



ZEE NEWS LIMITED

2Q FY2009 TELECONFERENCE
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Moderator: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I am Manjula, the moderator for this conference. Welcome to the Zee News Limited Conference Call. For the duration of the presentation, all participants' lines will be in the listen-only mode. After the presentation, the question and answer session will be conducted for participants connected to international bridge. After that, the question and answer session will be conducted for participants in India. I would now like to hand over the floor to Mr. Tarun Nanda. Thank you and over to you sir.

Tarun: Thank you Manjula. Good afternoon and good morning ladies and gentlemen and thank you for joining us today to discuss the results for the quarter ended September 30th, 2008, which is the second quarter for the fiscal year 2009. We do hope that you had a chance to go through the earnings release and the copy of the results, both of which are uploaded on our website, www.zeenews.com.

Since the Chairman, Mr. Subhash Chandra had to travel for some urgent official work, joining us today on behalf of Mr. Chandra is Mr. Puneet Goenka who will be reading out his speech. Along with Mr. Goenka, we have members of the senior management team of Zee News Limited including Mr. Barun Das, CEO; Mr. G. Ramprasad, CEO South; Mr. Nitin Vaidya, Head of Regional Channels and Mr. R.K. Agarwal, CFO. We will start with a brief statement from Mr. Goenka on the second quarter performance and then we will open up the discussion for questions and answers.

Before that, I would like to remind everybody that anything we say during this call that refers to our outlook for the future is a forward-looking statement that must be taken in the context of the risks that we face. With this, I now hand over to Mr. Puneet Goenka.

Puneet: Thank you Tarun. Good afternoon and good morning ladies and gentlemen and thank you for joining us today to discuss the results of the quarter ended September 30th, 2008.

In this time of a perceptible global economic slowdown and challenging macroeconomic environment during which investor confidence is certainly not at its peak, Zee News Limited has

delivered reassuring results in the second quarter of fiscal 2009. The company has recorded revenue of Rs. 1.28 billion which is a 60% increase over the corresponding quarter last year. The consolidated EBITDA stood at Rs. 212 million, up 99%. Operating profit was Rs. 178 million for this quarter as against a figure of Rs. 85 million during the corresponding period last fiscal. Advertisement revenue grew by 61% while subscription revenue recorded a growth of 56% compared to the corresponding period last fiscal.

On the business side, the much awaited Zee Tamil channel had a grand launch in Chennai on October 12th. Other designated launches this fiscal are going to be that of a 24-hour Telugu News Channel, Zee 24 Ghantalu, and a 24-hour UP news channel, Zee 24 Ghante Uttar Pradesh. The U.P. news channel would require CAPEX plus OPEX investments of approximately Rs. 200 million in its first 18 months of operations. In line with our vision of regional expansion, we may as well look for certain innovative strategic investments in the coming period. It will be worthwhile to mention here that as per our guidance, our Telugu channel, Zee Telugu, broke even in this second quarter.

Let me now summarize the results of the second quarter of financial year 2009. Advertising revenue was Rs. 1.01 billion for the quarter, recording a 61% growth as compared to the corresponding quarter last fiscal. Subscription revenue was Rs. 234 million, an increase of 56% as compared to the corresponding quarter last fiscal. Operating profit was Rs. 178 million for the second quarter ended September 30, 2008 and the consolidated EBITDA margin was 16.6%.

New businesses comprising of Zee Telugu, Zee Kannada, Zee 24 Taas and Zee Talkies have for the six months period ended September 30th, 2008, incurred an operating loss of Rs. 289 million. This includes Rs. 53 million on account of Zee Tamil channel which was launched recently and Rs. 1.7 million for Zee 24 Ghantalu, the 24-hour Telugu news channel, which is proposed to be launched in November 2008. Zee Talkies, our Marathi movie channel, has been included in Zee News Limited with effect from August 2008. The existing businesses over the same period ended September 30, 2008, have incurred an EBITDA growth of 37%.

On the expenses front, there have been no exceptional increases except for interest charges which are unavoidable considering the investment required for our new businesses. These are, however, well within our budgets.

Coming to our business performance during the quarter, the all channel share of Zee News Limited channels in the total cable and satellite universe grew to over 5% in Q2 FY 09 as compared

to 3.9% in the corresponding period last fiscal. Almost all the Zee News Limited channels experienced a growth in channel share compared to the corresponding quarter last fiscal.

Post the repositioning, our flagship channel, Zee News is getting established as the nation's trusted news channel with an increase in share.

During the second quarter, Zee Kannada and Zee Telugu increased their GRPs by 130% and 72% respectively over the corresponding period last fiscal while Zee Business and Zee 24 Taas increased their GRPs by 43% and 37% respectively. Zee Marathi maintained its numero uno position and continued to deliver strong numbers while 24 Ghanta emerged as the number one player in the genre during the quarter.

We believe that with the renewed focus on brand building, programming, and positioning, each of our channels is further going to consolidate its position and capture a much bigger share of the market. With this, I would now like Tarun to open the floor for questions.

Thank you very much. Tarun, we can now start taking questions.

Tarun: Ladies and gentlemen, we are ready for questions now, but before that I would request all participants to please limit themselves to two questions each, so that we can take as many as possible.

Moderator: Thank you very much sir. At this moment, I would like to handover the proceedings to the international moderator to conduct the Q&A for participants connected to center. After this, we will have a question and answer session for participants at India Bridge. Thank you and over to you Zyna.

International Moderator: Thank you Manjula. We will now begin the Q&A session for participants connected to the international bridge. Please press 01 to ask a question. Once again, please press 01 to ask a question. At this moment, there are no questions from international participants. I would like to handover the proceedings back to Manjula, over to you.

Moderator: Thank you very much Zyna. We will now begin the Q&A interactive session for India participants. Participants who wish to ask questions, please press *1 on your telephone keypad. On pressing *1, participants will get a chance to present their questions on a first-in-line basis. Participants are requested to use only handsets while asking a question. To ask a question, please press *1 now. First in line we have Mr. Arjun from Principal Mutual Fund, please go ahead.

- Arjun:** Good afternoon sir and congratulations on an excellent set of numbers.
- Barun:** Thank you Arjun.
- Arjun:** Sir, I had a question, in the opening remarks, you did mention Zee Talkies was transferred to Zee News, at what rate was this done?
- Barun:** See Arjun, you know that we do not share individual channel-wise information, it is being worked out and sharing this information would be against our usual process of not sharing individual information, but let me also inform you, it is a minor amount given the entire scale of business.
- Arjun:** Sure. Zee Tamil was launched extremely well while it created a lot of buzz, but on ground you see a lot of people not receiving it, do we have any time lines by when we expect the reach.
- Barun:** Can I request, Ram, our CEO South, to take this question.
- Ramprasad:** We are in talks with Sumangali Cable Vision to get the channel up in the TAM towns. We are hopeful that this should be done in a couple of weeks.
- Arjun:** Sure.
- Barun:** Let me just add there, this is usual market dynamics which we had expected anyway. It is an ongoing process. As far as the current progress is concerned, we are more than satisfied with the Tamil launch so far.
- Arjun:** Sure sir, and just a last question before I may come back later, what is the amount of debt on our books currently.
- R.K:** It is around 650 million.
- Arjun:** Thank you.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much sir. Next in line we have Mr. Ajnish Rai from Edelweiss, please go ahead.
- Ajnish:** Sir, wanted to understand the strategy behind the UP launch obviously being an election year this makes sense, so how does it add in terms of the total losses because now UP channel has come and initially we had heard that it was part of a franchisee model and secondly Zee Talkies has also come. So wanted to understand the overall losses and what kind of numbers you can expect from the UP channel.

Barun: See, I don't know from where have you heard that U.P channel was a franchisee model, it was never projected like that. The strategy behind UP launch, you have already answered, is that the state makes the maximum difference, influences election results to the maximum extent. We should be having general elections sometime early next year, so having a 24 hours news channel makes sense. Also, it will only be the second channel there, the first one being Sahara, which is doing reasonably well. In fact their U.P channel is doing better than their national channel. Therefore, it's an extremely exciting proposition for us.

The other aspect of this strategy is that now we will be having two Hindi news channels in our stable. For Zee News, we have taken a completely different stance compared to the rest of the news channels in the country. We would now be able to differentiate the content of Zee News in a much better way than we have been doing so far. From a standalone basis, UP channel also offers us extremely exciting opportunities with respect to breakeven, our expected target in breakeven is between 18 to 24 months.

And as far as our total loss guidance is concerned, the Rs. 700 million loss guidance was given taking into consideration the Tamil and Telugu news channels. We may have to revise it considering the launch of U.P news but as of now we are not revising it. Even with the U.P launch will be well within that guidance. And Zee Talkies, as I mentioned, is a small amount which would not make much difference to that figure.

Ajnish: Okay and sir coming to the repositioning of Zee News, have we seen any traction in the ad rates.

Barun: Ad rate is only one component of the advertisement revenue. We have seen traction in our overall advertisement revenue. Overall it is in the right direction and exceeding our expectations.

Ajnish: And sir my last question is on interest front, it has gone up substantially both on QoQ basis and YoY basis, so going forward in the next two quarters, should we expect Q2 kind of numbers or it might go up further.

R.K: Interest may go up further proportionately, because we have to invest in Tamil.

Barun: Given the current debt quantum, that is the interest. The investment in Tamil will grow as we go forward, but that will be well within the budget.

- Ajnish:** So sir does it mean that the coming two quarters might actually look bad although seasonality-wise the H2 is much better, but if interest rates go up and your investments go up, any chances of numbers being disappointing.
- R.K:** No, we do not foresee that.
- Barun:** We are not shying away from our guidance given and despite the rise in interest cost; our overall guidance would be maintained and adhered to.
- Ajnish:** And sir last question would be on Star Pravah, what kind of change in strategy are we planning for it?
- Barun:** Nitin, if you would like to take this question?
- Nitin:** We are well positioned to take on competition Star Pravah or any other channel for that matter. Basically, at the moment we are far ahead of competition. Zee Marathi is not only the number one Marathi channel, it is number one in the state also. It is ahead of Star, it is ahead of Zee, it is ahead of Colors, everybody. But of course we are keeping a close watch on competition from regional as well as national space.
- Ajnish:** Okay sir, thanks.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much sir. Next in line we have Shubham from Macquarie, please go ahead.
- .Shubham:** Hi, congratulations to you and the management team. Sterling set of numbers in very, very difficult circumstances. Something to look forward in today's market.
- Barun:** Thank you Shubham.
- Shubham:** I have two or three questions, one is very quickly, what really was the strong addressing growth driver of 61% year-on-year in this quarter, if you could just break it up in terms of inventory utilization improvement followed by our rate improvements and any other thing that is worth knowing here and most importantly, I clearly see the need to raise guidance of 25% year-on-year growth for fiscal 2009 and on that vane, what does fiscal 2010 look like, I mean I clearly agree that real industry will start feeling the pinch now and there will be significant de-leveraging and cut down in costs, at least in the discretionary cost to a great extent. What's your outlook for 2010, even if you do not want to give a formal guidance for it?
- Barun:** Let me break up your questions Shubham. There are two to three questions, the first one as I understood is that you want to

get behind the 61% growth which we have seen this year. It is a function of both E.R and inventory utilization and add to that, our focus on innovation in this quarter. The new businesses have seen astronomical growth over the last quarter. And the existing businesses also are experiencing an increase in ER, better inventory utilization and innovations. There is also enhanced focus on individual brands and programming.

Shubham: Just quickly, do you not see the need to up your guidance of 25% year-on-year growth for fiscal 2009, given that a lot of it may be locked in for the Diwali and October to December quarter, you know you just need absolutely marginal revenue growth for the remaining two quarters to achieve your 25% year-on-year growth guidance.

Barun: I think logically speaking we are inclined to sort of revise our guidance, but let me also tell you that nobody in the entire industry knows what is going to happen post November-December, so we would try and stick to this guidance currently. If any revision is required, the earliest we can think of is not before the next quarterly meeting.

Shubham: And outlook beyond the next one or two quarters? Going into 2010, what should we be looking forward to, whether you are seeing caution in the voices of media buyer and advertisers?

Barun: No, I will once again stick to our standard guidance that our advertisement revenue growth would outgrow the market growth rates by at least 5% to 10%, so I think that takes care of the market dynamics as well. We as a company obviously cannot go against the market dynamics but we would always try to outperform the market.

Shubham: And given your understanding as a company and yourself, what has been the worst case in growth, in any year on television over the last 20 to 25 years, if you have the data.

Barun: No, I do not have that data, but I can tell you, it was the 09/11 year.

Shubham: Which was around 5% to 6% isn't it, by market book.

Barun: I think it was worse than that, there was no growth, there was de-growth in the market.

Shubham: Okay, sure and secondly why was selling cost and other cost so high this quarter, any trends for the future.

Barun: The selling cost is linked to the revenue, so obviously with this kind of revenue growth; the selling cost will also grow.



- Shubham:** And quickly, why does depreciation always jump in 4Q every year.
- Barun:** There is no abnormality or anomaly in depreciation increase; it is a regular business process.
- Shubham:** Any worries on the balance sheet side given the focus on the markets right now, anything worth knowing, any movements you are contemplating, are you confident about your financing positions,, if there is any debt that is coming up for maturity.
- Barun:** As a company we have always focused on cost and fundamentals, so I think that is paying dividends in this economic slow down. I think we are better placed than most of the companies to withstand this slow down and come out in flying colors.
- Shubham:** My last question, the current cash balance that you have on the balance sheet, any color in it as of the latest quarter.
- R.K:** It is around 40 million.
- Shubham:** Okay, any debt coming off for maturity in the next couple of quarters
- Barun:** No.
- Shubham:** Okay, thank you all very much.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much sir. Next in line we have Mr. Balaji from Sundaram BNP Paribas, please go ahead.
- Balaji:** Just one question, I joined the call a bit late. Margins seemed to have improved on a YoY basis and also sequentially and this is despite the Tamil launch, so how has that been possible actually.
- Barun:** Last year the first quarter was exceptionally good for most of the news channels because India lost in the world cup, so lot of advertising got diverted to news channels. Usually the second quarter is better than first quarter, so that is what happened this year.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much sir. Next in line we have Ms. Yasmin from DSP Merrill Lynch. Please go ahead.
- Yasmin:** Congratulations on the good set of numbers.
- Barun:** Thank you very much.

- Yasmin:** I just had 2 questions. Firstly is Zee Talkies breaking even or making profit.
- Barun:** It is almost breaking even, insignificant losses, but once again this will be channel-wise information. As we said, the impact is very, very minimal.
- Yasmin:** Okay, I wanted to ask you if you see a segment breakup of new and old businesses. Your OPMs for existing businesses have dropped this quarter from 33 to 31. Is there any reason for that?
- Barun:** YoY there is a marginal drop in EBITDA margins for the existing businesses.
- Yasmin:** Why is that? I mean, because we have seen good traction in your revenues.
- Barun:** Firstly, our guidance was to maintain the overall EBITDA margins. Secondly, this quarter though we have garnered significant advertisement revenues, we have made certain programming and brand building investments also.
- Yasmin:** Okay, this was pertaining to which channels?
- Barun:** All the channels are part of it.
- Yasmin:** Okay and is there any element of carriage cost because of which you have seen a change in your margins.
- Barun:** No, most of our driver channels, enjoy the benefit of being driver channels, so we minimize our cash cost and even in the news domain, one of the reasons why we are amongst one or two profitable news channels in the country is that we have kept our carriage cost under control. There is no significant deviation in carriage cost of late.
- Yasmin:** Okay and when was your main channel Zee News re-launched?
- Barun:** May 8th.
- Yasmin:** Okay and my last question is on the guidance that you gave of Rs. 700 million losses for these new channels, is it till FY '09?
- Barun:** FY '09
- Yasmin:** So presently we have done around Rs. 29 crores and you are expecting this to go up to Rs. 70 crores?
- Barun:** Yes.

- Yasmin:** Excluding your new channel, UP News?
- Barun:** Yes, we might have to look at how Zee Tamil goes for couple of months and then revise the guidance but our current plan is to accommodate U.P's losses within that guidance.
- Yasmin:** Okay right. Thank you so much.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much ma'am. Next in line we have Mr. Sharad Todi from Edelweiss. Please go ahead.
- Sharad:** Hi, my questions have been answered. Thank you.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much. Next in line we have Mr. Vikas Mantri from ICICI Securities. Please go ahead.
- Vikas:** I just had a very hypothetical question, saying that we have very aggressive plans of investment, be it Tamil, UP News, or the Telugu news channel. What if three months down the line we see that things are only turning to be worse? Do we curtail our investments or continue with them in the long run?
- Barun:** If we have committed some investments we cannot curtail them to a large extent during the course of expansion, but if things turn out to be extremely bad then every plan will have to be re-worked. This is a very fundamental approach that we would adopt for our business, but if we have committed something, our endeavor would be to withstand the slow down and try and stick to our guidance and carry on with our expansion plans. But obviously the belt would be far more tightened now and will be covering every division of expansion and investments will be far more judicious.
- Vikas:** Okay. Thank you Barun, that helps. Wishing you luck.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much sir. Next in line we have Mr. Riken Gopani from Radha Madhav. Please go ahead.
- Riken:** Good afternoon sir. Congratulations for a good set of numbers. I just wanted to understand something relating to what would be the kind of divide between the local advertisers and national advertisers for you?
- Barun:** It is very difficult to work that out on our consolidated business but I can give you a ball-park figure. About 30 to 40% advertising is locally generated.
- Riken:** What kind of growth have you seen in this segment over the last half of the year?

- Barun Das:** South has grown by about 15 to 20%. Newer markets have grown much faster.
- Riken:** Okay. Do you think that the local advertising could remain or there could be a risk to even that in the current slowdown?
- Barun:** See, you cannot really classify that way. To our understanding, in this kind of a downturn, the luxury advertising gets hit but the regular consumption products still have to move from the shelf, so some bit of advertising would continue. However, people would be far more conscious. So to a large extent, the tailor made solution driven approach to advertising and sales would be the key to success in future.
- Riken:** Okay and sir, since you have seen such a strong growth in advertising if you could give some picture on which sector saw the highest growth in terms of advertising growth?
- Barun:** Sector in the sense?
- Riken:** In terms of say, is it the financial sector or the banks, I mean which sector has contributed to the maximum.
- Barun:** Sectors, which to my mind are the strongest moving, are telecom and then there are some new sectors also which have contributed to this growth, for instance DTH has been one of the biggest advertisers of late.
- Riken:** Thank you sir.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much sir. Next in line we have Mr. Hiren Dasani from Goldman Sachs. Please go ahead.
- Hiren:** Hi, I just had one question again on debt. You said 65 crores of debt right, as of September?
- Barun:** Yes.
- Hiren:** And as of March 2008 balance sheet date it was only about 12 odd crores?
- Tarun:** Yes, that is right.
- Hiren:** We have also generated EBITDA of almost about 38 crores in the first half, so I do not understand why we need to take so much of debt. Where has it gone? Even though we are talking about the overall operating losses of Rs. 70 crores for the new business, out of that we are saying that 28 crores have appended the first half, but even after that we have made EBITDA profits of 38 crores in the first half.

- Barun:** Yes.
- Tarun:** Our approach has been to be sufficiently funded. As regards the investment in new properties is concerned, we have been financing them through a mix of debt and internal accruals. In these times when it is difficult to raise fresh debt, it is always better to be well funded rather than going to the market every time you need funds.
- Hiren:** Sure. Any increase in the balance sheet side receivable days, loans and advances etc?
- Tarun:** No.
- Hiren:** Okay any temporary assistance which may have been made to other group companies.
- Barun:** No such assistance has been given.
- Hiren:** Okay, thanks a lot.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much sir. Next in line we have Mr. Nainesh from Tata Mutual Fund. Please go ahead.
- Nainesh:** Good evening sir, I just had one question. I missed on your beginning remark wherein you were talking about certain kind of strategic investments or strategic partner that you are looking at. Can you throw some light on that?
- Barun:** It is a statement you know. There are various strategic opportunities which we keep exploring to strengthen our position in various regional markets. U.P news to me is a strategic expansion considering the already existing Zee News. There are other plans which we would unfold as and when we are in a position to share with you, but basically what we mean is that innovative and strategic approach to business would continue.
- Nainesh:** Alright, you are saying that after U.P. you would have plans but for that you would probably need certain funding requirement. That would be decided at a later point of time, is that what you are saying?
- Barun:** That is right. As far as this year is concerned, our committed expansions are Zee Tamil, which has already happened, Zee Telugu News which is impending in this quarter, and Zee Uttar Pradesh.
- Nainesh:** At this point of time you are also saying that you are still not revising your loss guidance in spite of the fact that you will be launching U.P this year itself. You are saying that it would be

within Rs. 700 million but that could increase maybe one quarter down the line. Is that what you are saying?

Barun: That is not only because of U.P; one quarter down the line lot of things might change depending on how the economy will move. Our endeavor would be to protect ourselves as we have done so far, but I think there are things which are beyond any one of us in times to come.

Nainesh: Absolutely right. By when are we expected to launch the U.P channel sir?

Barun: By the end of this year.

Nainesh: End of this financial year?

Barun: Yes.

Nainesh: Alright. Thanks a lot.

Moderator: Thank you very much sir. Next in line we have Mr. Ankit Kedia from Centrum Broking. Please go ahead.

Ankit: Sir, I just wanted to know what is the market size of the U.P news channel and what are we looking at, because we have one competitor there in that market.

Barun: Yes, that is a very small market. Currently there is only one channel. I think they are doing about Rs. 150 million.

Ankit: Sir, in the south market, how much growth are we looking at, the industry growth in each of the markets is good?

Barun: Ram, would you like to take that?

Ramprasad: Yes, south market overall is growing at over 24%, however, given the excellent performance of our channels on the viewership, we are getting a larger share of the advertising revenue. And therefore, higher market share.

Ankit: Okay sir, and for the Bangla market?

Barun: Nitin, would you just brief about the Bengali market.

Nitin: Bengal television media market size has grown to Rs. 2500 million in the current financial year. With the launch of Star Jalsha and two more channels, there will be tough competition which will further help in increasing the market size.

Ankit: Okay, thank you sir.

- Moderator:** Thank you very much sir. Next in line we have Mr. Arjun from Principal Mutual Fund. Please go ahead.
- Arjun:** Mr. Vaidya just mentioned that these markets will grow would the next logical step be launching a movie channel or a local news channel in each of our regional market per se.
- Barun:** In case of regional entertainment, the expansion could be restricted in the long run because you really cannot differentiate a regional market by anything other than language. I am assuming that the culture is linked to language. So having been present in the four language differentiated markets in the North and three markets in the south. Logical expansion would be to be present in the language differentiated markets in the future as far as GEC is concerned, so Malayalam etc. But that is only a vision for the future. As far as news is concerned beyond language we have another differentiating factor which is the content, usually a local news channel would carry about 70% local content, as a thumb rule, so therefore we can afford to launch a local news channel in U.P, but it will be rather difficult to consider GEC channel for U.P because we really do not have language differentiation there. So that is how we would go about our expansion.
- Arjun:** No, I was just trying to understand would we prefer expanding in the regional language or maybe move on to English news or an English business channel in terms of priority.
- Barun:** It depends. Currently we have given outlook for another two launches which are in regional language and we have maintained that we are exploring opportunities for expansion in the English news domain, but that is at that stage only. When our plans are ready and we are in a position to share with you, we will do that at the first opportunity.
- Arjun:** Sure, thanks a lot sir.
- Moderator:** Thank you very much sir.
- Moderator:** Sure sir. Next in line we have Mr. Sukrut from ICICI group. Please go ahead.
- Sukrut:** Sir just wanted to know what is the overall plan for the launch? How many channels do we expect to launch in one year or two years down the line.
- Barun:** We do not have a number put to it. There are a lot of things which will decide the number, but to give you a general summary; we are in the domain of regional entertainment and news which is about 37% of advertisement market currently.



With Tamil and Telugu launch we would be commanding about 27% of that 37%. Our wish list would be to be present in the remaining 10% as we go forward, but we have not put a number as to how many channels we would launch next year. Our guidance is only till the end of this year.

Sukrut:

Okay, thank you so much sir.

Moderator:

Thank you very much sir. At this moment I would like to handover the floor back to Mr. Tarun Nanda for final remarks.

Tarun:

Thank you. Thank you all for joining us. We hope to have a transcript of the call very soon on our website www.zeenews.com. We look forward to speak to you again at the end of the third quarter of FY09 or even earlier on a one-on-one basis. Thank you and have a great day.
