's Investor Relations section.

Trust you have been able to go through the same. I now hand the conference over to Mr. Pawan Agarwal. Thank you, and over to you, sir.

**Pawan Agarwal:**

Very good evening to everyone, and thank you for joining the Q4FY24 D B Corp Earnings Conference Call. We will begin the call by highlighting the key financial performance for the quarter ended March 31, 2024, followed by key operational updates.

We've had yet another year of growth with Q4 topping off 11 consecutive quarters of broad based growth. The current period has definitely seen an uptick also supported by the positive sentiments and consumption growth due to increase in disposable income around the election season. We are particularly encouraged by the industry leading growth in advertising revenue and a significant increase in EBITDA.

In keeping with our focus on creating shareholder value, the Board of Directors have recommended an interim dividend of INR 8 per share. You will recall that during the past few quarters, we have been highlighting how the Print Media is impacting the media landscape on the back of editorial integrity and trust. As a market leader, Dainik Bhaskar has driven this change and we have fostered a virtuous cycle of growth, supporting our advertiser success, while concurrently driving alongside them.

For FY24, our consol advertising grew by 18.2% Y-o-Y to INR 17,524 million against INR

14,827 million. Total revenue grew by around 14% Y-o-Y to INR 24,821 million against INR 21,682 million. EBITDA grew by 95% Y-o-Y to INR 7,033 million against INR 3,611 million.

PAT grew by 152% Y-o-Y to INR 4,255 million against INR 1,691 million. Our average cost for newsprint has reduced from the high of INR 63,500 per metric ton in Q2FY23 to around INR 51,500 per metric ton in Q2FY24 and now to INR 49,350 per metric ton in Q4FY24, resulting in newsprint cost reduction of 14% Y-o-Y in FY24.

In Q4 FY'24, consolidated advertising revenue registered a growth of 25% Y-o-Y to INR 4,457 million against INR 3,578 million. At the same time, our EBITDA grew by 121% Y-o-Y to INR 1,967 million against INR 889 million. EBITDA margin expanded by 1,500 basis points to 31% from 16% last year. Our PAT grew by 199% Y-o-Y to INR 1,225 million against INR 410 million.

Let me now take you through some of the highlights of our other business segments. For yet another quarter, our radio segment has delivered industry-leading EBITDA margins. Our efforts at building the radio business with strategic investment, strong focus on content and various engagement events led us to believe that this performance is sustainable. We will continue to fuel these efforts to help our omnichannel presence grow.

Revenue grew 21% Y-o-Y at INR 1,623 million versus INR 1,342 million while EBITDA grew by 37% Y-o-Y to INR 551 million versus INR 402 million.

Coming to our digital business. As you are aware, Dainik Bhaskar has continued its focus on building the best-in-class user experience on its digital app, while maintaining very high quality, insightful and engaging content for its readers. The omnichannel presence has been very important, and we see our digital presence as a strong supplementary pillar of growth for future.

Our app has registered a tremendous growth from 2 million in January 2020 to approximately 14 million in March 2024. With that, I would now request Mr. Girish Agarwal to update us on the operations. Over to you, Girish Ji.

**Girish Agarwal:**

Thank you, Pawan, and good evening, everybody and thank you for joining us on this call. Print Media has emerged stronger and more resilient in the current environment. According to the Pitch Madison Advertising Report, the print sector demonstrated its robustness by clocking an Adex of INR 19,250 crores in year 2023. It signifies our commendable performance. And one of the key factors contributing to this steady performance is the unwavering support from major advertisers across various sectors.

Industries like real estate, automobile, education, jewellery, government and health sector.

All of them have continued to invest significantly in print advertising, thereby helping us sustaining the advertising volumes. Looking ahead, we must remain vigilant and proactive in our efforts to innovate and evolve with the changing times. While print advertising continues to hold its ground, we must leverage emerging technologies and embrace digital integration to enhance the effectiveness and reach of our offerings.

And now may I open up the floor for the question-and-answers from all of you. We will be happy to answer you. Thank you.

**Moderator:** Thank you very much. We will now begin the question and answer session. The first question is from the line of Jahnvi Dodai from Aequitas Investments. Please go ahead.

**Jahnvi Dodai:** I wanted to ask in the advertising segment the contribution from auto has it reached the pre-pandemic level and if you could signify the amount of percentage?

**Girish Agarwal:** So automobile is growing like this year, if you see the entire year we have seen the automobile growing almost 30%, but it has not yet reached the pre-pandemic level.

**Jahnvi Dodai:** Okay. And sir, a follow-up question. And what would be the amount of ad revenue on account of elections for 2024?

**Girish Agarwal:** See, the overall government as a category which includes the political has grown by almost 70% plus this year for us which includes the assembly elections of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and as well as the Lok Sabha elections up till 31st March advertising what we got from the government as well with the political parties.

**Jahnvi Dodai:** Thank you sir. I will come back in the queue.

**Moderator:** Thank you. The next question is from the line of Himanshu Shah from Dolat Capital. Please go ahead.

**Himanshu Shah:** Sir, congratulations on great set of numbers. Just continuing with the previous question, can you just let us know what would be the share of government plus political advertising in FY'23 and FY'24? You have already highlighted that it grew by 70%, so government as a category? And then separately, how much would be national and local, excluding the government?

**Girish Agarwal:** So let me give you this way that, normally, government used to stay with us in the range of around 15%, 16% overall on a normalized year, if I see, the government advertising revenue is in the range of 15%, 16%. This year being the election year in the state and the central both, this number has shot up to almost 25%.

**Himanshu Shah:** And sir, this backdrop, since government advertising or government plus political may not repeat in the same fashion in FY '25. Can you provide some color on advertising revenue growth outlook?

**Girish Agarwal:** So I think color is very clear out of our 18% - 19% growth almost, I would say, 9% growth has come because of the election year and such. If I take that out, I'm almost at 10% growth apart from the election revenue. So that's the number, which is our double-digit number, we must work harder to achieve that same going forward, also.

**Himanshu Shah:** Very, very helpful. And on news print side, can you provide what would be the exit rate of newsprint or some color or outlook for next 2 quarters on the newsprint front?

**Girish Agarwal:** Last year, full year average was INR 61,800 in the year FY22 - 23. While this year FY23-24, we have closed on an average of INR 52,000 per ton. But the last quarter, which is Q4, this rate has been as low as INR 49,500. And going forward, which you believe in the Q1, this rate may further go down by around 4%.

But we will have the advantage of annualizing the number going forward because our last year average number was 52, while the Q4 was 49 and Q1 will be maybe 3%, 4% less. So the benefit of that will continue for this year also.

**Himanshu Shah:** Okay. And so we were coming across some media articles that at least the writing and printing paper side when the prices have again started inching upward. Are we seeing any headwinds on the newsprint front or do we foresee that maybe a quarter or two down the line?

**Girish Agarwal:** So this is a commodity business, nobody can predict.

**Himanshu Shah:** Okay. And sir, lastly on digital front, for a longish period 4 year, 5 years, we haven't provided any color or any outlook. Some color possible on digital side in terms of what kind of revenue run rate it would be clocking and what kind of an outlook we are seeing over there, maybe from a medium-term perspective 2 year to 3 years perspective. I believe we are also expanding in UP and a few other markets where we are not present physically.

**Girish Agarwal:** So you are right. We are taking on UP in a big way for our digital business and we have got a very great traction in the initial months from Uttar Pradesh. As far as the overall digital is concerned, we are at around 15 million monthly active users with us on our app. And the time spend is also almost 14, 15 minutes. And the number two if at all we have to take the comparison in picture number two would be at around 3 million monthly active users and a time spend of around 4 minutes, 5 minutes.

So compared to the competitor in the market I think we are doing a far superior job which

we are very excited about, and we'll continue investing our time and effort to achieve more numbers going forward also. As far as the further detail of revenue and monetization is concerned, if you remember, we took the approval from the Board and all our investors also that since it's a very competitive market, and we don't want to disclose too much of information in this. That's the reason we don't want to divulge much more right now. But going forward whenever we feel that the things are happening, we will certainly inform you.

**Himanshu Shah:** Sure, sir. Just qualitatively, in the next 2 to 3 years, should the revenue contribution from a digital perspective be closer to high-single-digit or low-double-digit growth?

**Girish Agarwal:** Let the time tell, sir.

**Himanshu Shah:** And can I have one more follow-up on circulation side?

**Management:** Go ahead.

**Himanshu Shah:** So can you just let us know what will be the circulation number? And I believe last count, it was around 40 lakhs or 41 lakhs broadly in this range for FY'24. Are we looking -- is the number correct? And are we looking for any kind of increase in circulation numbers?

**Girish Agarwal:** This year number what we have closed on a average is 41 lakhs something. And largely, we are trying our best to increase the circulation and our teams are working on it. Hopefully, we are targeting some growth this year.

**Himanshu Shah:** That's it from my side and all the best.

**Moderator:** Thank you. The next question is from the line of Amit Doshi from Care PMS. Please go ahead.

**Amit Doshi:** Sir, just wanted to understand on this digital part since last few quarters the number of average monthly user has been slightly flattish. So you believe that -- I mean, in terms of further penetration how much more is possible or is it because that some parts where have been probably you have gone under paywall or you have started subscription-based model. So if you can give some idea about that or what -- and what is it that probably a number that you would look before you go for, so to say, a monetization? So just a bit on that.

**Girish Agarwal:** Okay. In digital, if you look at the overall total addressable market is huge. So as anybody who has a smartphone and is in the age bracket of 25 to 60 is our customer. And 80% male, I would say, because not every female wants to know about news. So I would say 20% of the female audience and 80% of the male audience.

So the total addressable market is huge. We are doing 15. A lot of improvement has been done. As we rightly mentioned, we are experimenting with certain paywalls also. We have launched in Uttar Pradesh, also. So I think we are working steadily on that. But we are not looking at anything to happen in a day. We are going very steady and peaceful in that.

**Amit Doshi:** No, no, that absolutely it will take probably a few more quarters. What I'm trying to understand is that since that MAU stopped growing for last few quarters or they're growing by just minor percentages. So just wanted to understand what is your expectation in terms of users? I'm still not going into the monetization part.

And what -- I mean, what could probably trigger those MAU growth further because, of course, the first post-COVID jump was exceptional. And then you are maintaining that growth that is also a sufficient this thing, But I'm just trying to understand what could be a number that would be comfortable for you before you kind of jump to monetization.

**Girish Agarwal:** So just as you rightly mentioned, in MAU, we have been able to maintain the number, in fact, grow a little bit, while the industry, all the players have seen a 30% to 60% decline. I think that way, I would call it that we have grown by 60% rather than declining that way. So give us some more time on that.

**Amit Doshi:** Okay. And second question about this you mentioned about the government breakup. So in terms of government, auto, jewellery, if you can just this quarter on this Q4 as well as annual, what would be the breakout of that?

**Girish Agarwal:** For Q4 specifically, Mr. Prasoon Pandey will get in touch with you because I don't have a Q4 exactly right now with me. But on the full year basis, as I mentioned that the government contribution has gone up to 25%, which normally is at 15% - 16%, while jewellery has grown in, again, a double digit. Lifestyle category has grown in a single digit. Healthcare has grown by double digits. Automobile has grown almost 30%. So this time, in this year, I've noticed most of the categories have grown some in single digits, some in double digit.

**Amit Doshi:** Okay. And sir, in terms of circulation, while you mentioned that. So what are the areas that you believe there is a possibility of -- so that we could reach to that pre-COVID number of 43 lakhs, 44 lakh. So what are those because fourth quarter, I think you would have given kind of whatever probably users would have to get back to the paper probably has already back. So now since you mentioned that we are doing more efforts to get some growth in the circulating part. So what would be those areas? Where do you expect that additional growth to come from?

**Girish Agarwal:** So, three areas: One is offices. So, what has happened post-COVID most of the offices have cut down the newspapers as a part of their cost-cutting exercise. So we are getting back to

those offices to see how we can start that again. Second is hotels. If you remember, pre-COVID all the hotels used to provide a copy in the room. Post-COVID, they have not yet gone back. So, we are talking to these two large areas.

Furthermore, another area is new nuclear families. For example, in last 5 years' time, every year, people get married or branch out from their joint families and start living in the separate house, living in different houses, high-rise buildings and all that. So over there, also, since it's a new market, vendors are not able to reach out that quickly. So we are seeing how can we reach out to these markets also. So there are constant effort.

Also, one important thing, pre-COVID, if you remember, we used to do a lot of schemes for the circulation. However, post-COVID, because the print prices are very high, we decided not to do any kind of subsidized copy, not to do any kind of schemes, unless until it's 100% on our cover price. So that's also a difference that happened. So we may have to create some environment, again, for enticing the reader for the newspaper for that growth.

**Amit Doshi:** And in terms of the ad rates, would we believe that we are now back to pre-COVID ad rates?

**Girish Agarwal:** In some categories, yes.

**Amit Doshi:** Okay. Okay. So still there is some room to grow? Or do you believe that there is kind of considering that print overall ad pie has significantly shrunk? So...

**Girish Agarwal:** I personally believe in the ad space ad rate, there's always much to be desired.

**Amit Doshi:** Okay. Thank you and all the best. We will join back the queue for more questions.

**Moderator:** Thank you. The next question is from the line of Pranav Shrimal from PINC Wealth Advisory. Please go ahead.

**Pranav Shrimal:** So now that the election season is almost over in all the states, are you seeing a little downside on advertisement on certain sectors or is it still as strong as before?

**Girish Agarwal:** Sorry, I'm not able to understand your question. I think you are using some speaker phone. Can you...

**Pranav Shrimal:** Sir, after Q4, that is within April and now that May is almost over, are you seeing a little downturn in any segment?

**Girish Agarwal:** Generally, what happens in the election month, when the election ground activities are on, there are a lot of restrictions in the markets and all that, and all that. So that's the reason April and May are not a very great month, when it's the election month. So we are hopeful



that from June onwards, the activities will start in the market again.

- Pranav Shrimal:** Okay. So Q1 will be little flattish and from Q2 we can see there is an improvement?
- Girish Agarwal:** No, I'm not saying Q1 will be muted. It will be also good, but will not be substantially good.
- Pranav Shrimal:** Okay. Got it sir. Thank you so much.
- Moderator:** Thank you. The next question is from the line of Rishikesh from Robo Capital. Please go ahead.
- Rishikesh:** Yes. So I was asking if you could comment on the yield of the newspaper business. How much has the increase in FY'24?
- Girish Agarwal:** One second, when you're saying yield for the business means advertising or -- advertising yield you are talking about, sir?
- Rishikesh:** Ad yields.
- Girish Agarwal:** Yes, it has already gone there. It's already reached there.
- Rishikesh:** So it has reached pre-COVID levels you are saying?
- Girish Agarwal:** Yes, sir.
- Rishikesh:** Sorry, I missed you.
- Girish Agarwal:** Yes, it has reached.
- Rishikesh:** Okay. Got it. And also for FY'25, what sort of revenue growth and EBITDA margin are we looking for, sir?
- Girish Agarwal:** Company doesn't give any forward-looking assumptions and projections. We have achieved 31% margin in print. And in radio, our EBITDA margin is 34%. And we are hopeful that the entire team is working towards it so that we are able to perform.
- Moderator:** Thank you. Next follow-up question is from the line of Jahnvi Dodai from Aequitas Investments. Please go ahead.
- Jahnvi Dodai:** I wanted to ask that the operating cash flow of about INR 589 crores. How are we planning to utilize it since the major investments and digital is now over?
- Girish Agarwal:** So, the company is sitting on a cash balance of INR 1,017 crores as on 31st March 2024.

This year, as you are aware, that company Board has announced a dividend of INR 13 per share with total amounts to including the earlier dividend announced for this year was INR 233 crores. And I'm sure the Board will take a more prudent call how to deploy this money going forward.

**Moderator:** Thank you. The next question is from the line of Sakshee Chhabra from Svan Investment. Please go ahead.

**Sakshee Chhabra:** Congratulations on a good set of numbers. Not able to understand that your circulation copies overall should be in higher. What should it be? Because I think you mentioned around 41 lakhs. But last year, the same number was 42.5 lakhs. So that means has there been a drop? And if so what will be the reason for that?

**Girish Agarwal:** Yes, you are right. Last year, we were at around 42 lakhs, this year around 41 lakhs. So we have lost around 1 lakh copy over one year's time. And yes, there are various reasons in this, what we've been trying to do. And so maybe some copies we have lost in the hotels and the offices which we are able to start last year and some copies in the rural market also we have lost. So this 2.5% loss in circulation. That's the target this year we have that we must grow it and take it back.

**Sakshee Chhabra:** But we've also expanded to newer regions, so are we expecting any growth in those regions?

**Girish Agarwal:** We have not expanded to any new geography in terms of physical copies. We still operate in the same geographies.

**Sakshee Chhabra:** Okay. All right. But do we plan to now expand further geographies to improve circulation?

**Girish Agarwal:** We will continue to focus on growing in our current markets, including Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Chandigarh, Bihar, and Maharashtra. We'll continue to grow here only.

**Sakshee Chhabra:** Okay. But what would be the strategy then to grow this circulation copies?

**Girish Agarwal:** See, that's a big question to go out in the market and to get more readers because people are moving into the newer market what we call the new high rises which are being built in the city where our vendors are not able to reach initially.

And because generally what happened in society, the new society, the vendors are not allowed in and use the lift to go up to deliver the copies unless until he's already registered there. So there's a whole process of security in this thing that we are trying to work out with the vendors to see how can we capture that market also.

**Sakshee Chhabra:** Okay. And my second question is on the cover price. So what has been the increase in the cover price in the entire year?

**Girish Agarwal:** So cover price, there has been hardly any increase around 2%.

**Sakshee Chhabra:** 2%. Okay. Thank you so much and all the best.

**Girish Agarwal:** Thank you very much.

**Moderator:** Ladies and gentlemen, due to time constraint, we'll close the call. I now hand the conference to the management for closing comments.

**Pawan Agarwal:** Thank you, everyone, for your participation and time on this earnings call today. I hope we have responded to your queries. We'll always be happy to be of assistance through our Investor Relations department headed by Mr. Prasoon Kumar Pandey for all your further queries. Thank you, everyone have a great evening.

**Moderator:** Thank you, members of the management. On behalf of D.B. Corp Limited, that concludes this conference. Thank you for joining us. You may now disconnect your lines.