

SPREADING 'EM OUT

His job to ensure that all shoppers in Mumbai get their soaps and detergents in time leaves him with no time to shop for his wife, reports Kiran Kabtta Somvanshi



Jitendra Haria ran up to his godown in Byculla in the wee hours of the morning on Wednesday, November 25, 2009 when a fire broke down in the Great Eastern Mill compound. The largest distributor of FMCG products in India thanks his stars that his godown was spared. However, the fire, which raged for more than 24 hours, stalled the operations at his godown for a day. Mr Haria, a man in a hurry, couldn't afford to lose even one man-day in his business. Even in the absence of electricity, he decided to resume work by renting generators for the next two days to operate the computers at his godown.

Forty-year-old Jitu bhai (as he is popularly called) comes across as a typical Gujarati tradesman with business in his blood. However, doing distribution business for the country's largest FMCG company Hindustan Unilever (HUL), has transformed him from a traditional Gujarati trader to a tech-savvy manager with lot of fire in the belly and hunger for growth.

For someone who is born and brought up in Mumbai, he knows the nooks and corners of the city like the back of his hand. After all, he services more than 3,500 retail stores right from Nariman Point in South Mumbai to Kurla and Mahim in central Mumbai. He also supplies HUL's products to nearly 50 modern trade outlets from South Mumbai to Mulund in central suburbs

to Andheri in western suburbs. From foods & beverages to soaps & toiletries manufactured by HUL, he supplies them all and ensures customers get stock as fresh as possible.

Jitu bhai's conversation is laced with words like 'target', 'performance', 'deadlines', 'customer', 'delivery' and such similar management jargon. In his case, these words are not just restricted to conversation but rather are words

DELIVERY MECHANISM

Starting with a small turnover of seven digits, his firm Mahavir Retail now contributes to 2% of HUL's turnover (over Rs 400 crore) — which itself is a very big achievement

that he lives everyday. A hard taskmaster, Jitu bhai clocks around 14 hours of work on an average - monitoring good dispatches by trucks, daily review of targets, visits to market to get the customer's pulse and overlooking the billing raised by salesmen at the end of the day.

Along with his partners, he manages a big team of people in sales, logistics, IT

and back-end - quite many of them being unskilled. The team works on zero inventory system that ensures that a wholesaler or retailer gets his order replenished by third day of placing it. Except for 52 Sundays and two more holidays in a year, this team is at work from 9am to 9pm daily. The show must go on, come what may' seems to be the unwritten code of conduct.

All this hard work over the last 15 years has paid off Jitu bhai. Starting with a small turnover of seven digits, his firm Mahavir Retail now contributes to 2% of HUL's turnover (over Rs 400 crore) — which itself is a very big achievement. Starting operations from a 3000 sq ft godown in Mazgaon for first ten years, the firm moved to a 10,000 sq ft godown in Reay Road. As the scale of operations increased further, the firm started operating from an 18,000 sq ft godown since last year. From recording inventory in physical ledgers and manually accounting the daily billing of salesmen, the firm now has computerized accounting system and has provided palm-tops to all its salesmen.

From 60 distributors catering to Mumbai city in 2000, HUL now has

only four large distributors for the city. And Jeetu bhai is proud to be one of them. He is one of the only two distributors handling distribution for HUL's modern trade business in M u m b a i .

Consistently performing better, meeting and beating targets and switching from a traditional system of working to a more technology-enabled system have helped him gain this recognition. Handling distribution business for a multi-national FMCG company gives him a much higher say and standing in the market today as compared to a distributor of any other smaller FMCG company.

All this also has its flip side. Which is that a wife who cribs that she always sees less of him and two daughters who know beforehand what will be their father's reply if they ask him to accompany them at their school or social function. The irony is that the man, who ensures that customers get their desired bar of Lux and Liril when they go to the shopkeeper, keeps his wife waiting for her list of HUL products for as much as a fortnight, since he doesn't get time to shop for her in his godown!

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