

# PROGRESSIVE GROCCER

MARCH 2012

AHEAD OF WHAT'S NEW

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INDIA EDITION

**MARKET VIEW • 16**  
**South India Consumption**

**INTERVIEW • 42**  
**Giving More**



**PROGRESSIVE INSIGHTS • 50**  
**Mom Shopper**

**FOOD • 54**  
**Healthful Snacks  
Come of Age**



**HEALTH & WELLNESS • 62**  
**Something Special**



## Customer Service

How grocers are using  
it to drive sales and  
retain customers

Page 20

# EDITOR'S NOTE

## Customer service, always

"A man without a smiling face must not open a shop" goes an ancient Chinese saying. This universal truth holds true even today as modern retailers grapple with daily challenges in meeting the increasing expectations and demands of their customers.

While each and every retailer from a kirana store to a hypermarket will agree that good customer service will drive sales, so why is this essential approach so much under scrutiny? Why is it that retailers who understand the concept of great customer service, and chalk out lengthy policies and staff training programmes, not deliver where it actually counts, that is on the shop floor? Ask an irate customer and he/she will complain about a rude or uncaring shop assistant. Why does this happen? Where is the lacunae in the company's staff training? Is it because an impersonal corporate entity has replaced the personal touch and the eagle eye of the store proprietor? Is it because customer service is being sacrificed as focus shifts to profitability, growth, and expansion plans?

"Every company's greatest assets are its customers, because without customers there is no company." This statement made by Michael LeBoeuf, an author, consultant, and former management professor at the University of New Orleans, says it all. Retailers must view their business through the eyes of their customers. What do they want and need to keep coming back to them? What more can they do for their customers? Facilities such as parking, assistance in carrying their purchases, having their complaints addressed,

are some ways to retain customers - even getting sales staff who can speak the native language of their customers.

It's only human that customers as well as salesmen want to deal with nice, pleasant, smiling people, but this does not happen always. Daily problems such as traffic, the summer heat, professional or personal problems and stress, etc, take their toll on the best of temperaments. Being affable, I would think, is everyone's responsibility, in order to ensure a smooth and pleasant business transaction.

I am reminded of a time when I was debating between two brands of a household cleaner while shopping at a supermarket. I was tempted to pick up the one that offered a freebie and a discount (a private label, of course). However, the salesperson assisting me suggested that I pick the more expensive one (a national brand) saying that I would end up being dissatisfied with the former. While I was pleased with his honesty, I wondered how his manager would weigh it. A debatable question: should an employee be loyal to the customer or to his employer? (*Your opinion on this would be welcome*).

Warned business owner and author Kate Zabriskie, "Although your customers won't love you if you give bad service, your competitors will." I'm sure no business person would want so much love coming his way!



Amitabh Taneja  
Editor-in-Chief

All feedback welcome at [editorpgindia@imagesgroup.in](mailto:editorpgindia@imagesgroup.in)

### IMAGES MULTIMEDIA PVT. LTD.

**Delhi:** S-21, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110020, India  
Ph: +91-11-40525000, Fax: +91-11-40525001,  
email: [info@imagesgroup.in](mailto:info@imagesgroup.in)

**Mumbai:** 1st Floor, Bharat Tin Works Opp. Borosil Glass Works, Off Military Road Marol Maroshi, Andheri (E), Mumbai - 400 059  
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**Kolkata:** 30-B, Anil Roy Road, Ground Floor, Kolkata - 700 029  
Ph: +91-80-41255172, 41750595/96, Fax: +91-80-41255182,  
email: [piyalioberoi@imagesgroup.in](mailto:piyalioberoi@imagesgroup.in)

**Bangalore:** 523, 7th Cross, 10th Main (Jeevanbhima Nagar Main Road), H.A.L. 3rd Stage, Bangalore - 560075  
Ph: +91-80-41255172, 41750595/96, Fax: +91-80-41255182,  
email: [suvirjaggi@imagesgroup.in](mailto:suvirjaggi@imagesgroup.in)

### Business Development Associates:

**Ludhiana:** Hemant Gupta: +91 9814019745  
**Chennai:** S. Venkataramanan: +91 9444021128

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# PROGRESSIVE GROCER



## COVER STORY

### 20 Customer Service

Retailers in India are waking up to the importance of store level profitability, increasing store efficiency, and enhancing sales through better customer experience

## FEATURES

### 16 Market View

Consumption across India's southern regions

### 38 Interview

Thomas Varghese, MD and CEO of the Aditya Birla Retail owned 'more' chain of supermarkets and hypermarkets, shares the company's business model, challenges and future plans

### 42 Interview

The 'less is more' principle followed by Indo-Italian venture Fratelli Wines is based on quality over quantity, say the promoters

### 46 Market Insight

The increasing role of private labels in retailers' long-term business strategy and marketing mix.

### 50 Progressive Insights

Capturing the lifetime value of the 'Mom Shopper'

## SUPERMARKET FRESH FOOD BUSINESS

### 54 Healthful Snacks Come of Age

How produce leaders meet the demand for fresh and healthy snacking

## SUPERMARKET NON-FOOD BUSINESS

### 56 New Kid on the Tray

Electronic cigarettes are finding their way into major grocery stores

## DEPARTMENTS

**6 Round Up:** National and International company updates

**59 Health & Wellness:** How grocery stores can help change lives and turn a profit

**62 Health & Wellness:** The market for specialty foods is set to grow in India

**64 Technology:** Smart solutions that make businesses work smarter

**67 Equipment & Design:** The evolving shopping cart

**72 What's Next:** New stores and products in the market

# Moments of Truth

Unlike the more mature retail markets in developed countries, very few retailers in India have given the required attention to customer service. However, they are now waking up to the importance of store level profitability, increasing store efficiency and enhancing sales through better customer experience

By PG Bureau



**T**he Tiger Roars— how a billion plus people consume and shop – a joint report by Boston Consulting Group and industrial body Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) says that consumer spending in the country is likely to grow nearly four times in a decade to \$3.6 tn by 2020. While this is good news for India’s modern retail industry, which has developed an enabling environment to satisfy this consumption growth, how equipped are retailers in meeting consumer demand to their complete satisfaction at the store level?

Says Devangshu Dutta, Chief Executive, Third Eyesight, “In the last decade or so, the retail experience has been upgraded significantly with the emergence of new formats and new brands being launched. However, the market and the consumer has also changed dramatically. The growth in the market is fuelled by what I call Generation-C (the C denoting ‘choice’). Gen-C was born in the 1980s and later has grown up with more choice than previous generations, whether it is in consumer products, retail brands, telephone providers, information sources or career choices. In this environment, service – better and faster – is demanded by these consumers, not merely as an expectation, but as a right.”

Comments Pragya Singh, Principal Consultant (Retail) - Technopak, “Modern retail is still in an evolving phase (<6% of total retail (US\$ 470 bn) in India). Till a few years back, a retail chain’s main focus was growth through addition of new stores. However, retailers are now waking up to the importance of store level profitability, increasing store efficiency, and enhancing sales through better customer experience. Unlike the more mature retail markets, in India very few retailers have given the required attention to customer service.”

The growth of modern retail is linked to consumer’s changing needs, attitudes and behaviour. Today, people are willing to experiment with new or different things, be it apparels, food products or grocery items. Increased awareness has also meant that consumers now seek more information, variety, product availability, better quality and hygiene, as well as customer service, with the last including speed, courteousness and efficiency, else they will check out the shop across the street.

Justifying this, Thomas Varghese, MD and CEO of the Aditya Birla Retail owned More chain of supermarkets and hypermarkets, says, “The size of the sales area may vary from large to small, but for the customer to come again and again, his or her shopping

## Customers have high expectations from modern retail since these are supposed to be ‘better and evolved’ and therefore have lower tolerance for inefficiency

experience should always be interesting, entertaining and full of great offers, and exciting merchandise to discover. As we aim to become India’s preferred retailer of choice, excellent customer service is our biggest priority and we expect customers to be treated with respect.”

“Customer service for us is all about providing shopping convenience, and ensuring a delightful experience at our stores,” declares an official at Spencer’s Retail. “Our customer service is primarily aimed at satisfying the monthly shopping needs of a modern day customer by providing a world class environment. Spencer’s is positioned as ‘Makes Fine Living Affordable’ and our customer service too is aimed to cater to the same. We are the oldest retailer in India dating back to 1863, and we have been earning consumer’s trust since then by providing them with the finest quality products at affordable prices, and in the best manner possible.”

Says an official at Future Group “At Big Bazaar, the whole idea of customer service is to prepare ourselves for the needs of

customers of 2015, which is based on a simple yet powerful thought – how to make life easier for our customers? We understand the lack of time that customers face, so we aim to understand even the minutest details of service that our customers require, and watch for even the smallest of their wishes.”

He adds, “In fact, we extend our customer service to move beyond into the realm of ‘seva’. For instance, customers can not only buy vegetables and fruits but can also get them cut as per their requirement. Our ‘Taste and Buy’ service enables customers to first try out our varieties of rice, grains, etc, by getting it cooked at our live kitchen before buying. They can pick their choice of grain, get it floured, the dough prepared, and even get chappatis made, thus saving them effort and time.”

### How to be a cut above the rest

With all things being equal, viz product range and accessibility, comfort, convenience and ambiance, how can retailers wean away customers from their competitors? Can customer service become the great differentiator?

According to Pragya Singh, it is difficult to define customer service in the retail context because customers interact with a retailer as a single entity and not with individual departments and functions of the retailer. In a way, customer service is any contact between a customer and a retailer before, during and after purchase, and is not limited to human interface. From the retailer’s perspective, it is a process aimed at enabling it to constantly and consistently meet or surpass its customers’ needs and expectations at each step – from the time of entering the store (maybe even prior to that through marketing) to the entire process and experience of buying, queuing, billing, after sales service/returns handling, loyalty programmes, and so forth. “The customer is not expecting to be ‘delighted’ by the retailer, but if a store is able to provide an unexpected reward or service, or even an exemplary level of customer experience, then the customer is unexpectedly delighted,” she says.



Customer service desk at Reliance Fresh

# Winning With Less



Indo-Italian venture Fratelli Wines launched in 2010 believes in incorporating best practices in its vineyard as well as in its winery, and follows a 'less is more' principle with a focus on quality over quantity. Their labels are already showing promise with their maiden vintage Chenin Blanc 2010 winning an award at the International Wine Challenge. Co-promoter and Director **Kapil Sekhri** and Co-owner **Alessio Secci** talk about their brand's positioning, retailing and marketing capability in the growing Indian wine industry, with **Annie Johnny**

## What sets Fratelli Wines apart from the other wine brands?

**Secci:** Five years ago, when my brother, Piero Masi, who is a wine-maker, and I decided to set up a winery in India, we travelled a lot and tasted different Indian wines present in the market. We wondered if these were the only wines that could be made in India? Were there faults in the wine making process in India that produces such quality of wines? So we visited several vineyards in India, and discovered the missing link – that the vineyards worked on the contract farming system and that their owners had no direct control over the operations. Working with such a system means that most times you do not have the varietals that you need. So we made it our policy to not source grapes from vineyards over which we have no supervision and control.

We saw that many others who were sourcing grapes through contract farming had suffered due to fluctuations in demand. Also, in contract farming, quantity is the main objective since payment is made according to volume or the weight of the crate. So the aim is to get as much weight as possible. So unscrupulous workers put water at the end of the phenological phase, which is a week before the harvesting period. Once you add water at this stage, it reduces the quality of the grapes. Once we understood the shortfalls in the wine making process in India, we decided that we would set up a project only if we were able to ensure quality. At Fratelli Wines we never compromise on quality, and we believe that this makes us unique.

**Sekhri:** What really sets us apart from the others in the business is that our whole focus has been on our vineyards. Almost 90 percent wine is made in a vineyard, so if you don't have good quality grapes, you cannot produce good wine. We have 350,000 plants directly under our control. We have 58 tanks which have been brought in from Italy. The whole structure has been designed in a way that we can crush the grapes in the shortest possible time in the industry to retain the freshness in our wine.

We are also doing a lot of experimentation in our vineyard. We are planting varietals which



 Alessio Secci, Co-owner

has never been planted and as soon as we get results we move forward with production. We do the same in our winery located in Akhuj, in the Solapur district, about 170 kms south of Pune, where we have a high-tech laboratory complete with machines brought directly from Italy. We have already introduced around 13 varieties of grapes sourced from France, and have plans to introduce new varietals in the future.

Currently, we are building on our knowledge and understanding of how the varietals are evolving in India after they are planted, and we need at least five years to fully observe and understand this. We have always tried to innovate, for example we have planted varieties like Müller-Thurgau which are very aromatic white grapes. In India, this is something which no one has done before.



## Which Indian cities are your wines retailing in? Will you be introducing more labels?

**Sekhri:** Fratelli Wines are retailing in five major markets of the country – namely Delhi, Maharashtra, Chandigarh, Rajasthan and Punjab. In April we plan to enter Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and West Bengal, and after that we would look at Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh.

India is an important wine market, and we have long-term investment plans and goals for this market. We had invested over Rs 40 crore in the company and hope to break even in 2012-13. In fact, in our first year of operations we sold over 15,000 cases of wine across 600 outlets in India.

**Secci:** In 2010 we launched three labels: Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin Blanc, and by 2011 we had a total of 10 labels, which includes Classic White, Classic Red and Chardonnay, all of which have been well received by the market at over 300 retail institutions. In 2012, we will introduce around two more labels - a dessert wine and a higher quality white wine called Chardonnay, which has been fermented in French barrels. It will be positioned at the same level as our premium wines.



 Kapil Sekhri, Co-promoter & director

# Giving More

MD and CEO of the Aditya Birla Retail owned 'more' chain of supermarkets and hypermarkets, **Thomas Varghese**, shares the company's business model, challenges and future plans with **Roshna Chandran**, during the opening of the company's new hypermarket in Bangalore, also its biggest in India



## Tell us about the new 'more' hypermarket at Bangalore.

The store measures 60,000 sq.ft. and has 25,000 SKUs. You can divide this store into 6 or 7 sections. 'Fresh', the macro-category is only one area. Fruits and vegetables comes under the larger category of 'fresh'. So you have the bakery, butchery, sea-foods, and then prepared foods. We refer to these as deli or prepared foods. Then we have staples, spices, condiments and cereals. Freshness being the major footfall driver, the more hypermarket tackles back-end logistics to provide a new section of fresh food.

There is food and non-food under FMCG. FMCG can be categorised into these 4 spaces. Food, beverages, that includes your hot beverages like tea and coffee, with non-food like skin care, etc. Then you have consumer durables and electronics, IT, digital, which is a major category. There is also apparel, footwear, general merchandise that run right across from treadmills to sports equipments, toys, plastic containers, steel containers, brooms, mops and so on and so forth. Home linen, curtains, bed linen and bath also comes under general merchandise. Roughly our ratio sales mix in hypermarkets is roughly 60% food and 40 percent non-food.

## What potential does ABRL see in Bangalore?

I think Bangalore is one of the fastest growing areas for modern retail. The complete structure of the market, whether it is in terms

of demographics or if it is in terms of the demographic patterns, the development of service industry (which is leading to huge growth of gen y consumers), the kind of per capita incomes that we are seeing particularly



At 60,000 sq.ft and 25,000 SKU's ABRL's new More hypermarket in Bangalore is the company's largest



in new income areas, population growth, (which is a mixture of inorganic as well organic growth), there is a lot of migrations and urbanisations still happening; so in my view, there is a great potential for improving the consumption of this city.

### How much has ABRL Invested?

We have invested roughly about Rs 17-18 crore in every store that we have opened. Out of which Rs 7 crore investment is on stocks. So the capital investment is about Rs 10-11 crores. All the stores come in the range of roughly 50,000 to 70,000 sq.ft. We do not open obscenely large stores and we do not open very small stores. So this is in line with the international norm for hypermarkets. There are people in this country who open a 1000 sq.ft. store and call it a hypermarket, but that is not a hypermarket. We expect roughly about a minimum of Rs 6 crore a month during 2012-2013. We are expecting that this will become one of our best flagship stores.

### What is the total number of SKUs in the food and grocery section?

We have an overall of 25,000 SKUs in the store. In the Private Label (PL) category, staples is the biggest selling, then home-care, followed by processed food. 40% of our staples are PLs and roughly 24% of our apparels are PLs in which we have brands called Blue Earth and Tru. Roughly about 9,000 SKUs in food and grocery contributing to about 15,000 sq.ft. of space. The non-food is about 13,000-14,000 SKUs and this contributes to roughly 20,000 sq. ft. of space. It takes up more space and is less productive. There is a warehouse space and the whole back-office infrastructure, which is the canteen, the office, the locker rooms for the staff, etc.

Fresh food is the footfall driver and it makes people want to shop. Our bakery is almost like a 5 star hotel bakery and that is the extent to which we invest in a store. Making a store like this is like building a factory. There is a huge back-room. There are cold rooms dedicated for vegetables, fruits, veg and non-veg frozen stuff, fresh meat and poultry. So there is a huge patternisation of packing that a customer does not see.

### Please tell us about your PLs.

We provide customers a wide choice of products under our PL. The objective is to provide quality products at attractive price points to customers. Since quality of the products is of prime importance, stringent quality norms have been set and are followed by our manufacturing partners.

## Fresh food is the footfall driver, and it makes people want to shop. Our bakery is almost like a 5-star hotel bakery, and that is the extent to which we invest in a store

We have introduced PL across multiple product categories including staples, processed food, personal care, apparel, footwear and general merchandise. Our own label food brands at more hypermarkets include Feasters, Kitchen's Promise and Best of India. In the FMCG categories, we have home and personal care brands such as Enriche, 110%, Pestex, Paradise and Germex.

Our total sale of PLs is roughly about 19-20%. We have roughly 225-250 FMCG SKUs and 100s of staple and dairy SKUs. We make our own butter, oil and have gone into many categories. We had launched shampoo, conditioners, face creams, moisturisers that were withdrawn because we think high involvement categories will not succeed in the short run. I think people are very brand conscious when it comes to high involvement categories. We have not done anything to make the sales for the PLs go higher and we hope it doesn't go lower. We had launched cooking and eating butter, curds as well as disposable diapers and glycerine soaps.

Our strategy is dedicated on the 'good, better and best', which is a Tesco strategy. 'Good' for us has more value, 'Better' for us

has more choice, and 'Best' has more select. Juice, breakfast cereals, coffee, atta, rice and a lot of home care products are as good and if not as better in some cases. These are priced 10-15 percent lower. We have been able to establish significant traction with our customers, with our products doing better than the benchmark brand in several categories. PL is as yet a small proportion of the overall FMCG space, so this will be a continuing focus area of ours to build market share with customers.

As regards local sourcing of products, what is sourced locally are snacks. If you look at the main categories of processed food, beverage, home care, personal care, there are many brands. Certain brands are categorised as regional brands as it does not sell all over the country. It is sold in pockets. Similarly certain detergents are sold geographically in Gujarat, though these products are spreading outside Gujarat, it is a Gujarat scheme.

### How efficient is More's distribution/supply system?

We have centralised warehouses which are state specific because GST has yet to come to



14,000 SKU's in non-food take up about 20,000 sq.ft space



## Something Special

**The market for specialty foods is set to grow in the coming years, and retailers are bound to see gains here - maybe more later than sooner – because the effort required is more in creating this market, and margins are average. But when the boom happens, I, for one, want to be ready, writes Pooja Kothari**

**H**ealth is the latest Indian obsession. Every grocery store, small or big, has a section on diet snacks. While Mumbai munches on nachni chips between meals, Delhi swears by its dry diet bhel and baked papris.

That's the fad part. The lasting truth is that eating healthy is not a matter of choice for an increasing number of Indians. It is a prescription. Their bodies have left them with no option but to follow a diet that excludes many of the food items they've grown up eating.

Most of us are aware that India is the diabetes capital of the world. According to the

WHO, an estimated 50.8 million Indians live with diabetes, giving us the unique honor(!) of having the world's largest diabetes population.

As if that isn't enough, it now seems that 1 in 98 North Indians is prone to gluten intolerance, as estimated by a study done by AIIMS, India's premier medical institution. This condition called Celiac Disease makes people intolerant to gluten - a protein found in wheat and other cereals from the same family, namely, oats, barley and rye. Those affected have to live on a wheat-free diet for life, to put it simply. What's more, they have to watch out for contamination of gluten in products

like chocolates and corn flakes that wouldn't necessarily use wheat as an ingredient. No more bread, burgers, pizzas, biscuits, pani puri, cakes, and so on.

Ishi Khosla, a well-known nutritionist and founder of the Celiac Society for Delhi, has been working on educating the public at large about how Celiac is acquiring "epidemic" proportions. That it is far more common now than ever before is also evident from the emergence of manufacturers of "gluten-free" products (there are at least eight of them right now) who are serving this audience of 'specialty foods.'



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