

# foodService

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*Michelin-starred  
Indian chef,  
restaurateur, food  
writer, filmmaker  
and a humanitarian*

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Is the high noon of fund raising in Food tech a thing of the past? While it may be premature to pass any hasty judgement, the feeding frenzy has slowed down considerably in recent months. Companies like Food Panda, TinyOwl, Zomato and many more, which at one time were riding the crest of a powerful business wave, are now witnessing sobering times. For instance, discovery and food ordering app Zomato has shut down its online ordering service in Lucknow, Kochi, Indore and Coimbatore, where it had ventured a few months ago.

What is interesting about this retreat is that cities like Coimbatore and Kochi are no pushovers in technology adoption. Kochi in Kerala boasts of some of the largest IT parks in the country, and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu sits on the high table of world's top global outsourcing cities. So, why did the business cookie crumble for India's top food tech brand in these putatively technology-friendly cities?

Perhaps, start-ups should rethink their go-to-market strategy. A business model that works well in bigger metros can come a cropper outside tier 1 cities. Most food tech start-ups have existed purely as an order delivery chain in the metros. Even though they have been delivering food to customers at a higher cost in the hope that they will form a habit of ordering food, the volumes have been attractive enough to make business sense for the companies in the long run.

In most tier-2 cities – even with visible tech permeability – most people still prefer to walk into an outlet first before buying online. It is therefore wiser for food tech companies to first test the waters in these places before taking the full plunge. There are examples replete where companies have had to wait out patiently and get involved in building the market before they could start counting the pennies. But then, such forbearance calls for staying power and deep pockets, which our new-age companies are mostly bereft of.

The moot thing is not to lose heart in the business potential of our smaller towns. Technology is a great enabler and a few years down the line, it will be these places that will become the magnets and hotbeds for the food tech companies. All that is needed is to keep the faith and not stop probing the waters.

Amitabh Taneja

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Vikas Khanna is an award winning, Michelin-starred Indian chef, restaurateur, food writer, filmmaker and a humanitarian. He shares with FoodService India magazine his thoughts about life, love for food, new changes in the culinary world and what to expect in 2016

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Rocketchefs is a first of its kind mobile food delivery service that makes food available immediately through its mobile food bikes and especially designed food vans

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## BIG FISH VENTURES BAGS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

Delhi-based restaurateur Umang Tewari's "Big Fish Ventures" has been awarded the Most Emerging Leader by Asia & GCC 2015 Awards under the Emerging category of "Hospitality Services". Brands and leaders from India, Singapore, Bangladesh, Malaysia, China, Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, United Arab

Emirates, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman participated in The World's Greatest Brands & Leaders 2015 at the Indo-UAE Business summit in Dubai. The 150 World's Greatest Brands & Leaders 2015 - Asia & GCC - is a research-based listing using both primary and secondary data researched across

sixteen industries and sixty two sub-categories and evaluating brands from 12 countries under Iconic, Powerful, and Emerging. The award is an initiative of the United Research Services International and AsiaOne Magazine research project with PricewaterhouseCoopers acting as the Process Reviewer.

Big Fish Ventures is about to open 10-15 more outlets by mid 2016, including big projects like OMG, 3 Pegs Down in some of the best locations of Delhi. It also plans to open outlets in the UAE, Canada, China soon.



Umang Tewari getting the award for the most enterprising restaurateur

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'Anubhav Hotel Provides' is an established hospitality supplier specialising in highest quality draperies, bedspreads, bed linen, towels, duvets and pillows. As a premier hospitality supplier since 1990, it has helped customers create memorable guest experiences and build strong relationships by offering quality products with many patterns and designs to choose from at competitive prices along with the finest service throughout the India. What makes its products unique are important factors such as durability, generous sizing, ease of laundering and ironing, and probably most importantly – excellent value for money.

Its products have been tried and tested by leading hotels in India and abroad. Among its clients are The Bristol - Gurgaon, Shakti Resort - Behror, Hotel Raj Vilas Palace - Jaipur, Hotel Durbar - Kathmandu, Hotel Marc Royal - Kathmandu and several other esteemed names.

While there are many other suppliers which offer a wide range of choice in terms of thread counts, weights, sizes etc., it is impossible to tell which are the tried and tested players and which of their products offer the best value for money, is most durable and more frequently used, etc. But Anubhav Hotel Provides has always kept its range limited and it offers hotel customers the best products available at the price they are willing to pay. This is why it only uses 400 and 300 thread count as this is the linen of choice for most hotels, 650 gm towels, pure goosedown or micro-fibre duvets and pillows, and heavyweight and lightweight robes.

For any queries regarding its products or for receiving a sample, contact by telephone on (91)- 9971750535 or by email on [anubhavhs@gmail.com](mailto:anubhavhs@gmail.com) or visit its website [www.hotelprovides.com](http://www.hotelprovides.com)

## MKN SPACECOMBI PACKS A PUNCH WITHOUT HOGGING SPACE

Many professional chefs appreciate the multifunctionality and user friendliness of a modern combi steamer. However, some of them don't have sufficient room in their kitchen or they need their combi steamers situated suitably for front cooking and at serving stations, where every centimetre counts. With the space saving SpaceCombi models, MKN offers a professional solution which is specially geared to these conditions.

The SpaceCombi is only 55 cm wide, yet still comparably equipped to larger models. The state of the art MagicPilot touch and slide operating concept with information steps and Favourites function, the automatic cleaning system WaveClean and the consumption display GreenInside are just a few examples of user-oriented features which make the SpaceCombi a high performance professional appliance. In addition, despite its slim width, it offers astounding capacity: 6 x 1/1GN in SpaceCombi Compact and 6 x 2/3 GN in SpaceCombi Junior.

Analogous to the FlexiCombi, the SpaceCombi is also available in the MagicPilot and Classic versions. So every user can decide for himself whether he wants to operate his combi steamer similarly to a smartphone using easy touch and swipe gestures or if a classical control system is preferred.





## SPECIALISTS IN COCKTAILS STATION DESIGN

Arcux Bar Zone Impex Pvt. Ltd. (ABZI) is a company that provides the best bar solutions for hotels and restaurants. Founded in 2009 by Parikshit Kakkar and Piyush Tayal, the company has successfully completed more than 100 projects in India and the subcontinent. Arcux Bar Zone is presently an exclusive distributor for brands like Perlick Corporation and Napa Technology. It has tied up with the world's best brands in bar and beverage industry and has come up with some super exclusive products that have met the demands of elite chains like Park, Hyatt, TAJ, ITC, Radisson, IBIS and many more. In addition to distributing the industry's finest brands, ABZI contributes new concepts and latest equipment to keep pace with the upcoming trend and needs in the market.

Arcux's Product of the Year is the Tobin Ellies Cocktail Station from Perlick Corporation, which is a breakthrough achievement in bar design. The product is the result of an ambitious collaboration

between six-time National Bartending Champion and celebrated bar designer Tobin Ellis and the award-winning engineering team at Perlick. The cocktail station is perfect for everything – for craft cocktail bars to high-volume nightclubs and 5-star/5-diamond hotel environments. It's the tricked-out station every serious bartender has dreamt about and every savvy operator has hoped for.

Another superb installation by Arcux is its Polo Lounge bar at Hyatt, New Delhi. An Arcux team member involved in the project describes it thus: "If we talk about the drafting part of the equipment, Hyatt used all the latest technology available at that time – from beer dispensing station to dual zone refrigeration for red and white wine. For a bartender everything was in easy approach of just three steps. All it took was three steps for a bartender to make a beautiful cocktail." Polo Lounge was honoured with the recognition of being one of the three 'Highly Recommended Bars in India' at



*Piyush Tayal and Parikshit Kakkar*

the Whisky Awards 2012. "We have been working with Arcux Bar Zone since five years now. Arcux Bar Zone is dedicated to providing innovative, quality services with variety and new modular features, which helps us in day-to-day bar tending," says Sunil Anand, Manager, Polo Lounge.

Well, now Arcux has an even more efficient cocktails station design thanks to Tobin Ellies, and it is called "Zero Step Bartending". Arcux is currently working on making India's biggest remote beer dispensing system, which is expected to debut in the market soon. ♦♦



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## “We have been successful in moving single-use customers to subscription plans”

Divya Shetty, Founder of 3SqrMeals, an online meal solutions platform, speaks to FoodService India, about how she has positioned her start-up as a busy professional's outsourced kitchen with customers having the flexibility to order meals of their choice, which can be delivered at multiple locations within Mumbai



Divya Shetty

### How was 3SqrMeals conceived and what is unique about its concept?

3SqrMeals is an online healthy meal service that aims to ease the daily chore of organising nutritious meals for working professionals. The idea was conceived during my nine years of work in the corporate world after trying every single tiffin service provider there was in the market. Most of the services available do not provide the customer any flexibility in terms of ordering. Any cancellations have to be confirmed the previous day. If the food tasted great, it did not match the health quotient and vice versa.

3SqrMeals is unique in its concept since it gives the user complete flexibility in ordering. Our customer can buy a single meal or discounted bulk plans. He/She has the choice to pick from a daily changing menu. The subscription plans are also made flexible to allow users to order only when they are certain of their schedule and will need the food. Cancellations can be made till 9 am the same day. We also take special care of the nutritional aspect of all our meals with no compromise on the variety or taste. All our meals are cooked and come in one person portions.

### Tell us about your signature recipes and how much demand do they command in the areas under your operational cover? Give us an idea of how demand has grown over time?

We offer a wide variety of International meal options like the BBQ Chicken, Lebanese Meal, Garlic (Brown) Rice with Teriyaki Satay and Yakitori vegetables. All of these meals fall under the high protein-low carb category and are extremely well appreciated by our

patrons who work out or follow a sedentary lifestyle and are looking for low calorie options.

3SqrMeals began operations in March 2015 and our deliveries have been growing at a steady pace of 50% month on month since. Our customer attrition rate from our subscription plans has been under 10%.

### Have you been successful in developing consumer stickiness for your meal solutions? How many orders are you currently serving and what is your estimate of the number of repeat consumers?

Our core focus has been the subscription plans we offer and we have been very successful in moving single-use customers to subscription plans and then retaining them on our plans. Our attrition rates average around 5-7% every month. We currently average 80-100 deliveries per day in the lunch segment. We currently provide only lunches.

### Do you also have any meal solution for kids?

We currently do not have such an offering.

### Which have been the menu innovations at 3SqrMeals and what are your plans for rolling out more such innovations?

Innovations in our menus are key to 3SqrMeals. We have been constantly innovating with a variety of cuisines and ingredients. We started with three Veg & three Non Veg Meal options daily. After a quick customer survey we are now doing seven Veg & seven Non Veg Meal options daily. Four of these seven options remain fixed for a month and the rest of the three change daily.



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We understand that variety is key to ensure customer retention and we are keenly focused on wow-ing our patrons everyday with incredible variety, quality and taste.

**What is your strategy for sourcing of the ingredients and how do you go about identifying the retailers?**

We use seasonal ingredients and having a rotational menu helps incorporate as many seasonal fruits and vegetables into our meals. All the ingredients are sourced from renowned wholesalers. Sample checks are done to ensure quality before vendor contracts are entered into. On a regular basis, quality checks are undertaken to ensure the consistency in quality.

**Which steps have you put in place to streamline your delivery and what are your plans to expand the delivery network?**

When we started in March, we were only covering Lower Parel & BKC. Currently, we deliver in Nariman Point, Churchgate, Fort, Worli, Prabhadevi, Dadar, Mahim, BKC & Bandra West. We are on track to extend this coverage to the western suburbs in Q1-2016.

We have our own delivery network. Based on the area of our coverage, we offer pre-order or on demand delivery to ensure we do not delay on any orders. Having a cut-off for orders in locations far off from our central kitchen helps schedule deliveries and avoid delays. We also supplement our delivery network with the logistics company – Roadrunnr – during high demand days to ensure deliveries are made on time.

**What is your marketing and promotions strategy for raising consumer understanding of this format and for scaling your services?**

We are an online service and actively promote our services on various social media platforms. We also do pop-up food stalls at various corporates to increase the awareness of the brand and our service. So far, word of mouth has been the most successful promotional tool for us.

**Going forward, how do you see the growth and popularity of your format and what is your understanding of the opportunities and challenges?**

The growing awareness about leading a healthy lifestyle has been very evident. However, our busy lives do not seem to help maintain a steady food pattern. A great amount of effort and discipline is required to ensure that you eat right. Our format helps busy professionals eat right with the minimal effort involved. We believe there is a huge market waiting to be tapped in the Metros.

Having said that, we also acknowledge that the Indian palate has evolved considerably in the last decade. Hence the standards have also increased. The competition is intense. With offers and deals being thrown around by every QSR, culling a market by commanding a price for quality is a slow and steady process. Delivery and logistics comes with its own set of issues. But in spite of the challenges, we strongly believe that efficient organised operations can achieve great synergies and bring scale and success. ●●

India's fast expanding food business is pulling people from different backgrounds who are trying out various models to attract customers and gain market share. But choosing the right model is a matter of horses for courses. Take Mumbai-based Vishal Shah who quit his career in investment banking in New York last year to set up meal kit delivery service Haute Chef in Mumbai. In a chat with FoodService India, he opens up on his choice of the format and its prospects in the future



## Mealkits that make cooking a fun experience



Chef Ranveer Brar with Haute Chef CEO Vishal Shah

### How was Haute Chef conceived and what is unique about its concept?

Haute Chef is a result of the convergence of several experiences I have had over the last decade or so during my life as a banker working in New York and London. Living a fast-paced lifestyle, my wife and I would often crave for a home-cooked meal which would be fresh, healthy and easy while recreating the look, taste and feel of a restaurant dish.

However, we regularly experienced frustration to cook for just the two of us and be left behind with either extra food ingredients or cooked food – both of which would go waste. Often times, we would get a box of mascarpone cheese or a bottle of sherry vinegar and didn't know what to do with the excess after using the 2 tbsp that the recipe recommended.

And that's how the thought of providing exactly-measured ingredients was conceived where one could make cooking a fun experience without having to worry about the boring legwork of recipe planning, grocery shopping and measuring ingredients. Along with neatly-labelled and pre-portioned ingredients, Haute Chef also provides step-by-step recipe cards with easy-to-follow illustrations and instructions to cook gourmet dishes from around the world in the convenience of your home kitchen without having to worry about food wastage or greasy take-out options.

The team at Haute Chef has put in significant efforts at every single aspect of our customer interaction to offer the gourmet experience mentioned earlier. A few things worth a mention are: our custom-made, food-grade boxes which come with reusable ice gel packs to keep ingredients fresh, our easy-to-follow recipe cards along with illustrations at every step, and most importantly our globally-inspired recipes which have been curated by chefs trained at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) as well as an Indian artisanal line curated by the culinary genius chef Ranveer Brar.

### Tell us about your signature recipes and how much demand do they command in the areas under your operational cover? Give us an idea of how demand has grown over time?

As we change our menu every month, it is difficult to point a single signature recipe. What we aim for is a signature ingredient in the form of homemade sauce, spice mix, ingredient combination, etc, that we try to incorporate in every recipe. Some of our bestsellers are: Arabic Fattoush Salad, Roasted Beetroot Salad with Candied Walnuts, Orange & Fennel Salad, Assorted Cheese Platter, BBQ Sliders Platter, Assorted Crostini Platter, Chicken Yakitori, Pistachio Penne Pesto, Fennel & Mascarpone Cheese Linguine, Thyme Garlic Infused Chicken, Pan-seared Basa with Grape Salsa, Korean Bibimbap, Burmese Khao Soi, Massaman Curry

with Jasmine Rice. In the newly introduced Indian artisanal line curated by chef Brar – some of our signature recipes are Rasgulla & Roti Chaat, Achari Jhinga with Tarbooz Chaat, Chicken Cafreal, Desi Ratatouille Makhani, Makai Akhrot Tikki with Shakarkand Chaat.

Demand has rapidly grown since our launch – we have a long and growing list of customers who are ordering our mealkits at least once a week.

**How many products are you currently offering in a ready-to-cook format and what are your plans to add more options?**

We typically offer 25-30 recipes every month. We will be expanding to other interesting options soon.

**Have you been successful in developing consumer stickiness for your meal solutions? How many orders are you currently serving and what is your estimate of the number of repeat consumers?**

Absolutely – as mentioned earlier, we have several customers ordering our mealkits every week. Almost 50% of our customers are repeat customers.

freshness of ingredients. While the endeavour is to create restaurant-quality meal at home, many of our innovative dishes are not available on restaurant menus as well.

Some of the innovations that we have introduced on the menu include: Wine Poached Pear Salad, Pickled Lychee & Broccoli Sandwich, Mushroom & Miso Ramen, Chermoula-spiced Burgers, Pan-



**Which have been the menu innovations at Haute Chef and what are your plans for rolling out more such innovations?**

We have been very conscious about the kinds of recipes that we introduce on our menu. Customer convenience is at the heart of whatever we plan along with a focus on impeccable taste and

seared Fish with Grape Salsa, Chocolate Chilli Fondue. All our Indian recipes curated by chef Ranveer Brar have his signature touch.

**What is your strategy for sourcing of the ingredients?**

We source our ingredients from the same set of established vendors that supply to five-star hotels and high-end restaurants.

**Which steps have you put in place to streamline your delivery and what are your plans to expand the delivery network?**

We have a hybrid model of in-house delivery as well as outsourced delivery to ensure timely delivery to our customers. We will be moving to a fully outsourced delivery function very soon.

**Do you also have any meal solution for the kids by way of offering a fast and nutritious packaged meal solution in boxes?**

We have a lot of kids' special recipes under our DIY format. We try to incorporate a lot of fresh greens and veggies without compromising on the taste and flavours to ensure that kids are getting enough nutrition. Some of our kids specials include: Gourmet Mac-n-Cheese, Three Cheese Quesadilla, Pepperoni Pizza, BBQ Sliders, Pesto Pistachio Gnocchi to name a few.

**What is your marketing and promotions strategy for raising consumer understanding of this format and for scaling your services?**

We have an active digital strategy to market our concept and services to customers. We also engage in regular cook-offs for our customers to experience cooking our meal kits. We do several alliances and corporate partnerships as well to help scale our offerings to new customers. ●●

**As we change our menu every month, it is difficult to point a single signature recipe. What we aim for is a signature ingredient in the form of homemade sauce, spice mix, ingredient combination, etc, that we try to incorporate in every recipe**

# Food exporter finds a growing market at home



**N**eo Foods is part of the \$150 million Jalan Group, which has diverse businesses: tea plantations, textile machineries, software services, engineering as well as processed vegetables and fruits. Adarsh Jalan, CEO, Neo Foods, started the company, which specialises in the processing of processed vegetables after settling down in Bengaluru 16 years ago. “I noticed that the processed food market was growing and India had several advantages. So I decided to set up a factory in 2005 geared towards exports.” The aim was to operate in the fruits and vegetables sub-segment and export gherkins, jalapenos, paprika, chips and processed vegetables to leading retail chains, distributors, food service HoReCa companies across the globe.” Today its products can be found on retail shelves across the world including Tesco, Asda, Aldi, EdeKa, Metro, Dollar General, Family Dollar, Biedronke, Woolworth, etc.

About five years ago, Neo Foods entered the domestic food service market as well. The domestic foray was initially small in scale. “About two-and-half

**With a tie-up in place covering over 10,000 farmers in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, a state of the art factory, and with support from the parent Jalan Group of companies, Neo Foods – which has been growing at more than 30 per cent per annum – expects to create a strong brand in India. Adarsh Jalan, CEO, and Shalini Jalan, Director, talk to FoodService India about the brand’s expansion to newer product categories**

by Roshna Chandran





years ago, we decided to enter the retail segment as we felt that the domestic market has changed drastically over the years, with consumers picking up gherkins and jalapeños,” says Jalan, talking of his initiative in the domestic market. The timing was bang on as a new generation of consumers, who are young, upwardly mobile and part of the urban culture of working professionals, has been gravitating toward convenience food and creating a growing market for ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook products.

Neo Foods is the second-largest and fastest growing company in its sector. A major chunk of the company’s total revenue is accounted for by supplying products to markets in Germany, UK, France and the US. Jalan accepts that the domestic business is still small for the company. But he has every intention to double the revenue over the next two years. “We will target three core segments in the market, which are QSRs, modern trade & retail, and HoReCa. A fourth segment, online retailers, is also part of the growth picture.

The growth projections are based on the changing preferences of a growing number of consumers towards ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook processed foods. “People in India have started to understand these kinds of products thanks to the multi-national chains, whether it is a Domino’s or Wendy’s. These chains are our direct users as they know how to use our products. Neo is already working with chains like Domino’s, Pizza Hut, Papa John’s, Au Bon Pain, Wendy’s, Chicago Pizza and others. Even though our products are made in India, they still belong to a niche category and their consumption calls for an evolved taste. But because of these food service brands, tastes of the people are also changing. Now we have a pan-India presence,” says Jalan.

#### How it pickles

With a 1,20,000 square feet built-up area, Neo Foods’ factory unit is situated in Tumkur, about 75 kms from Bengaluru. The unit has a state-of-the-art equipment and facilities. Apart from local conveyors, the canning, bottling and cutting machines are imported from Germany and the US. The factory is divided into two separate units so as to handle both the export and domestic production separately. The plant also meets the requirements for certification – it complies with BRC issue 6 and IFS 6 global standards by SGS. The factory has also been designed to comply with the International Food Industry Standards. Both units have independent processing and packaging lines. The capacity of the factory was ramped up in the past two years and now produces 35 million jars and cans per annum. Jalan is negotiating to purchase land to set up another factory and is increasing the acreage under contract farming. The company has also been tying up with the farmers using drip irrigation, which will increase the yield by 50 per cent per acre.

#### Pickle trends

According to Neo Foods’ Director and Head of Indian Business Shalini Jalan, “People are beginning to recognise and savour the taste of our products. With demand for our products on the rise, we decided to step into the retail segment for greater reach and accessibility of our products.” As demand for Neo Foods’ products pick up in the domestic market, items that were once 100 per cent exported – gherkins, relish, burger chips, jalapeños, red paprika, baby corn and silver skin onion – are now finding greater space on retail shop shelves in the country. “We have a good

**Neo Foods is the second-largest and fastest growing company in its sector. A major chunk of the company’s total revenue comes from supplying products to markets in Germany, UK, France and USA**





**With demand for its products picking up in the domestic market, products that were once 100 per cent exported – gherkins, sandwich stackers, burger chips, jalapeños, red paprika, baby corn and silver skin onion – are now finding greater space on retail shop shelves**

control over the farm so the quality of our products is assured. We started with pickled vegetable, which we were initially exporting and now sell in India. As business continues to grow in India, we have added and are adding more products for the Indian market,” says Shalini.

According to Jalan, the northern states of India contribute the highest in terms of QSR segment sales. On the other hand, the retail segment in the south is witnessing good growth probably due to the fact that the brand has a significant presence in those states, followed by the west, which is also contributing well.

Jalapenos and gherkins have started selling well in India. Baby corn also sells well at locations that do not have access to fresh produce. Shalini points out that the Bengaluru consumers from the expat and IT community pick more of the pickled vegetables and relishes as they have consumed these products abroad. Sampling and tasting counters have helped to promote the products. In the fastest moving range of Neo Foods’ products are the Neo Sliced Jalapeños, Neo Gherkins, Neo Hot Relish, Neo Mustard Relish and Silver Skin Onions.

#### Challenges

According to Jalan, the challenges are not at the production level but mostly on the agricultural side. “Dealing with cultivation and 10,000 farmers is not an easy task. There are risks of crop failure, which is why our cultivation is spread over Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. So if the crop in one region fails, we have a back-up,” explains Jalan.

Then there is the perception battle – fresh versus bottled or processed food products – which has to be dealt with and turned around. Consumers in India are still used to buying fresh produce even though the demand for convenience food is

gaining ground. Shalini finds that convenience has played an important role in creating a demand for Neo Foods’ products. QSRs with their international recipes and standards are playing a key role in promoting modern food products.

#### Expansion plans

Jalan is looking to expand capacity and is planning to set up a second factory unit close to Hosur Road, in Tamil Nadu, just on the outskirts of Bengaluru. “The one we have now is close to Tumkur, which is 75 kms northwest from Bengaluru. Hosur is closer to the port and easier for export. About 30 per cent of our crop comes from Tamil Nadu and the new unit will make it easy to manage. The new factory will take one year to set up.”

The tie-up with numerous farmers across three different states is a big advantage, which ensures consistency in product replenishments. Neo Foods has recently added other faster moving product ranges. It has recently introduced its paste line, which includes ginger, garlic, ginger-garlic, chilly and onion pastes as well as its fruit range i.e. fruit cocktail, pineapple slices and pineapple tits bits. Another product line - salsa dips - is slated to follow soon.

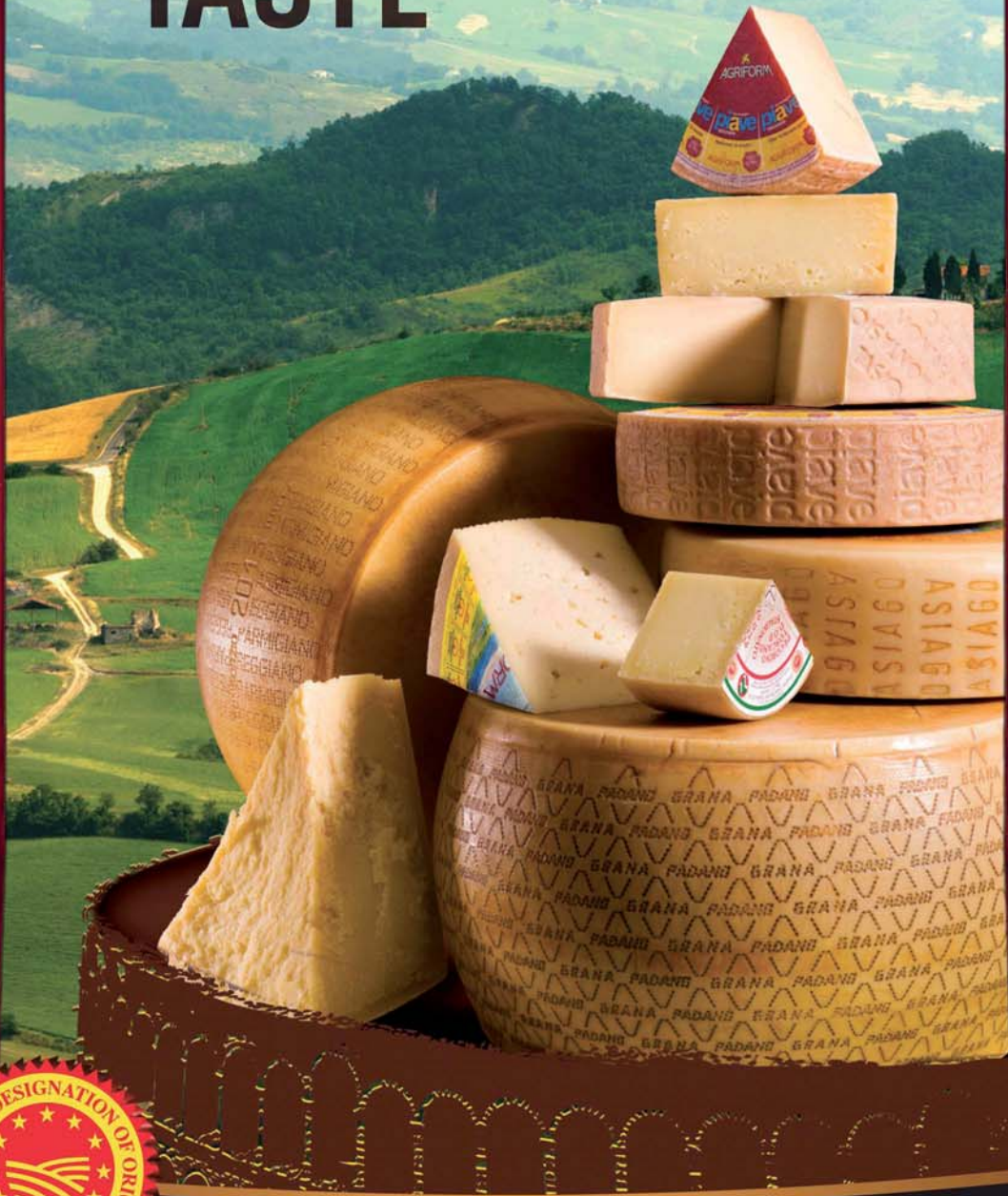
“We had met and spoken to customers regarding ginger-garlic paste and we got the feedback that they were not getting regular supply. Since we will be sourcing our own ginger and garlic, we have a great advantage,” says Shalini. “We have also spoken to many QSRs and restaurant owners and we came to know that it is not easy getting a timely and quality supply of all the vegetables. So, why not produce and supply all vegetables and fruits in processed form for easy usage? We are also supplying our products to sauce manufacturers who use it as ingredients, and this just adds to the basket. We have added red chilly paste, which is in big demand.”

As the products are new and at least some of them are relatively nouvelle, it will take some time before they are able to grab good shelf space in bigger retail outlets. Says Shalini, “We plan to approach Reliance and Big Bazaar as most people nowadays know what jalapeños and gherkins are. Most of the new retailers opening up want to have gourmet category products on their shelves.” Presently, Neo Foods supplies products to A Grade retailers such as Nature’s Basket, Nilgiris, Food Hall, Hyper City, Spar, Star Bazaar besides premium regional stores like Le Marche, Khan Market, M.K. Retail, etc. But plans are afoot to approach mass market retail players like Reliance and Big Bazaar, besides also entering the tier-2 cities. ●●





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# “I am a firm believer of slow cooking”

**Avanish Jain, Executive Chef, Crowne Plaza Today Gurgaon, shares his thoughts and views on what it takes to be a successful chef and how he is exercising his ideas and creativity to crank up the food service appeal at his hotel**



Avanish Jain

**How would you describe your culinary journey?**

Cooking was always my passion since childhood. I always used to ask my mother about different dishes and their preparation method. My passion brought me to do hotel management. After finishing my BHM, I started working in Goa, then came to Narendra Nagar near Rishikesh, went to Jaipur and from where I left to work abroad. Maldives was my first destination after which I moved to Qatar, UAE (Dubai), and have subsequently worked in the Philippines, Shanghai and Tokyo.

**What is your approach to cooking?**

Cooking is an “art and science of making healthy and tasty food”. One should always think of the health perspective of any dish and try to retain the nutritional value. That is why I am a firm believer of slow and covered cooking called “Dum Cooking”.

**Which are the dishes that you love to cook?**

I love Indian cuisine due to the varied ingredients. Apart from Indian, it is Thai and other Asian cuisines that fascinate me most. The aroma of coconut milk, fragrance of galangal, lemon grass, Vietnamese mint is hard to shake off. I believe that Asian and Indian food is the future because Asia is the emerging economy of the future.

**Tell us about the star attractions and offerings at your F&B outlets in Crowne Plaza Today Gurgaon?**

Our refurbished multi-cuisine restaurant Café G was reopened in September 2015 and has emerged as the star outlet in terms of footfall, earning revenue, and the cuisines on offer. We have added a Japanese interactive kitchen in Café G together with live tapanyaki grill as a buffet offering. We have created seating around the counter where guests can sit and speak to the Japanese chef and order whatever they want. The revamping of the 24x7 lounge and bar Connexions and Wildfire with its award winning Brazilian menu will happen soon in order to make these places more customer friendly.

**How do you ensure that food offerings at your F&B outlets remain contemporary with the times?**

Constant feedback from the guests, menu engineering and current market trends keeps

me updated about what to offer. There are times when customer themselves tell us about their requirements. We are very open to following up on such suggestions. If there is a good demand for making new changes, we embrace them in the spirit of hospitality without diluting the authenticity factor at the same time.

**Which innovative F&B ideas have implemented in the past year and/or have plans to implement in 2016?**

Keeping in mind the increasing volume of corporate business and international travelers at Crowne Plaza Today, I have created a healthy corner for breakfast where we offer seasonal fruits and vegetables, which can be eaten raw or pressed to juice. Gluten-free breads, eggless and sugerfree desserts during lunch and dinners are always part of the buffet. For 2016, I am creating a chef's corner where dehydrated products will be showcased at our signature pastry shop.

**What have you done to expand your F&B options?**

Constant upgradation of the product, introducing healthy cuisines, giving a touch of personalised services to long stayers, organising different weekend activities help us to retain our customers. Taking these steps create word of mouth publicity, which ensures that our business keeps growing.

**What do you think of the future of regional cuisines?**

For me as long as a chef keeps providing healthy, quality and authentic food, any cuisine will rock irrespective of their place of origin.

**what do you feel are the constant challenges?**

Getting trained and experienced manpower is a major concern. We hire and train people but unfortunately when the time comes to get the output, they are poached by someone else.

**What have been your major learnings as a chef?**

Organising yourself well in advance is the most important thing I have learnt as a chef. Being a mentor, coach, trainer and a marketing personnel, I have learnt to be highly patient with the team as well as with clients. Being a chef is like walking a long journey, which teaches you many different aspects of life. ●●



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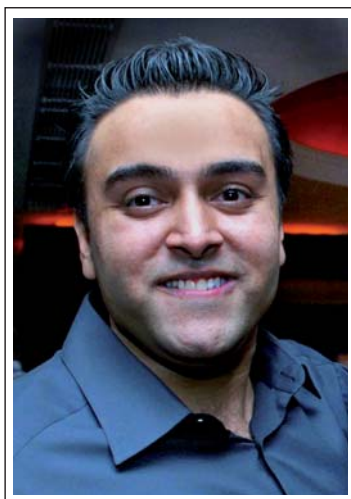
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Zorawar Kalra

**Zorawar Kalra, Founder & Managing Director, Massive Restaurants Pvt. Ltd., outlines some key culinary trends and challenges that will impact the F&B industry in the new year**

**“The challenges will be putting in place international processes like prior reservations, dress code, etc.”**

by Nivedita Pawar



**From a business perspective, what is your opinion about the year gone by?**

It was an extremely rewarding year. We are truly humbled by the overwhelming response our patrons have showered on us across the various concepts that we operate in. We not just celebrated Jiggs Kalra's contribution towards reviving, restoring, recording, reinventing and reintroducing Indian cuisine to diners from across the globe and placing it on the global map, but also launched our first ever foray into another cuisine with the launch of our new, modern Asian concept Pa Pa Ya in Mumbai. There have been many milestones that we have achieved and hope to keep the same pace going in the years to come.

**What are your expectations from 2016?**

We are going to introduce a couple of new dining concepts, thereby endeavouring to set new benchmarks and attain new heights in the global hospitality arena.

**What are your goals for 2016 and how do you plan to achieve those?**

Our vision since the inception of Massive Restaurants has been to build the world's best restaurant concepts across categories, creating

unparalleled dining experiences, and achieving near perfect guest satisfaction levels consistently. It is this vision that forms the basis of all our endeavours and has been the driving force for us.

**How do you see the challenges in 2016?**

The biggest challenge is of restaurants being able to put in place certain international processes like prior reservations, dress code, etc., which I feel we are still trying to get around. Then there is also the point of a diner's perception and expectations when it comes to dining out in India. While we have been able to bust some age old notions, in the process showcasing the robustness of various cuisines through our restaurant concepts, the guest's perception of what they expect as against what they may get is a difficult one. Lastly, quantity is not always a deciding factor about the quality of the cuisine served; as consumers we tend to think very highly of a place if there are a 100 dishes on the menu, as compared to a place which may have, say, 50-55 dishes.

**What will be the trends to look out for in 2016?**

Some key trends which seem to be catching up and I expect will become big in the coming year are:

**Tapas** - Now and going forward, the scales are shifting towards small plates and the concept of tapas style menus where diners get to experience a large array of the restaurants specialities, while not filling themselves to the brim will take precedence. Tapas style menus are a trend that many restaurants have started adopting in recent times and something that we see picking up both in the Indian as well as the international restaurant

before and is a relatively new concept in India. While the diners find the concept fascinating, there is still a lot left to explore in the concept and a long way to go for the diners to be aware about the nuances of the process, for a pure molecular gastronomy concept to work in the Indian environment. Also, there is a generic perception of the concept being unsafe, which is largely owing to the fact that diners haven't been exposed in



space. This trend is still at a very nascent stage and will take some time to gain momentum, though the process has already started.

**Use of fresh produce** - Locally sourced vegetable and fruits have become a norm and many chefs and restaurateurs have already begun their own small farms as an extension of the restaurant or away from it. The reason for this trend are multi-dimensional; while on one hand it's more cost and time effective for restaurants to develop their own produce, on the other plucking and using fresh produce in the dishes gives guests a whole new dining experience, which is more engaging.

**Molecular Gastronomy** - Molecular Gastronomy is a technique of food science, where you use certain processes like spherification, gelification, powderising, deep freezing and much more through various certified natural ingredients like maltodextrin during the process of cooking. While molecular gastronomy has been prevalent and hugely successful globally for the past few years, Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra and Farzi Café have been credited with introducing it in Indian cuisine and recently Pa Pa Ya has done so for Asian cuisine, to Indian diners, which was never done

depth to the concept of molecular gastronomy; this notion doesn't hold true in actuality. The elements used in molecular gastronomy are all natural and mostly plant extracts, which are globally accepted & certified and now being very frequently used in India as well.

**Traditional Vs Modern cuisine** - Diners globally, today, have become quite adventurous and have allowed their curiosity to get the better of them. This curiosity to try new dishes / cuisines has given space for fusion variations to come up. However the downside to it is, in the Indian context, that "traditional Indian" cuisine is getting lost or losing focus. While we may be stepping away from traditional cuisine due to globalisation, there is enough demand for authentic as well as contemporary Indian cuisine in their respective spaces. While the demand for traditional Indian fare is still equal to what it was a few years back, modern Indian cuisine is only set to take centrestage in times to come.

**Progressive cuisine** - Modern age diners are looking for out-of-the-box concepts and something that breaks the daily monotony of home dining. It is here that the concept of Progressive cuisine has stepped

**Our vision has been to build the world's best restaurant concepts across categories, creating unparalleled dining experiences, and achieving near perfect guest satisfaction levels consistently**

in to bring in a sense of surprise into the fray of dining out. Using modern culinary techniques, latest technologies and cutting-edge styles of presentation, progressive cuisine aims to showcase cuisines from around the world in a contemporary manner, bringing them to the 2020's. Don't mistake progressiveness with the earlier concept of fusion, which sadly many believe to be the same.



### Use of exotic and high quality imported ingredients

- Earlier, it was largely the domain of super luxury hotels around the world. Today, restaurateurs and chefs globally are investing in offering their patrons a similar experience, using high quality, exotic and imported ingredients not as a point to lure in the well heeled, but to add to the dining experience. They are offering a more authentic and flavourful cuisine at practically 1/3rd the cost of what one pays for a similar experience at a luxury hotel. While this has already been in process, the trend is only expected to become bigger in the coming years.

**Going Glocal** - Glocal (globally local) is the new wave. The times to come will witness use of many international ingredients in Indian dishes and many Indian spices / ingredients in international favourites, not just within the culinary boundary of India, but overseas as well. This trend is a result of diners becoming more adventurous; while there is a segment that still prefers the traditional cuisine, the newer generation is ready to experiment in order to find newer and finer flavours.

**Luxurious Dining** - Luxury is now more affordable as a result of disposable income and the availability of brilliant, luxurious (and affordable) premium fine dining restaurants outside the confines of five star hotels. This is one trend that is only set to become bigger in times to come.

**Prior Reservations** - While Mumbai believes in making prior reservations, mostly because of the traffic scenario and distance being measured in time than in kilometres, Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Chennai, among other cities, don't believe in the concept. Having said that, some diners across all these major metropolises still make prior reservations to avoid not getting or waiting for a table once they reach the venue. As an example, with our brand Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra, we have witnessed something that is unheard of in India – prior reservations with a waiting period of a fortnight, especially for weekends even after two years of the restaurant's launch. Hence, I see this becoming a norm in times to come.

**Culinary Tourism** - In the recent past we have seen many chefs of Indian origin being invited overseas to showcase Indian cuisine to the Western audiences. The same has been the case with chefs of international origin being invited in India to showcase their cuisine at specially curated events. This form of interchange, although seen in ancient times as well as effectively done by people like my father Jiggs Kalra, late Tarla Dalal and Camilia Punjabi in the 70s, 80s and 90s, is seeing a surge in the form of Culinary Tourism and is set to become bigger and an effective way of showcasing authentic cuisines from various countries to the Indian audience.

**Regional goes international** - India is a treasure-trove of and, in my opinion, the only country in the world to have so many regional cuisines. While Indian regional cuisine has been lead by Punjabi cuisine to the global audience for over five decades, I see the coming years focusing on regional Indian fare from across the landscape of India, being taken forward to the international audience not just within India, but overseas as well.

**International cuisines** – After Japanese and Teppanyaki, other international cuisines like Vietnamese, Cambodian, Mexican and Lebanese will see a surge in popularity in India in the coming years.

### Which format according to you will thrive in 2016 and why?

They all will and the reason is simple – eating out has already taken centre stage across all key cities in the world and in India. The trend is only expected to further seep in to the smaller, non-metro cities. There is enough demand for all formats to co-exist and we will witness some newer formats coming up as well, such as Smart Casual and Casual-Fine Dining. ●●



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# “Year 2016 will belong to concept restaurants”

Delhi-based restaurateur Priyank Sukhija, who operates over 23 restaurants under different names and formats, believes that experimentation and the quest to try out new things will help F&B outlets with interesting concepts to thrive and grow



Priyank Sukhija



**T**he food and beverage industry is always in a state of evolution. It is constantly looking at bringing new things – new menus, new concepts and new ambience. This evolution has helped the industry move from the more traditional concepts to more International concepts now. Apart from the evolution in the food service industry, customers are evolving too. Today, people like to experiment with new things and this offers the opportunity to come up with new and exciting restaurants.

Year 2016 will belong to concept restaurants. I say this because both customers and industry will go for more experiments in 2016. Food is the fundamental reason for people to dine out. And experimentation therefore becomes important so that your food outing can always be enjoyed and should not become monotonous.

The year gone by totally belonged to International flavours. 2016 will be the year for the industry to cater to a wider audience because exposure to international cuisines has also increased. So no prizes for guessing that as an industry we will be experimenting more with cuisine. But the thing to remember is that it is always important to have the right balance of both classic and experimental flavours. The Indian palate is about making and creating dishes that are well accepted by the masses and yet look, feel and taste international at the same time. So we are sure that in 2016, we will be bringing together Concept and Fusion but no confusion.

The ground has already been prepared for this twinning to take place. Last year's experience was a gamechanger. And I would say that it was not a gamechanger for us only but for the entire market. The year saw many international players come up as well as the emergence of a large number of domestic players as well.

We run concept-driven restaurants under the Lazeez Affaire Group, and these are places that have really nice interiors and serve multi-cuisine food and good drinks. We try to understand the market and make our strategies according to the requirements of the clientele. For example, our bar – The Project at Delhi's Hauz Khas Deer Park – embodies a youth-centric concept with its large and lush natural environs, thumping music, a good pumpkin ravioli and dishes that go down well with the youth. It is also the most pocket-friendly bar in line with the youth-centric market





that Hauz Khas village is. Similarly, our other places are built around interesting concepts: we target big events at Flying Saucer Café as it is an event-driven place. Similarly, Lord of the Drinks is a place with great cocktails and drinks menu because of its corporate acceptance.

Today, the market has evolved to the extent that the food industry has enough momentum on its own. The percentage and number of people dining out has increased substantially and this trend is likely to strengthen further in the days ahead. The prospects for the food industry appear brighter and better than at any time before.

Taking cognisance of this evolution, we run Food shows at our restaurants for the much travelled clientele that understands cuisines much better now. Unlike in the past, customers today are educated and they understand cuisine and its authenticity. This gives us the capacity and strength to experiment with concepts and keep introducing new menus.

As compared to fine dining, the current food scene is definitely more in favour of casual dining. However, food service is a very dynamic industry and it has room for all segments to grow and flourish. With offerings from all parts of world, food, drinks, ambience and events will be the four major elements that will contribute to the future success of the industry. In this respect, the Lazeez Affaire Group plans to go bigger and better on all the four dynamics. Right location, pricing, unique concept and offerings are a few things that we have in mind for 2016.

Apart from the quality of food, the concept and interiors of the place will play a pivotal role in making the place happening and popular. The furnishings, music, lights, décor – whatever you choose should make the customer comfortable

in his surroundings. We live in times when people love to flaunt and show off. The target audience of concept-driven restaurants are people who want to eat and drink in style. It's for the people who look out for ingredients and food to post on their Facebook page. So restaurants need beautiful décor and vibes to retain customers.

Going ahead, we will see more of the above mentioned sort of restaurants and lounges come up. They will seek to bring to customers variety from different parts of the world. At the same time, even customers will become more experimental in trying out newer things.

At the Lazeez Affaire Group, we have great expansion plans for 2016. We are opening four outlets in Delhi in the first quarter of the year, which will include Tamasha at Kasturba Gandhi Marg, Teddy Boy at CP, Lord of the Drinks at Flying Saucer Café and Lord of the Drinks at Rajouri Garden as well. Apart from this, we are also opening Flying Saucer in Pune, which will be our second outlet in the city. Besides, we are foraying in Mumbai with Delhi's favourite brand Lord of the Drinks. We plan to introduce more cuisines at our eateries and take events to an even bigger and larger scale.

These plans apart, I am also concentrating on growing our franchise model. We have already given the franchise of Boombox & Out of the Box. While Boombox Reloaded has already opened in Rajouri Garden in 2015, the first quarter of 2016 will see the opening of Boombox in Gurgaon, and Out of the Box in Gurgaon and Hyderabad.

With all these developments, we are sure that our annual turnover will clock about Rs. 200 crore this year. ●●

**We run concept-driven restaurants under the Lazeez Affaire Group, and these are places that have really nice interiors and serve multi-cuisine food and good drinks. We try to understand the market and make our strategies according to the requirements of the clientele**



Dharmesh Karmokar

## “Social and casual will be the buzz words in 2016”

Dharmesh Karmokar, Partner & Food & Beverage consultant at Hotel Aureole, speaks to FoodService India about the growth in the demand for good quality affordable bars and newer cuisines such as Peruvian, Bhutanese and Cambodian in the times to come

by Nivedita Jayaram Pawar

### What are your goals for 2016? How do you plan to achieve those?

I want to open two junk bars, one fine dine and a cute little cafe. These are my personal targets. Either I will purely consult or own them, but these are my clear goals. And if things work out, a sinful healthy concept – yes, it will be sinful and healthy.

Property /location is the key in this industry. Give me a good location at a good price and it will be ready. Everyday, meeting professionals from the industry makes it very interesting because we discuss our challenges and everybody is ready to help. NRAI has been a boon for hospitality professionals and we work to help each other. Things get easier to achieve when we are together.

### What will be the key challenges in 2016?

Property & FSSAI clearances. Real estate itself is going through its cyclic change and it is on a downward trend, hence it will take time for landlords to come to terms with the fact that their



**Social and casual will be the buzz words in 2016. Brands that are very active on social media and are a platform for socialising will do far better than others. Bars will spring up everywhere. The youth will drive hospitality in 2016**

### What were some of the significant milestones your company achieved in 2015?

Year 2015 was high on innovation. Our company, United Facets Hospitality, is in the business of breathing soul into hospitality brands. Social media, simplicity in the communication message and advancement in the IT methods have been the agents of bringing about change. Good clean pictures with only five words in the message go further in the complex web world. We have achieved just that. We have launched a hotel in Andheri East called Aureole Hotel and Jeon, the 24 hour eatery, at Sea Princess Hotel. A bar at Lower Parel is scheduled to open and a fine dine restaurant in BKC.

### What are your expectations from 2016?

We are looking at 2016 to be the year when the market segments will dissolve on the price front. Guests from mid- to high-segment no longer hesitate to enter a bar which is low priced, if the hospitality brand is ‘cool’. This will bring new pressure on hospitality companies. As a large chunk of the youth enter the drinking age every year, the numbers for the same are on the rise and so is the demand for bars. Open a bar and it will do well. On the food front, newer cuisines like Peruvian, Bhutanese and Cambodian will see new takers. And most interestingly, chefs will start owning restaurants and I see this trend increasing every year. In one word, divergence will rule.

properties will fetch them lower rents. And, as more and more ingredients need to come to our country, we need to get our clearances as soon as we can. Though these processes take time, we need to work on a quicker process. Training of skill sets will need huge investments from the hospitality sector. We will all have to invest in a small training classroom with quality material and videos.

### What will be the trends to look out for in 2016?

Innovative concepts spearheaded by youth and an increasing number of chef-owned outlets will rule in 2016. India may even produce our very own Tod English or Gordon Ramsay’s. 2016 will see international brands but they will need to reinvent. I see a lot more bars opening up than restaurants as the ROI on bars is fantastic. The big boys will perhaps make mistakes but the niche players will succeed and fare far better. Junk bars are here to stay and I look forward to a big push from the government for this sector.

### Which format according to you will thrive in 2016 (casual, fast casual, QSR, fine dine, etc) and why?

Social and casual will be the buzz words in 2016. Brands that are very active on social media and are a platform for socialising will do far better than others. Bars will spring up everywhere. The youth will drive hospitality in 2016. ●●

# “Noted chefs from various parts of Italy have created our menu”

**Sanjiv Puri, MD of Himanshu Resorts Pvt. Ltd., which runs the Italiano chain of restaurants in Delhi-NCR, speaks to FoodService India about his outlets' speciality in offering authentic Italian cuisine and how the business has grown over the years**

## **Tell us about Italiano and what is special about it.**

Restaurant chain Italiano, as the name suggests, is all about the most authentic Italian food. We were one of the pioneers of Italian standalone restaurants in Gurgaon when we started in 2001. Since then Italian Cuisine has caught on tremendously and is one of the favored cuisines of all age groups.

## **How has the chain grown over the years?**

We started operations in 2001 and after consolidating our position as the Best Italian Casual Dining Restaurant – HT City Eating Out Guide in Delhi and NCR – Italiano is now also open at the Cyber Hub, Cyber City, DT Mega mall, Raheja Mall, Sohna Road, Gurgaon and in the beautiful surroundings of the hills in Nainital. Italiano has been awarded as the Best Authentic Italian Casual Dining Restaurant by the Indian Achievers Podium. Our outlets are a rendezvous for inimitable Italian flavours and our offerings are every food connoisseur's delight.

## **Which are your signature offerings and which creative trends are you observing in food preparation, cuisine, presentation etc?**

At Italiano, you'll find only the most scrumptious Italian delights. Italian food goes well beyond the ubiquitous pizzas and pastas, and Italiano's menu strives to highlight this fact. Noted chefs from various parts of Italy have helped create Italiano's impeccable menu. Prepared with fresh and flavourful ingredients, every rich preparation comes with a unique twist.

Our must try dishes include the thin crust, wood-fired oven pizza such as Pollo Pollo Pollo, The Works, and the Picante. Guests can also sample the home-made pastas like the ravioli, lasagna and the cannelloni as well. Italiano complement a meal with a refreshing drink – the pomegranate and basil dream or sangria are the winning picks.

## **How would describe your approach to the foodservice business?**

We are determined to pursue our quest to constantly keep on improving our product and services and to exceed the expectations of our valued patrons.

## **Give us some examples of new concepts and innovations in food service at Italiano?**

Our chef constantly upgrades the menu with new dishes and recipes. One can check out our chef's



recommendations besides the various ongoing promotions at our outlets by visiting our Facebook page, which gives out all the latest updates on the ongoing promos.

## **Tell us about your kitchen operations and how far it has been rigged and customised to offer Italian cuisine.**

Ours is a specialised modern kitchen with special wood fired ovens, latest bakery and kitchen equipment.

## **How have you been able to ensure that the kitchen maintains food quality and consistency?**

We have a team of qualified and experienced chefs headed by a Corporate chef who ensure that standards are maintained by following SOP and conducting periodic trainings.

## **Technology is becoming the new buzz word in the restaurant business. How are you leveraging technology to streamline and expand your infrastructure bandwidth?**

We have been upgrading with time and keep adding any new technology related to our business. We have presence on all the prominent food portals, have an online ordering app on our web site and we use the latest POS and CRM software.

## **What are your growth and expansion plans for Italiano?**

Italiano is looking to expand operations by opening more outlets in Delhi-NCR and has plans to go pan-India very soon. ●●



Sanjiv Puri

## “Classical cuisines will take on a modern avatar”

Hitesh Keswani, Director of Silver Beach Hospitality & Entertainment Pvt Ltd., which runs six successful restaurants – Nom Nom, Silver Beach Café, Copa, Jantar Mantar, The Treesome Café and Radio Bar – sees classical Indian cuisines and Greek and Mediterranean food growing in popularity and the trend of full food menus at bars becoming more pronounced in the days ahead

by Nivedita Jayaram Pawar



Hitesh Keswani



### Business-wise, how was the year 2015 for you?

2015 has been a great year and sales have gone up by 15 per cent. My greatest achievement this year was catering to over 1,00,000 new customers through all the brands put together. I want to thank every one of them.

### What are your expectations from 2016?

The year 2016 will see a lot of young entrepreneurs and start-ups take over the market and create new jobs and new earnings. So it will be great for us to get lots of new people to serve and have as new customers. As the food markets keep evolving and palates go diverse, I see classical cuisines undergoing a modern avatar such as modern Greek / progressive Mediterranean food, etc. Last year we saw a warm welcome to food in bars. I do foresee that trend continuing as well.

### How do you plan to achieve your goals this year?

We plan to open five new outlets in 2016. Most of them are already underway. I will reveal more details in the coming months.

### What will be the key challenges in the months ahead?

The hospitality industry is evolving rapidly with changing consumer needs and behaviours. The consumers are not only expecting good service but they are also increasingly drawn to products derived from ethical, safe and clean manufacturing. The biggest challenge in this sector is cost control - making math make sense and balancing the books!

### What will be the trends to look out for?

Evolution of concepts, modern Indian food, full food menus at bars, locally sourced meat and seafood, new cuts of meat, house made artisan ice creams and healthy kids meal will be some of the trends to look out for in 2016.

### Which format according to you will thrive in 2016 (casual, fast casual, QSR, fine dine, etc) and why?

Fast casual will thrive but a lot depends on the location. ●●

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“We aim to be the best bar not only in India, but in Asia eventually”

*Chef Sujan*

When Chef Sujan S partnered with the well known restaurateur AD Singh, he came up with Ek Bar in September 2015 – a Indian cocktail bar concept with a twist. The concept is rooted in storytelling and takes inspiration from Indian myths and legends. Chef Sujan talks about the concept of this bar in detail, and how Ek Bar would continue to evolve in 2016

by Suchitra



**Tell us how did you and AD Singh come together for this bar venture and what is it that you have set out to achieve?**

Both of us always wanted to do an Indian bar concept. Ek Bar is the new Indian cocktail bar, which is developed around our own stories. When people are in a bar environment they tend to experiment more with their food choices as well. Looking at that, we are focussed on the bar experience while offering quality food.

**What is the thinking that has gone into the creation of Ek Bar?**

All over the world, bars are now coming out really big. It is no longer just about restaurants anymore. For example, the bars in Singapore and London are already raising bar standards, and Ek Bar is our contribution to the world. We eventually ended up with an Indian story; Indian cocktails and Indian design elements all coming together.

Ek Bar pays homage to the art of storytelling. It promises many possibilities along the lines of

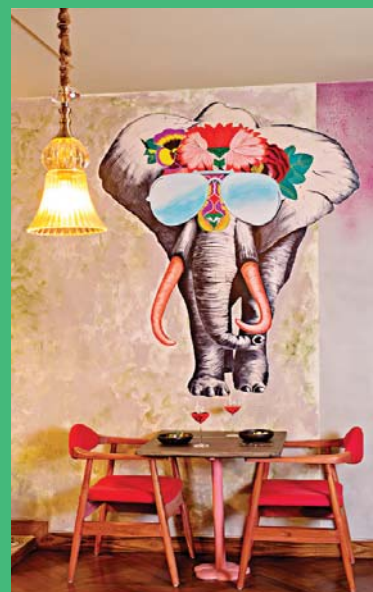
‘once upon a time’ – a phrase (translated literally from Hindi ‘ek bar’) that signals the beginning of a journey into our imagination and guided by the words of the teller.

Here, as Olive Goup’s partner in this venture, I bring forth a menu with small plates for those looking to sit back and relax on tables with friends and family.

**When thinking of food, where would you place Ek Bar in terms of its F&B offerings? What are the unique characteristics of the food vis-à-vis any other bar?**

It took me a few months to create the dishes and cocktails that are on the menu. Each and every item on the menu is Indian and it has a story to tell. Each cocktail comes up with non traditional ingredients such as fermented kahwa, star fruit juice, honey water, mangoginger, katori-shaped ice making star appearances and such others.

The food menu, too, comes laden with dishes such as mango and melon-infused goat cheese; chicken tikka or prawn sausages; Kashmiri cheese (kalari)



pakoda; crab and fresh Bombay Duck fritters; Scotch eggs with Goan chorizo sausages; the masala taftan served with a jar of chicken liver and bheja pate. The food here is created with modern techniques but with known Indian flavours that amalgamate.

**How have you captured the essence of bar experience through your food and beverage offerings?**

Ek Bar serves a modern menu, inspired by regional Indian cuisine. Reimagining the ancient story telling tradition and taking cue from ancient Indian mood points, we cut to the present. Indians love chicken tikkas, bhajia/pakodas, papads, chutneys and rotis, but don't necessarily partake them in the same avatar any more. And that is where Ek Bar food makes a mark.

Here, memories are revisited and the whiff of Indian kitchen takes the shape of modern thalis – think veg platters and non-veg platters in unique avatars. Rotis turn into chips, and dips are served with them.

**Ek Bar is planned to be light, non traditional, surrounded with facets communicated in illustrative and imaginative ways. What makes you think that this concept will stick with the audience?**

Ek Bar is a beautiful modern Indian cocktail bar which carries a sense of storytelling gleaned from Indian myths and legends. The nostalgia begins as soon as you walk into Ek Bar with modern traditional elements in design such as old theatre backdrops adorning the ceiling; the elephant in the room welcomes you in the India style, albeit sporting a pair of blue aviators. There is a signature selection of 12 cocktails presented on playing cards deck — Ekka, Badshah, Begum, Ghulam, which are all hand crafted. Homemade bitters, fresh juices and the homemade shrubs bring out the best in Ek Bar cocktails. No pre-packed ingredients are used. Fresh and seasonal ingredients are the core of the cocktails at Ek Bar.

The food menu brings forth bar recommendations and a small plate food menu for those looking to sit back and relax on tables with friends and family.

**How do you differentiate the offerings and turn them into a niche proposition for customers?**

The food, drinks and ambiance, altogether, celebrate the story in each one of us, experienced once upon a time. Ek Bar is an organic concept Indian bar which is unique and not copied from the West.

The audience is fairly mature, who understand cocktails and are aware of the new drinking concepts. Ek Bar is an Indian cocktail bar, and has various stories to share behind every cocktail. Here every cocktail has a story. All our cocktails are inspired from within the city, and our target audience is the one who wants to try out new things and formats.

**Ek Bar concept has been approached in a fresh way. What is so intrinsic to that freshness?**

We, at Ek Bar, use fresh and seasonal ingredients in our cocktails and food. Almost everything is prepared in-house. We will bring more stories through our food and drinks in 2016 where customers will enjoy quality offerings made with fresh and unique Indian ingredients.

**What is your target for this F&B outlet for 2016? How do you wish to achieve them? In your scope of work, which are the different areas you have focussed on while planning for the entire 2016?**

I wanted to create an Indian cocktail bar of an international standard. The first ingredient to achieve this is my team. I want to focus on building a team of passionate and talented bartenders and chefs who will raise the bar of Ek Bar. To achieve that we have to maintain consistency, train people and build a good team. We also aim not only to be the best bar in India, but eventually be the best bar in Asia.

**In 2016, what are going to be the distinguishing factors for the success of this outlet?**

We don't copy. We create and that is the distinguishing factor of Ek Bar and we will continue to carry out the innovative approach in the coming days. To add on, there is a lot of concentration

**It took me a few months to create the dishes and cocktails that are on the menu. Each and every item on the menu is Indian and it has a story to tell. Each cocktail comes up with non traditional ingredients**



**At Ek Bar, we take this sentiment forward with concept cocktails, which reflect a seasonal Indian flavour, stylised and crafted by our mixologist Nitin Tewari, who is the storyteller behind our cocktails. At Ek Bar, a tale is told with every cocktail**

on more R&D, new ingredients which we can be infused into cocktails, changing the drinking culture as we are offering concept cocktails and having professionals behind our bar who can challenge any world class bar with all of the above stated facts.

**How do you view the changing trends in F&B and which would rule the bars in India?**

I believe, ‘gastro bars’ and ‘fun and molecular bars’ (where more emphasis is on fun elements and gimmick) would become popular in the coming times in India. Like I mentioned earlier, Ek Bar is the only Indian cocktail bar, where we serve concept cocktails and not just classic cocktails. There are Indian ingredients which people know of, which would not be known to many, and we infuse all those different flavours in our cocktails.

The good news is people are slowly accepting a unique change such as this, which have been discussed above.

**What defines an Indian bar? How did you establish those characteristics in Ek Bar?**

The cocktail craft is slowly taking form with an increased number of bars around the country focussing on high quality cocktails made with passion. All that you want from a cocktail is a harmonious balance of ingredients and integrity of the right flavours.

At Ek Bar, we are taking this sentiment forward with concept cocktails, which reflect a seasonal Indian flavour, stylised and crafted by our mixologist Nitin Tewari, who is the storyteller behind our cocktails. At Ek Bar, a tale is told with every cocktail. Each set of Ekka, Badshah, Begum and Ghulam feature three delicious cocktails with many flavours, colours and textures of India that come alive as the story unfolds, as you discover the unusual ingredients of fermented kahwa, star anise, spice mix, kokum, amruk and more.

**How do you assess the market mood and consumer sentiment for any new products to be introduced?**

Your restaurant may serve the most delicious food or provide the best table service in your area but if you do not know the strengths / weaknesses of your business and industry, you might suffer.

This could be like looking for opportunities, which help your restaurant to increase the profits, such as expanding and providing different types of food and beverages. Taking advantage of the trends related to eating healthier may mean featuring more organic dishes or salads on your menu. It is important to find the ways to generate more traffic during slow times, such as in the afternoon. Selling some of your restaurant products, such as salad dressings or baked goods, for people to buy and take home represents an opportunity. Offering delivery services and take-out or setting up a drive-through to meet the needs of people on the go represents another potential opportunity.

**Tell us about the varieties of cocktail drinks offered in the bar?**

I would give the answer with three examples.

‘**Ekka**’ card, for example, serves up Ek Bar’s take on classic cocktails with Old Delhi flavours. In ‘Murabba Mule’, the key condiment trail leads to its genesis from the bartender’s moms’ recipe for Murabba, spiked up with robust homemade ginger beer and vodka.

The ‘**Badshah**’ selection brings forth delights such as ‘The Royal Indian Punch’, a heady concoction of fermented and chilled kahwa, whiskey, grapefruit and star anise, served in a tea pot and poured into vintage tea cups — a stellar illustration of the imagination of Ek Bar and its vision for a new Indian bar. It captures the community drinking culture of India. The story behind the punch goes thus: Punch comes from the Sanskrit word (pronounced as is), which means five and was first made in India in the 16th century using five ingredients: alcohol, sugar, lemon, water, and tea or spices. When the British came to India, they enjoyed the drink and took it to their homeland where it became popular and then, globally.

**Begum** drinks are all dedicated to women of the world, especially the Milk Maid which is Ek Bar’s take on the Milk Punch. The first thing a baby tastes in the world is milk. The drink features Badam milk combined with dark rum and cacao nibs. It is also a salute to the mother who is like a queen.

**In the last two years, what has been the most interesting development you have observed in F&B in India? At present, which factors are driving the demand of the F&B industry?**

The rise of quality standalone restaurant and bars is definitely a noticeable change in the F&B space. Lots of Indian F&B professionals are coming back to the soil after gaining international exposure and experience, and are opening new ventures. Also, people are ready to experiment and are identifying the use of more and more local, seasonal and fresh ingredients, which is definitely a gain for the food service industry. ●●



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# Casual Dining

## is booming and the segment is poised to grow at a scorching pace

Rohit Malhotra, Head of Operations, Barcelos India, outlines his vision for the booming casual dining segment in the country and his plans to make Barcelos India an established player in this space



Rohit Malhotra



India is a growing market where consumer preference keeps changing. It is the reason why demand for various cuisines and styles of food keeps pushing, leading to the current boom in food service. The largest contributors to the boom in the food service space have been casual dining and fine dining restaurant. Apart from the ever growing fine dining market in India the QSR and casual dining space is also a major market segment now.

While fine dining restaurants have started showing an interest in entering the Indian market, it is the global fast food brands that have upped the ante on Indian markets and are expanding aggressively. More international QSRs have established their footholds in the major cities and are now expanding into smaller cities with smaller formats. To withstand the competition, most of the players are customising their menu in terms

of flavours, pricing and services to meet Indian consumers' inclinations.

However, across the world, the QSR market is slowing down because people now prefer to go for healthy food. People of India are now more educated about hygiene and healthy foods. The consumer is more aware about the nutritive value of a product, before purchasing it. Nowadays, the gen-next is much more aware of the brands than before and is more focused on the health and fitness aspects.

This evolving consumer behaviour has spurred the trend for casual dining. Customer trends are also gradually moving from the fine dine to a more casual dining culture. The segment is at a booming stage with 60%-80% growth per annum. Barcelos, as a casual-dining healthy eatery, presents a great option for the health-conscious Indian youth, to look at healthy and nutritious food, saturated fats

# The Legend of Barcelos

The idealisation of the Barcelos Rooster derived from a legend concerning a galego who was sentenced to hang despite his protests of innocence. In a last-minute appeal to the judge, who was having dinner at the time, the condemned man made a bold statement: If his claim of innocence was true, the roasted rooster, resting on the judge's plate would get up and crow. Suddenly, a glorious scarlet-plumed cockerel rose from the plate, crowing loud and long. The man was acquitted, of course!



like oils and butter, with virtually no adverse effect on taste.

Many research reports have also revealed that even at times of financial distress people will not stop eating and the F&B industry will be constantly growing. Factors like value for money, quality service and experimentation in cuisines have become the core competence for any restaurant in the industry.

Indian consumers are increasingly dining out, particularly in urban areas. About 50 per cent of India's population eats out at least once in every three months and eight times in a month in bustling metros as compared to the US (14 times), Brazil (11 times), Thailand (10 times) and China (9 times). Urbanisation, changing lifestyle and food preferences are giving impetus to the F&B industry. The other key driver for the growth in the F&B sector is the rising number of working women and eating-out options.

Barcelos, with its roots in culture, tradition and history, is a household name for its flame grilled menu with peri peri sauces. Historically the seat of the Braganzas, who ruled as the monarchs of Portugal from 17th to early 20th century, Barcelos makes a fair point of being an authentic Portuguese offering, albeit laced with the dark and mysterious flavors of the African continent. The casual dining specialist has introduced a well-researched specialty menu in authentic Portuguese flavors catering to a predominantly vegetarian segment which covers about 40% of incoming footfalls. The Indian palate has traditionally gravitated towards more chilly and spicy flavors and the Barcelos flame-grilled, peri-peri offering brings out the 'best-in-class' spicy fare that naturally tickles the Indian taste buds.

In 2016, Barcelos is looking forward to open two new outlets in the opening month of January itself. Both the new outlets will run on two different concepts. Also, we will be launching our new menu



focusing on the blend of entertainment with food & beverages. Since the opening of our first store, we have spent time on understanding our customers, working on the menu and finding the right locations to open our outlets. By fiscal 2017, we plan to open about 10 more outlets.

Although we opened our debut restaurant in India in 2015, I believe that 2016 will be a more crucial year for us as we will be opening new projects with new concepts. Barcelos has created its own unique following by introducing to the discerning Indian foodie their own brand of innovation. We have revolutionised the concept of the 'burger' in India by presenting it in different colours. And now, for the new projects, we are making new changes and bringing on new innovations. As the food industry is at a booming stage right now, I believe it will have a knock on effect on casual dining restaurants.

In terms of our expansion plans, we are targeting all major metropolitan cities for the next three to four years. For the phase one of our expansion in 2016, we are targeting Delhi-NCR, Kochi, Chennai, Mumbai, Jaipur, Pune, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Goa and Kolkata. I hope to establish our brand identity in these cities first before moving on to our second phase of expansion in the coming years. ••

Customer trends are also gradually moving from the fine dine to a more casual dining culture. The segment is at a booming stage with 60%-80% growth per annum. Barcelos, as a casual-dining healthy eatery, presents a great option for the health-conscious Indian youth, to look at healthy and nutritious food, sans saturated fats like oils and butter, with virtually no adverse effect on taste

# “QSR business to grow 2-3 times in the next five years”



Sanjeev Pant

**Sanjeev Pant, Senior Vice President, CP Foods, articulates his thoughts and views about the future prospects of the food services market in India and why he thinks that fast casual dining will emerge as the red-hot growth segment for the F&B industry**



**T**he fast food industry is witnessing an unprecedented growth, making the food services market one of the most promising business sectors not only in India but across the world. The QSR business has grown over the last decade and is a key segment in Indian food service industry. This industry is expected to grow two to three-fold from Rs. 10,000 crore currently to Rs. 25,000 crore over the next five years. Globalisation, higher disposal income, lifestyle shifts, higher proportion of youngsters in the population and changes in consumer behaviour are leading to experimentation and adoption of new food habits.

The advent of foreign QSRs and access to world class food and services at an affordable price has changed the market dynamics favourably. The popularity and wider spread of the F&B sector has amplified the opportunities for entrepreneurs. One of the fastest growing concepts in the restaurant industry over the last few years has been the ‘fast casual restaurant’. In this concept, consumers get to taste great tasting food at affordable price points while on the go. This segment is expected to keep growing in 2016 and beyond due to the busy lifestyle of urban consumers.

In 2016, fast food industry will witness operational efficiency, growth in delivery-focused formats and services, social marketing, increasing importance of sides and desserts within the menu mix. Besides, consumers’ in-store experience will improve further, which will be prompted by e-commerce, home delivery and social media.

In the past five years, technology has taken an advanced role and there has been a lot of advancement in the mobile app players. Right from ordering flight tickets, booking cabs, ordering consumer goods to ordering groceries home, apps are now widely being used by consumers, especially in the Indian metros. This trend in the food sector

has led to an era of ‘Urbanisation’ of food. Unlike many other earlier channels – which were inherently aggregators – the new apps actually deliver the food to your table in less than 30 minutes with a lot of unique elements. Customers are now more demanding than ever, and their expectations of the in-store experience are higher than ever before. Using technology in the shops to meet the ever-increasing demands of tech-savvy shoppers is a major challenge. It has therefore become necessary for the brand to be present across all customer touch points – whether it is web, mobile, online partner channels, retail, supermarkets, kiosks, airports, tech parks and other retail touch points.

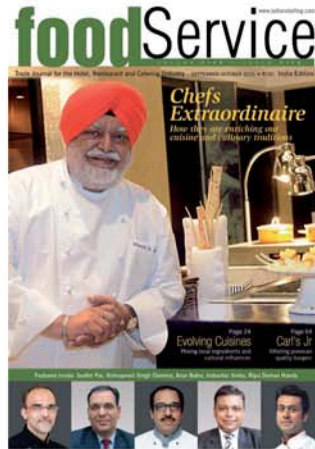
Foodservice operators are beginning to see penetration not just in the metros but also in the smaller cities and towns. With the availability of proper infrastructure, logistics, increase in disposable income of people, and the growth of the influencers through media and internet, people’s tastes have evolved and demands have increased. Tier I and II cities are emerging as attractive markets and offer immense potential for retailers to expand. However, logistics and distributed proper real estate availability remain a challenge.

Today, consumers have become diverse in choices and dynamic in nature. At the same time, they are more aware and expect higher standards for food safety than before. They expect food to meet their nutritional needs and to be produced ethically respecting the environment, animal health and welfare. Foodservice operators continue to focus and innovate by exceeding the expectations and demands of their vibrant consumers. To sum up, the fast food industry will continue to grow at faster pace due to globalisation and the lifestyle shift within the urban population. Brands that offer greater food safety, social responsibility, suitable taste & variety, at affordable price points will better connect with these consumers. ●●

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The publication combines international concepts with indigenous expertise to offer food for thought for the top executives and decision makers of the Indian foodservice business.

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Is something  
**wrong** with

**food tech  
startups?**

**A pure delivery model is a no-no because value-add is not great. As an investor, I would be inclined to invest my money in a food-tech startup that connects restaurants and consumers, enables discovery and has a rational costing model for the home delivery part of the business.**

by Anil Joshi

**V**enture capitalists are always on a lookout for the next big idea. After placing their bets in e-commerce sector in India, the next sector that excited them was food-tech startups. As investors opened their pursestrings for such startups, more and more entrepreneurs launched food companies or QSR businesses. As an early stage VC firm, we are also keen to invest in a food-tech startup but we haven't yet come across a company, which has a differentiation, and can disrupt the space or create a niche in the space. Presently, food-tech companies have developed their business model around service component, which is not so commercially viable. Their whole objective is to serve the customer without considering the unit economics. The reason that many food-tech companies like Food Panda and TinyOwl, in spite of growth, saw turbulence is because of high serving cost for the kind of service being rendered. This was mainly because of lower margins and higher operational cost coupled with high customer acquisition cost in a bid to acquire market share.

**Home delivery model**

Delivery cost is a big component in order to make the home delivery model work. And it doesn't come cheap. Companies have been delivering food to customers at a higher cost in the hope that they will form a habit of ordering food, and volumes will eventually make enough business sense for them in the long run. However, this premise has not proved right and has gone against food-tech startups. They started out as tech companies and transformed into a marketing model, which has different costs associated. Examples are for everyone to see. Localbanya, a mobile app and an online tech enabled grocery company, in spite of having a large customer base, had to shut down because of higher operational cost.

Another problem area is that today nobody is talking about unique product offering coupled with consistent quality/taste and variety, which would bring stickiness. Most of the startups, which got funded, focused more on acquiring customers than working on preparing menu, which could have offered better variety food. If you see the menu options available, there is hardly any fusion food or even new food items being thought about. That's because everyone is so focused on the packaging and delivery part of the business. Entrepreneurs have to realise that more food variety options and innovation in food offering will drive sales more with stickiness than fancy packaging.

**Internet-first restaurants**

Another popular model in the food-tech space is Internet-first restaurants. They need to bring more variety in their menus otherwise overtime customers will get bored and won't come back for a repeat order. They also need to come up with a formula where they can achieve positive unit economics for every item that they are delivering or at least achieve positive average unit economics. Unless they show a consistently growing revenue cycle, investors won't show the money. Another factor that has hurt Internet-first restaurants is that the space got too crowded too fast. Thus, they didn't get a chance to

build food habits or even a loyal customer base. A customer is now constantly ordering from various sites wherever the discount is highest. This was also because the habits were built mainly on a discount model than building a business on creating a niche or solving a real problem. Most of the customers came because they were getting a discount and before business could be built on sustainable basis companies ran out of money, resulting in the closure of business or truncating operations.

**Operational efficiency**

For food-tech startups to survive, operational efficiency at every step of the way is important. The kitchen, where they prepare their food, requires maximum investment in terms of equipment, ingredients, chefs and other related infrastructure. And on top of that there is the high real estate cost too to be factored in.

Omni-channel platforms may not work as every customer has a limitation over the number of apps a phone can download and support. One can't expect them to download the apps of every food-tech startup that is getting launched in the country.

**Explore other revenue generation models**

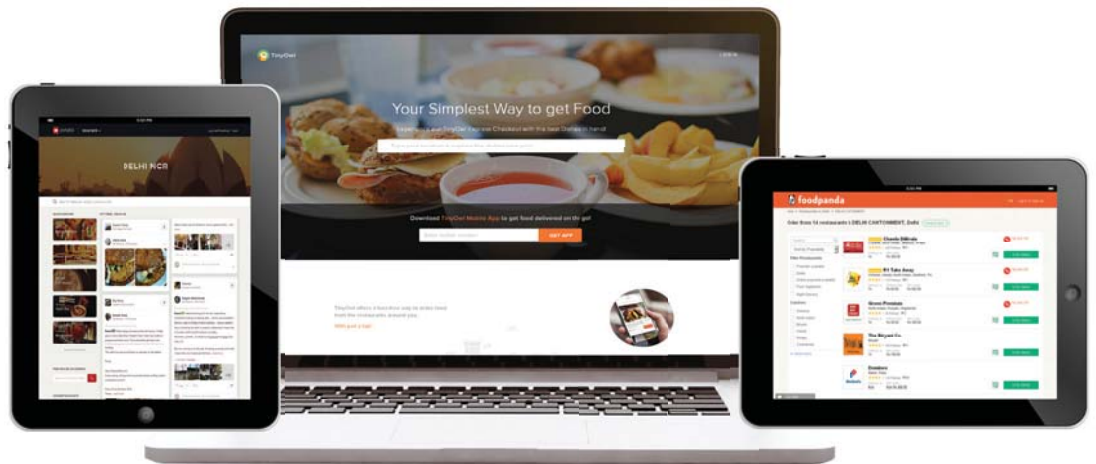
Focus on revenues is important if you are in this business for the long haul. Cut down on expenses that don't need to be there. For example, tie-ups with restaurant across a city's various suburbs to use their kitchen for preparing your daily order will cut down your cost of preparing a meal substantially. Spread out to the whole city with such partnerships. It will give you a larger footprint, ability to serve customers faster, control your cost and thus generate revenues once you have a critical mass of customers.

Only restaurant listing as a business model is a risky proposition specially now when we already have players like Zomato who started out as a listing marketplace years ago. Even they have diversified, so there is no reason for you to start your journey from the beginning of the curve.

**Omni-channel platforms may not work as every customer has a limitation over the number of apps a phone can download and support. One can't expect them to download the apps of every food-tech startup that is getting launched in the country**



If you are a food-tech startup looking to raise funds, then make sure your business is scalable and sustainable, unit economics should work in your favour, and you should focus on revenue generation



Deep discounting model will not work. Faasos' survival amidst this turbulence is a proof of that. The reason Faasos is seeing good traction in their business is because to some extent they have been able to control their costs. They have their own menu, cook their own food and deliver it. Tie-ups with players like Food Panda, Zomato, TinyOwl work as support for getting additional business to the company. They are marketing heavily to drive their app's downloads.

Box8, another fast-growing food-tech startup, launched with a new concept to fit the entire meal in a box, making it convenient for the customer to eat anywhere – be it at office or on the move. They have also control on their menu and food quality, which has resulted in customers liking their food.

One of the older players, Goli Vada Pav, which has been around longer than any of the food startups, has grown to a pan-India presence gradually. The company services its outlets through a centralised kitchen, uses technology at the back-end, has a franchise-led model that has helped them keep real estate costs under check and they have achieved unit economics. That's the reason companies like Goli are growing faster than their peers and will continue to grow.

Business ideas around food tech have to go beyond what Zomato, Food Panda, TinyOwl have achieved. As an investor, I would be interested in evaluating businesses that are optimising someone else's kitchen and keeping their costs in check. If a food startup or a QSR wants to include home delivery piece and make it a viable business model then the cost of delivery can't be more than the total value of the food items ordered. Till this issue is not addressed, the sector will continue to feel the pressure.

**Funding woes**

Until six months ago, VCs were happily writing cheques to new age food-tech startups. But easy flow of money into the sector disturbed the dynamics of the business. Companies started burning cash faster in a bid to acquire more customers than the others without realising that there are multiple stakeholders in the system. Customer stickiness cannot be built on a discounting model. Companies who have been able

to rectify this issue by changing their menu, pricing, etc., were able to raise another round of funding.

Thankfully, investors are not allowing food-tech companies to burn money mindlessly anymore. There is a clear shift in thinking towards 'Lets get the pricing right'. If you are a food-tech startup looking to raise funds, then make sure your business is scalable and sustainable, unit economics should work in your favour, and you should focus on revenue generation.

**What will work?**

A pure delivery model is a no-no because value-add is not great. As an investor, I would be inclined to invest my money in a food-tech startup that connects restaurants and consumers, enables discovery and has a rational costing model for the home delivery part of the business. For a home delivery option to become a revenue generator for any food tech company, the average ticket size per order should be in the range of Rs. 150-200. In addition to this, one should keep the following points in mind:

- Use tech to optimise cost of production
- Optimise kitchen
- Better cost management
- Focus on operational efficiency of the kitchen
- Avoid building your kitchen
- And obviously, no compromise on quality and taste

I have been associated with startups for more than a decade and my job allows me to learn and explore various business models. I have been mentoring a food-tech startup and the team has developed their menu, have a dietician on board, ops manager but they don't own a kitchen and they are working on bringing down the cost of delivery further.

**Has the bubble gone bust?**

That won't be correct to say because food-tech startups are the way forward as more and more customers go digital. This is a correction phase and is likely to continue for sometime. Funding activity will gather momentum once the correction phase is over. New investors will also start looking at startups as an asset class, bringing in fresh dollars. Hopefully, the entrepreneurs will also come out of this phase with new learnings. ●●

**About the author**



Anil Joshi is a managing partner at Unicorn India Ventures, an early stage startup focused fund. His experience includes corporate management functions in medium and large organizations, investment in startups, project management and business development. Anil has helped close 60 startup deals approximately and was directly involved in closure of 25 deals.





Techit Event Guests with Riyaaz Amlani

# The coming together of Tech & Restaurants

The horizon for greater technology integration is nearer than it ever was. This was the key message at the inaugural TechIt, co-hosted by the NRAI and held in Mumbai on Oct 26. It was organised by X Events Hospitality.

“Technology is essential to how & what we do. There’s no escaping that. We see the tech companies as partners in our future, one where we have to develop together,” said Riyaaz Amlani, president, NRAI.

It was a unique event where new tech companies were invited to present to restaurateurs and foodservice owners in hybrid format of Silicon Valley informality and elevator pitches popular among the B-school and start-up community today.

18 companies, each with their special value offering to this growing industry, engaged directly with owners as part of the event’s theme of ‘adoption’, the need to try out and accept tech to improve profitability in this challenging business. In the same spirit, each company offered the audience compelling discounts and deals that were exclusive to the event only, thus meeting TechIt’s goal.

“TechIt by NRAI brought together key stakeholders from technology and the F&B industry on a single platform today. Dineout has committed to support this initiative for all the TechIt chapters, and as the pioneers of table reservation and restaurant technology in India, it is our responsibility to expand the eco-system together.

Mumbai is a key market for us and we have invested a lot of time and manpower here. This TechIt, we shared our open-platform full-stack restaurant management solution, inResto, with the F&B industry,” said Ankit Mehrotra, co-founder, Dineout.



Ankit Mehrotra

## PANEL DISCUSSION

The event had three panel discussions that broadly covered the operational and technological challenges of today’s restaurateur.

### Panel #1: New revenue areas – what are they & how do we get it

- Moderated by Amlani, it featured restaurateurs and entrepreneurs that have made technology an integral part of the operations and customer interaction. On the panel were Hitesh Bhatia, founder, Noodle Play; Mihir Desai, co-founder, Corum Hospitality (Bar Stock Exchange), Ankit Mehrotra of Dineout and Abhishek Chandra of Mobikwik.



(LtoR) Riyaaz Amlani, Hitesh Bhatia, Mihir Desai, Ankit Mehrotra, Abhishek Chandra



National Restaurant Association of India  
Voice of the Indian Restaurant Industry

## Panel #2: Being customer focused – where they're going & what we need to do

- Also moderated by Amlani, this panel featured restaurateurs and technologists who have built massive online followings and who've got the pulse of today's customer. On the panel were Pooja Dhingra, owner of Le15 Patisserie, Aakash Sethi, co-founder & COO, Sweetish House Mafia as well as Sreeraman Thiagarajan, Google Business Group (Mumbai) founder and vice-president of client services at Publicis Beehive.



(LtoR) Riyaaz Amlani, Sreeraman, Pooja Dhingra, Aakash Sethi

## Panel #3: Efficient operations – Learning of the old school in today's times

- Moderated by Alan D'Mello, this panel featured legends of the hospitality industry and successful new owners such as Rahul Leekha of Di Bella Coffee, Aspi Nallaseth and PN Basu.

TechIt Mumbai was the first in a series that will see it travel across the country, bringing together restaurateurs and new technology on a common platform.



(LtoR) Alan D'Mello, Rahul Leekha, Aspi Nallaseth, PN Basu

# Restaurateurs rejoice, CM approves NRAI's recommendation for removing police permission

## Aims to make running businesses easier and cut red-tapism in Maharashtra

The National Restaurant Association of India, voice of the Indian restaurant industry accomplished yet another milestone as Maharashtra Government recently declared that eating houses, permit rooms, swimming pools and lodges will no longer require police permission to function.



Riyaaz Amlani

Restaurants and bars will also fall under this order's ambit.

Sharing gratitude on this development, Riyaaz Amlani, President, NRAI said, "NRAI is very enthusiastic about the move and the government's acceptance in this regard. Additionally, this would ensure 20 - 25% increase in revenue for the government as well."

Acting on a recommendation of NRAI, Hon'ble Maharashtra CM, Devendra Fadnavis, personally took cognizance of the matter and instructed concerned departments to make the required amendments. Amlani added, "It will also lead to 20% increase in employment generation across the state."

Earlier, in addition to the local civic bodies and the excise department, it was necessary for all such establishments to seek the approval of the police. This made the licensing procedure more tedious; paving way for more red-tapism. This change in rules vis-a-vis police permissions will simplify the process significantly while easing the daily complications that arise for restaurateurs from police interference.

Furthermore, NRAI has been lobbying with the state government and Mumbai administration for single window licensing, usage of terrace area for serving food, reduction in number of licenses required for operating a restaurant, 24/7 operations, reduction in drinking age amongst others.



National Restaurant Association of India  
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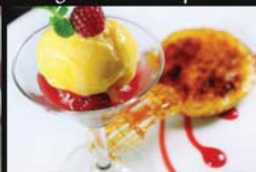
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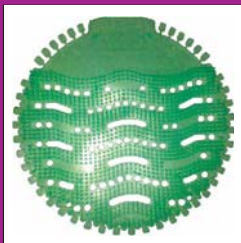
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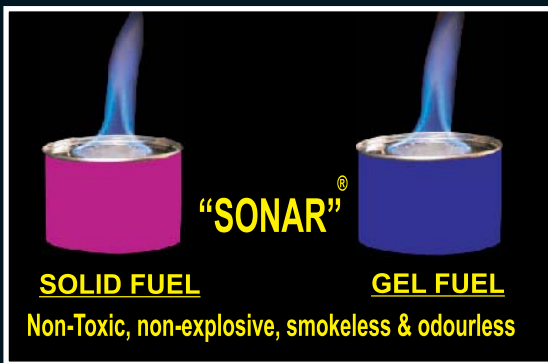
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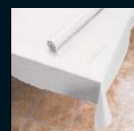


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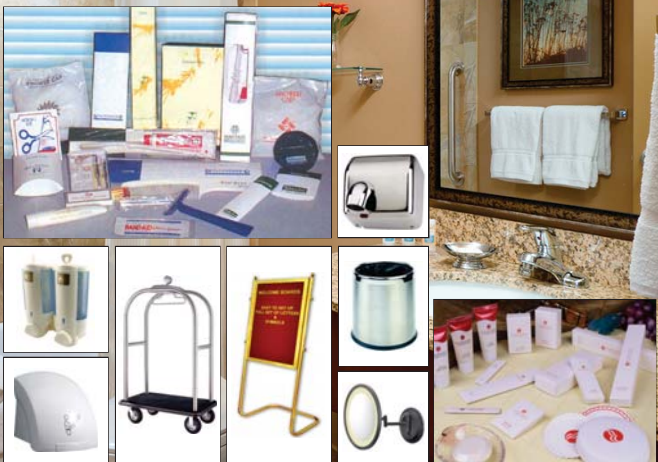
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# “We are at **No. 2** position across India for the **non-stick category**”

Sunil Agarwal, Director, Vinod Cookware, a leading manufacturer of pressure cookers and tawas and other kitchenware items, speaks to FoodService India about his company's new line of products, which are high on innovation and lifestyle quotient



## Tell us about your company and its journey over the years.

Vinod Cookware has been in the market for more than two decades. It was set up with a vision to mitigate the daily struggle and challenges faced by housewives in traditional Indian Kitchens. Determined to provide innovative kitchen solutions, our products help to uplift the methods of working in a kitchen, which has helped us to build an instant connect with homemakers of all ages.

Today, after a decade's experience and with a repertoire of over 400 products spread across four different categories, Vinod Cookware is established as one of the most preferred names in Indian as well as global markets. We have been successful in striking the right chord with consumers and are one of the most desirable brands in the cookware industry, standing strong at number three position in the country.

We have been the pioneers in “Sandwich Bottom” for pressure cookers and have the largest share of this product in the retail market across India. At the same time, Vinod Cookware also has been very aggressive in tapping the regional market segment with a competitive product line.

In the past, Vinod has also associated with popular TV actress ‘Sakshi Tanwar’ and currently with the very popular face of ‘Mandira Bedi’, which resonates with the brand's philosophy of building a stronger and wider reach for the audience and in ensuring an immediate connect with every Indian home. Our devotion towards revolutionising kitchens, with quality and innovative products, continues and we at Vinod firmly believe in ‘Jo bhi ho Khana, Vinod mein hi Pakana’.

**Who are your competitors in the industry and what is your strategy for facing off competition?**

Vinod Cookware is now an established name in the Indian market. Our strategy for success has always been genuine products and loyalty towards customer's faith in us. We strongly believe that though there are many players in Indian markets today, we are the only one to offer best prices for the products – value for money on every purchase by the consumer. At the same time, we have drawn up an appropriate strategy and planning for manufacturing and distribution of our products.

**How have you priced your cookware range and how are your products different in comparison to those from other industry players?**

We believe in understanding the consumer's need and lifestyle. Keeping this in mind, our products incorporate the latest technology and offer the best experience to the end users. Before launching any product or category in India, we undertake an in-depth research to comprehend the products as per the needs of the consumers. Our strategy of working in sync with the mindset of Indian homemakers has worked very well for



**Our closest competitors could be Prestige and Hawkins. In fact we were the only brand to show a double digit growth. We have captured roughly 12% market share, and are at No. 2 position across India for the non-stick category**

**Talking about the kitchen ware industry in India, what is the market positioning of your brand?**

Our closest competitors could be Prestige and Hawkins. In fact we were the only brand in FY 13-14 that has shown double digit growth. A majority of other brands showed a de-growth (category based) in this period. We have captured roughly 12% market share, and are at No. 2 position across India for the non-stick category.

For the year 2016, we have decided to position our brand for the health-conscious people in the health category. We will be coming up with several interesting and innovative products that will fit in in the category of health-conscious products.

**What is the overall market size of the kitchenware industry and what is your share in that?**

The kitchenware industry is growing many folds and the pace of growth has picked up in the past two decades. With many new technologies, designs and many more combinations of materials being used, the market is witnessing an ever growing demand. We, at Vinod Cookware, have roughly captured 12% of the total market share and are targeting a steady growth.

the brand. One such example is the launch of stainless steel Inner Lid Cookers in north India. We launched these cookers, designed in stainless steel over aluminum, as it's healthier and also aids in cooking faster. This product understands the needs and lifestyle of the people in the northern belt of India. Similarly, all our products are built with stringent quality measures. Each of our product guarantees value for money and has been designed keeping durability and affordability in mind.

**What have been the innovations have you induced in your kitchenware range?**

Talking about the innovative products, Vinod has launched a series of cookware which focus on easy cooking and also adding glamour to your kitchen. One such product is Marbilo Tawa of Vinod. It not only comes with a marble finish but also brings in a classy appeal to your cooking experience. Our 'Sandwich Bottom' for Pressure Cookers majorly focuses on the even distribution of heat while cooking, thus helping you to save on fuel cost. The company's insistence on research and development gets for its products the edge of convenience



and durability. Our products reflect a complete understanding of the Indian kitchen and are made using premium quality stainless steel.

### Which new product categories are you planning to introduce?

The festive season saw a spate of products released by us. To name a few, we introduced Zest Superb Plus and Marbilo. In addition, and in line with the demands of our target audience in the northern regions, we have come up with inner lid cookers.

These cookers retain the flavour of traditional cooking and have been crafted to meet the highest safety norms.

One of our upcoming products will be Multi-Kadai, which is designed and tailored for Indian cooking habits.

However, our focus products include Pressure Cookers and Tawas, which are made in accordance with the latest technology coupled with innovation and in-depth research.

### Who are your target consumers, and how do you plan to reach out to them?

Like the popular movie says 'Anybody Can Dance' we too believe 'Anybody or Everybody can Cook', with Vinod Cookware. Vinod products are the helping hands or your buddy in the kitchen, and they make your job simpler and faster. Knowing the complexities of Indian cooking, we target the 30+ age group, both male and female. Our products are priced affordably, and we have been very active through advertisements, social media as well as print media in reaching out to our target customers. We believe in selecting the right medium, which helps us to convey our message rightly to our customers.

### How fruitful was year gone by for the industry as well as for your company?

As a market leader in our core business, Vinod Cookware has seen no slowdown and is well placed to overcome the industry pressure. As I mentioned earlier, we are the only company in our segment to show a steady growth as compared to a de-growth for the industry.

Vinod Cookware has been growing steadily and strongly, aided by one of the biggest kitchen ware manufacturing units in Palghar-Mumbai, which is spread over seven acres.

Vinod Cookware products are loved and appreciated, and hence the demand for our products has been continuously growing. To meet this need, we have recently bought land in Gujarat and are currently working aggressively on setting it up. Our current plant capacity is 6,000 metric tonnes but we have been using only about half of that capacity. Now, with the new plant coming on, we plan to use our capacity to the fullest. We would be extending our portfolio with newer range of cookware, some of them being five layer non-stick and also multi-kadai.



### What are your financial targets for the year?

Vinod Cookware is a debt-free company. Our annual revenue is Rs. 200 crore. We plan to achieve at least 50% more and targeting to achieve Rs. 300 crore by next fiscal.

### Any new market segment that you are planning to target in 2016?

Vinod Cookware has created a niche for itself across the country. For 2016, we are looking at developing different market niches, each aiming at specific consumer groups. We are looking at introducing more lifestyle-enhancing kitchen items, which will increase in-store traffic and encourage consumers to linger longer in the outlets and encourage impulse purchases.

### Tell us about your marketing initiatives? What kind of promotional activities will you go for?

We have been engaged in active 360 degree communication with our audience. To start with, we have a very active social media presence on key vehicles – wherein we strike the right chord with the consumers. It also helps us build first-hand experience via the digital presence.

Very recently, we also extended our activity to Food/Lifestyle bloggers. We had our First Bloggers Meet in Mumbai, wherein the brand received immense response from the online fraternity. Our activities on the online front are mapped keeping the audience and also the brand visibility in mind.

Next, we are also engaged in several B2B and B2C activities. That apart, we have also done some few shopper marketing based events at retail spendzones so as to build in the right touch points with the audience. Our various ATL and BTL activities are ongoing at premium locations as we understand how 'experience' helps in driving 'sales'.

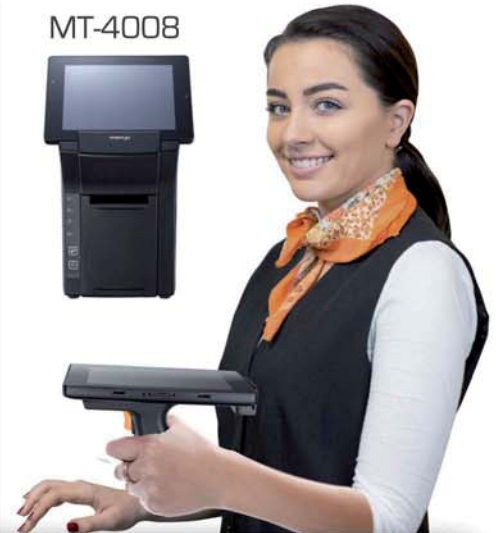
Lastly, we have also designed several outreach programmes for non-media promotions. The latest in line is our extensive advertising, which we are engaged in for our newest range. All these activities have ensured best visibility and awareness for our brand among our TG. ●●

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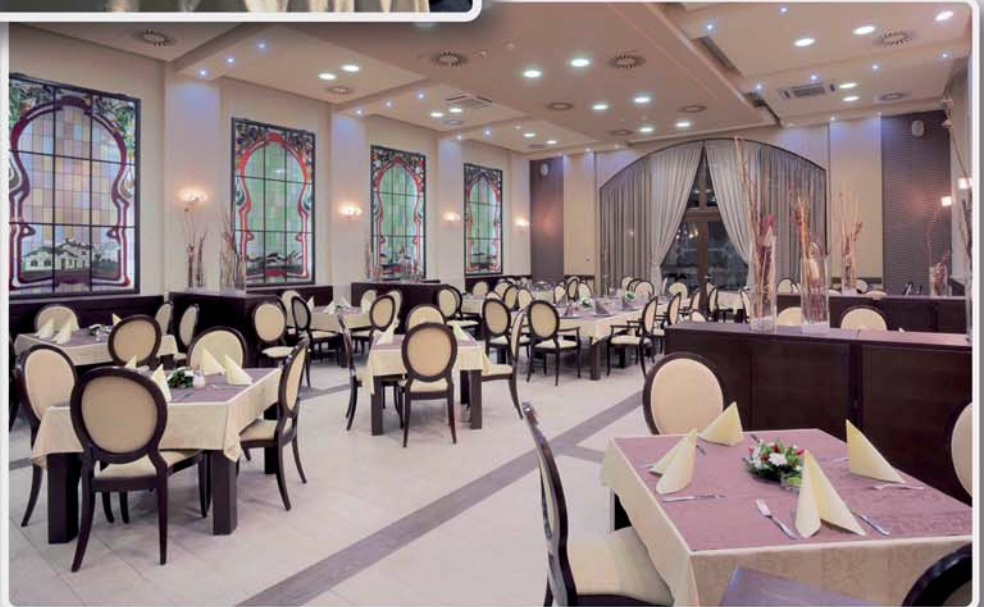
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# “I only know how to cook and nothing else”

Vikas Khanna is an award winning, Michelin-starred Indian chef, restaurateur, food writer, filmmaker and a humanitarian. He has also been a host for many TV shows. Even though he is based in New York City, it would not be wrong to say that he has evolved as a global citizen through his progressive outlook and approach toward food. In India, he travels extensively to various regions and explores diverse cuisines. From his busy routine, he takes a pause to share with FoodService India magazine his thoughts about life, love for food, new changes in the culinary world and what to expect in 2016

by Suchitra & Sanjeev



## Tell us a bit about your growing years that made you drift toward cooking.

I was raised in Amritsar where I grew up surrounded by large family feasts, the seasonal produce that were fresh and came right from the fields of Punjab and, of course, my grandmother's traditional home cooking. It was at my grandmother's that I started learning the intricacies of the Indian cuisine. At the age of 17, I started my own banquet and catering business — Lawrence Gardens.

Talking from my experience, college life was an eye opener for me. I realised that cooking is where I could find my own space, and it completed me. It eventually turned out to be a beautiful journey of my life. After my college, I even worked at the Leela Kempinski in Mumbai for three years and then returned to take charge of my own catering business in Amritsar. Later, my elder brother pushed me to scale the American dream, and that's how I came to the US to pursue my higher studies and my career as a chef.

## How did you streamline your passion for food and channelise it toward making your career?

I pursued formal education in culinary arts to hone my skills. During my graduation from the WelcomGroup Graduate School of Hotel Administration, I got the opportunity to train under renowned chefs of Taj Group of Hotels, Oberoi's, the Leela Group and many more. Then, I went to study at the Culinary Institute of America, Cornell University and New York University and the prestigious Le Cordon Bleu, Paris.

Later, I worked with some of the most honoured chefs in the world in New York. There, I was fortunate to receive positive reviews from the press, peers and also recognition from the James Beard Foundation.



**How do you identify with your job, especially when there are pressures of being a celebrated Michelin Star chef?**

The Michelin Star for my restaurant Junoon by Michelin Guide became one of the high points of my career as a chef. I am extremely proud of the fact that my restaurant received a Michelin Star within 10 months of opening. I call this destiny. Yet, there are definitely challenges and merits of being a chef. It has its own pressures, especially when every time you go on to cook something or you monitor someone; you have to get things right for your own satisfaction and only then it is possible to satisfy others with cooked food. Just a few years ago, nobody would have known anything about me, but the television shows have catapulted me into so-called celebrityhood. Today, people are opening their homes to me and are willing to share their secret family recipes. I really feel honoured.

**How do you view your growth as a professional in the US in comparison to what you have achieved in India?**

I came to India in December 2000 with an ambition to prove myself at any cost. America was a different ball game from India. But I had consciously decided that I will never compare America and India, as not only they are different culturally, but also for many reasons. For me, America is the highest point of human creation and creativity, which I will never deny. They have made the whole world bow to the creativity of children and respect individuals for his/her talent. What they create is phenomenal. But what India has created is a phenomenon of the human soul. I enjoy learning a different dimension of culinary art here, essentially the place where my love for food started during my childhood.

**What do you feel about cooking — a method to be followed or an expression of one's creativity?**

A lot is being said about cooking institutes, for example. Can they really make you a chef or teach you how to cook? I still feel that if you speak well or are a good orator, it is not a qualification enough to be a lawyer. Similarly is the case with cooking. But, the significance of education cannot be undermined. While culinary schools do provide a major link between the industry and training, cooking is also an art, so it also has a lot to do with inborn talent.

**What kind of a food person is chef Vikas Khanna?**

Having experienced so many things in food, I still swear by simple food, i.e., aloo methi and any dal along with it, which is my favourite dish. In fact, I was never a fussy eater and enjoyed everything — even the not-so-likeable veggies such as ghiya, karela, tinda and so on. I love vegetables — their texture, the taste and the aroma as they cook.

Since I am in the kitchen all day and taste a lot of dishes, I tend to balance it out with simple food in my everyday meals. I snack on smoothies, fruits,



nuts and granola bars. Steamed fish, plain dal, vegetables and egg whites are my staples.

**You enjoy healthy cooking, and especially love cooking seafood. How do you evaluate the possibilities that frozen marine products, such as shrimps, squids, cuttlefish and other fin-fish, bring to the table?**

Seafood is super large; I did a whole show on Coastal Curries on Fox Life. There is plenty of fish in our culture that stretch from region to region. I always discuss the rise in seafood consumption in India and the potential it has in the future. I love cooking (and eating) healthy, grilled food a majority of the time.

**While cooking seafood, which are the few things that one should be careful about?**

It is essential to first bring seafood from the frozen state to room temperature before cooking or even marinating it. Then, secondly, when it comes to spice, it is important to remember that less is more in seafood for obvious reason. It is also difficult to choose which recipe is good over another. I personally believe that it is difficult to pick a favourite when it comes to seafood, as I enjoy cooking and eating them.

You recently started promoting Gadre Marine Export that exports Surimi and other fish products in large quantities to Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Korea and Australia. Tell us about this association and its genesis.

I have been actively promoting seafood and I firmly believe that we can certainly learn a lot more about it (culinary scope), especially the frozen ones. I was discussing the rise in seafood consumption in India and the potential it has with Arjun Gadre, managing director of Gadre Marine Export. That was the basis of my partnership with Gadre seafood. It was then that we both noticed a few trends among the Indian consumers where the perception of fresh fish was better than the use of frozen fish. If we are to analyse it scientifically, most

**For me, America is the highest point of human creation and creativity, which I will never deny. They have made the whole world bow to the creativity of children and respect individuals for his/her talent. What they create is phenomenal. But what India has created is a phenomenon of the human soul**



I ONLY KNOW HOW TO COOK AND NOTHING ELSE. IN FACT, UNTIL 2004, THE THOUGHT OF DOING A TV SHOW HAD NEVER OCCURRED TO ME. BUT WHEN I MADE MY APPEARANCE ON GORDON RAMSAY'S SHOW, I WAS THE FIRST INDIAN TO BE ON PRIME TIME ON FOX. THE WHOLE OF AMERICA FOLLOWED THAT SHOW AND OPINED POSITIVELY IN RESPONSE TO MY CREATIVITY.

IN SEPTEMBER 2007, I WAS FEATURED AS THE CONSULTANT CHEF ON THE RAMSAY TV SHOW KITCHEN NIGHTMARES ON FOX. IN OCTOBER 2009, I APPEARED AS A JUDGE AND INDIAN-CUISINE SPECIALIST ON THE TWO-PART SEASON FINALE OF HELL'S KITCHEN. THESE SHOWS GAVE ME AN IDENTITY. ALSO, IN JUNE 2010, I APPEARED ON THROWDOWN! WITH BOBBY FLAY AS A JUDGE. I WAS ALSO A GUEST CHEF IN THE EPISODE 'THE INDIA SHOW' ON THE MARTHA STEWART SHOW IN 2011. IN INDIA TOO, I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE PART OF THE MASTERCHEF INDIA AND JUNIOR MASTERCHEF INDIA, BOTH AS THE HOST AND JUDGE. I WAS ALSO THE HOST FOR THE TRAVEL SHOW TWIST OF TASTE ON FOX TRAVELLER. ALL OF THESE EXPERIENCES EVOLVED ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL.



people would be surprised to know the outcome. For example, even if someone were to buy fish from the market in the morning when it is most fresh, that does not last for a long time. When fish is kept in a refrigerator, the water inside the fish expands to break cell walls that change the consistency of the meat. Frozen fish, however, is frozen on catch and the treatment is carried out at a low temperature. That actually helps preserve the fish. It is a misconception that fresh ones are better than the frozen ones.

**Anything in particular that you would like to highlight when it comes to seafood and has a high scope in the Indian food service market...**

Even though Surimi is a Japanese specialty, it is one of the most consumed forms of fish in the world. The concept of Surimi will resonate with young Indians. It is for that reason the recipes with the Surimi products are simple, healthy and easy to make. However, it is because of the simplicity that the recipes also are perfect for a family meal. It is for this reason Surimi has a lot of potential in the Indian food service market. These days, people are experimenting with their food and are willing to try out different alternatives, and Surimi is a perfect product for those evolving palates.

**What are the varieties of dishes one can think of with frozen food options, especially in seafood? What are your favourite and signature recipes in frozen seafood category?**

My favourite combination with seafood is coconut. This combination gives you amazing varieties within seafood option. It is basically a natural combination. On the other hand, there are a bunch of recipes, such as the Smoky Buttery Crab Claws, the Hot and Spicy Crab Claws and the Lobster Manchurian, which I am extremely fond of. All of these recipes are really good.

**What does chef Vikas Khanna feels about his eventful journey so far? What further he has to offer to his fans/customers?**

The idea of cooking good food is to tell about those hidden treasures of Indian culture that the new generation of this country may not

be able to track on the Internet. The restaurants, the awards, the food, etc., everything will go away one day. But the culture will remain forever. Hence, I am writing a book on the Himalayan cooking. I have journeyed into the Himalayas to get the secret recipes, traditions and cultures out. It will have all the forgotten recipes. It has been an emotional journey and I am calling it the 'Pilgrimage'. It took me almost seven years to write it. With this book, the whole world will know all the layers of our culture beyond what they already know. Culture is bigger than all of us and lasts much longer.

**How would you define food and success, together?**

When your mother comes to your restaurant she should feel that it is the food she was craving for. That is my philosophy about food and food service, and of a successful one. It should be simple and honest. For me, the essence of food and dining is to keep it pure. It should feel like you are eating the meal in your own dining room, cooked by a friend as a guest chef. I am a total believer of that. I also want the world to experience the depth of Indian cuisine beyond the few stereotyped dishes that it is famous for.

**Where do you enjoy eating most?**

The langar at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. There, all the bruises get healed and I find myself at peace.

**What is the proudest accomplishment in your career to date?**

On July 29, 2011, I catered for HASC Conference at the White House in the US. It was a moment of pride for me to stand at the podium and thank everyone for inviting me to represent India at this amazing conference on interfaith relations.

**You have authored many cookbooks. How has been the experience.**

I have earlier written several books, including 'The Spice Story of India', 'Modern Indian Cooking' and 'Flavors First'. In fact, in 2012, the 'Flavors First' won the Benjamin Franklin Award. In 2013, my other authored works like 'Savor Mumbai', 'My Great India' and 'Khanna Sutra' were appreciated a lot.



In 2014, my cookbook — ‘Return to the Rivers – Recipes and Memories of the Himalayas’ — with a foreword by His Holiness The Dalai Lama was nominated for the James Beard Foundation Award. Another cookbook is ‘Hymns from the Soil – A Vegetarian Saga’ has also been appreciated.

**What are your future plans?**

In the next five year, I see myself finishing my documentary film series ‘Holy Kitchens’, which connects food and faith, and would have published my favourite project on Himalayan cuisine with an introduction by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. To assess success, I take into account the opportunities that I get to express my love for my culture, cuisine and people.

**India is a complex market as far as food service business is concerned. How do you assess the fine-dine restaurant business in today’s context?**

I think the scope of food service in India is immense but sustainability of vision is perhaps lacking. These past few years have been particularly tough when the purchasing power of customers was down. The bigger countries, which are such big supporters of our restaurants in India, were all stuck with the financial crisis. We cannot deny that. It is affecting everything, especially the high-end restaurants because that is a luxury. The times have changed too. This is the time when such big projects cannot survive.

**What can one expect from India’s food scene in 2016?**

India is a place where a lot of things are taking place in the food business. I respect and support children who do fusion cuisine, but I think I am too old for that. I am a purist. It is not my cup of tea to develop my brand around fusion. I am too much into the depth of the culture and regional cuisines, and that is how I see the food trend evolving from my side. ●●

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# The welcome blaze of pizza vans on call

With its 7-minutes oven to table guarantee, Rocketchefs is a first of its kind mobile food delivery service, which makes food available immediately through its mobile food bikes and especially designed food vans. Ramnidhi Wasan, its Founder and CEO, speaks to FoodService India about how his service offers better value for the customer's money by delivering orders piping hot and fresh, unlike most home delivery options where the food gets cold by the time it reaches the customer



Ramnidhi Wasan

## Tell us about Rocketchefs. How was the idea conceived and what made you believe in its proof of concept?

Rocketchefs is a first ever pizza vans on call. Customers can place an order through its geo location based app to get piping hot pizzas and other foods, sometimes even cooked right at your doorstep.

Food delivery as a concept is fast gaining popularity in India given the young working population and consumers' preference of 'eating out' while being comfortable at home. With online food delivery players building scale through partnerships, the organised food business has a huge potential and a promising future.

Taking cognisance of the obvious concern faced by consumers during food delivery, namely the deterioration in food quality, we have tried to address such concerns. Thus was born the concept of Rocketchefs. With its 7-minutes oven to table guarantee, Rocketchefs envisages to be a solution for this gap in the market. It is a first of its kind mobile food delivery service that makes food available immediately, through its mobile food bikes and especially designed food vans.

## Does the name carry any special meaning?

The name Rocketchefs aims to denote speed with a high degree of quality.

## What is the menu on offer and which are the cuisines that you cater to? Also, what is your pricing strategy?

The inaugural menu includes lip smacking dishes such as stone oven thin crust pizzas and gourmet kebabs. We aim to expand the variety of food available and take it to the next level by providing

them completely on demand. We shall soon be launching interesting options as korma sandwich, korma coffee, etc.

Our pricing is almost at par, in fact, even lower than that of other key players operating in the segment. Our customers certainly receive value for their money as their order is delivered piping hot and fresh, unlike most home delivery options wherein the food gets cold by the time it reaches the customer.

## Tell us about your kitchen operations and how far it has been rigged and customized to meet the demands of mobile food service delivery?

The kitchen was specifically designed to attend to the needs of the mobile food service delivery. It is highly mechanised to ensure standardisation of the food, and the entire process is scientific and helps in achieving efficiencies.

## What are the relative business advantages that a mobile food delivery business has over brick-and-mortar restaurants and the Internet-first restaurants?

As mentioned earlier, an obvious concern faced by consumers during food delivery is the deterioration in food quality. Led by industry experts, Rocketchefs aims to use food knowledge, hospitality expertise, back-end support and a strong technological backbone to offer a cutting edge experience to its customers. Our mobile food bikes, vans and especially designed food pods allows us to be 'on the move' thus giving us the ability to adapt to the customer's requirements. We are able to serve customers better by offering them a fine dining cuisine experience right at their doorstep.

**It's very difficult for any mobile delivery service provider to create a brand with a loyal customer connect. Customers are not emotionally involved with the food they buy from mobile vans. How do you propose to overcome this big challenge?**

The Rocketchefs' concept has evolved the combination of technology and fine dining cuisines' experience at the consumer's doorstep. Our easy to use geo location based mobile app enables consumers to look-up the food van closest to them, choose a dish, and with one click finalise the order. Also, our menu offering is specialised, with stone oven thin crust pizzas and gourmet kebabs – food items that are best enjoyed when hot and fresh. The differentiated experience of actually being able to locate a food van closet to them, along with the ease of placing an order for delectable food, provides us with the edge over other similar food service providers.

**The mobile food business hasn't really picked up in India and is widely perceived to cater to only Chinese fast food, ice-creams, and street food. How do you propose to change this deeply entrenched consumer psychology and behaviour and make people believe that it can also cater to gourmet food?**

**Could you give us your assessment of the mobile food business in the country - in terms of size, potential, growth prospects, etc.? Who are the established players in this business that have transformed into brands?**

The organised mobile food business in India is worth \$48 billion, or Rs.3 lakh crore, of which food delivery is valued at \$15 billion (Rs. 94,755 crore). Home delivery and takeaways are expected to increase in popularity over the forecast period as consumers are looking for more convenient options. Late working hours and chaotic traffic is driving sales of home deliveries. Some of the top players in this segment are Zomato, FoodPanda & Swiggy. Cyberchef, Box8 & Yumist are other new players who are slowly catching up with the established mobile food delivery businesses in India.

**Please explain your business model – do you also own the trucks and vans, are you only a food supplier or a food supplier plus something more...?**

Rocketchefs is a progressive evolution from food delivery to food being cooked at your doorstep! We are not striving to simply create a brand, but to build an eco-system for food creation, delivery and experience. At present we have four of the specially designed food vehicles and five more are under production. We



**The kitchen was specifically designed to attend to the needs of the mobile food service delivery. It is highly mechanised to ensure standardisation of the food, and the entire process is scientific and helps in achieving efficiencies**



The mobile or food truck business in India is becoming popular and growing at a fast rate. Food loving entrepreneurs are entering this market with interesting concepts. The Rocketchefs model is based on India's legendary street food scene, and we aim to expand the variety of food available as "street foods". We will take it to the next level by providing an interesting variety in the menu, utmost hygiene and food safety, while delivering it completely on demand. Fortunately for us, the Indian consumer is open to experimenting with food and is willing to try out new cuisines, formats, etc. It is this consumer attitude that we will tap and I am confident that food truck concepts such as ours will continue to grow.

aim to build social entrepreneurship by entering into the franchise model, thus providing an impetus to budding entrepreneurs across urban centers.

The franchisee invests in the vehicle and all the last mile operations. All other support is provided by Rocketchefs. The franchisee requires no back-end and just has to focus on customer service. With a low break-even point of only Rs. 4000.00 per day, the model allows anyone to follow his/her entrepreneurial journey.

**Which are the systems, tools, and people that you have put in place to ensure smooth day-to-day operations?**

Reducing the moving parts is the cornerstone of any quality assurance guide. The same guiding



**Our mobile food bikes, vans and especially designed food pods allows us to be 'on the move' thus giving us the ability to adapt to the customer's requirements. We are able to serve customers better by offering them a fine dining cuisine experience right at their doorstep**

principle has been put to work here. The overall process has been made foolproof.

**The mobile food business is known to suffer from several operational, supply chain and inventory management challenges? What is your strategy and solutions for addressing these challenges?**

Rocketchefs ensures constant food supply at the franchisees' doorstep on a frequent basis, regularly attending to the supply chain and inventory management issues.

**One of the major hurdles with the mobile food delivery service is that each locality has a different approach to regulating, making it difficult to implement standardised regulations. How are you addressing this challenge?**

We don't allow our vans to park and cause any disruption to local traffic or the environment. The vans respond to the guest and deliver the food as per the order. They are not food trucks in the typical sense which may be seen parked by the roadside. Moreover, Rocketchefs model is also available as a kiosk.

**As health and hygiene regulations grow more onerous with time, what is your strategy for ensuring that quality, health and safety issues are beyond reproach?**

This is a huge area and requires a careful process-driven approach at every step. We have taken a six sigma approach to define the same. These include:

- Our recipes are scientific
- Chefs are trained
- Extensive automation at the back-end
- Customised cooking equipment with a high degree of energy efficiency and evenness of cooking to ensure repeatability and reproducibility
- Staff training
- HACCP training

**What is your current phase of development? Which are the markets you are currently present in, how many orders do you cater to per day, what is the average ticket size, daily/weekly sales turnover?**

At present we are operational in Gurgaon. We are poised to enter about 25 per cent of the residential areas in Gurgaon by the next three months. The

current phase of development could be termed as early revenues. We are currently attending to around 60-80 orders per day. We have broken even from the first month of operations itself. The pizza, which gets delivered, is also approximately 30% cheaper than the competitors'.

**Location is important to any kind of food business but more so for the mobile food delivery business. What is your strategy in this regard and how do you home in on a particular location?**

Our unique model with the mobile food vans on call allows us to cater to a varied audience, right from corporate houses to residential areas. The specialised menu offering and relatively low lead time, as the food van is parked right at the consumer's doorstep, make us an ideal choice for community meals, celebrating special occasions as parties, get-togethers, etc. Our vans are always on the move and we do not park at a location to cause any disruption to the local traffic or the environment. The vans respond to our customers and deliver the food as per his order.

**Which are the ways in which you are leveraging technology to reach out to customers and establish your presence in both offline and online domains?**

By some estimates, there are 250-300 food technology start-ups in the country at present. Technology plays an integral role in the sustenance and ultimate success of any food tech model. The Rocketchefs' concept is formed on a strong technological backbone and back-end support. Our easy to use geo location based mobile app enables consumers to look up the food van closest to them, choose a dish, and with one click finalise the order. We aim to become an ecosystem of food vans and food bikes on call. We visualise that these vehicles are manned by independent operators, which are able to attend to their local markets as true entrepreneurs. Literally, we want become the Uber for food.

**What are your plans for scaling up the business?**

We want to saturate Gurgaon first and then venture into Delhi. In next three months we are trying to have 25 vehicles with us to expand our reach in other parts of Gurgaon. ●●

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# Hotel industry should opt for vendor integration by a single **web-based software**

**An overview of the action to be taken and the solutions required for overcoming the problems created by the usage of different software by hotels and vendors**

— Sekar Selvaraj

It is not common to find a situation where vendor and hotel are using different software. This is an anomaly, which needs to be rectified immediately in the interest of a more productive, streamlined and efficient relationship between the two parties. When vendors and hotels operate through different software, it could lead to a situation that gives rise to unnecessary complications and information gaps in data sharing.

For instance, when the software used by hotels and vendors are different, the two parties are often not aware of what the other side is doing. Under such circumstances, getting reliable data and information on even routine functions like sending quotes, printing purchase orders, entering the dispatch details, raising invoice, viewing the payment details, etc., are hard to come by leading to uncertainties and fraught business decisions.



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In order to turn around this chaotic situation, a change in thinking is required by IT and Finance professionals in the hotel industry. There is a need to invest in buying new and advanced software and implement it across their procurement and inventory management. Unfortunately, even major hotels continue implementing or buying the same old software. Today, more than ever before, the IT professionals in hotels have to think afresh and make changes in the software purchase for procurement and inventory management. About 95% of the hotels continue using the software or modules that are used in common by all. Even the new hotel groups are following the same old trodden path. The decision makers in the IT and Finance departments should think of introducing fresh solutions and stop following the others who are using the same conventional software.

To bring about the much-needed changes, a hotel should ensure that policies are made considering the vendors as participants in business rather than thinking of them as just suppliers. Vendors should be allowed to participate in two ways: either by way of general participation or through process participation. In the case of general participation, at present, vendors are treated as mere suppliers who are aware of just the basic details of the hotel or the place to which they supply. For example, a vendor may supply items for the room service department but he might not have seen the rooms himself. Similarly, a vendor may supply to banquets but may not have seen the banquet hall at all.

Hence, hotels should make policies to ensure that the vendors are allowed to experience or see the guest areas of the hotel. Taking this step alone will ensure that the vendor becomes a participant in the process. This is a major challenge and a point of pressure for the hotel industry, as already mentioned earlier in this paper. And to remove the pressure and overcome this challenge, the hotel must make a policy and agreement with vendor for data sharing. The hotel should buy the software or module to ensure that data is shared in a two-way communication for transactions. This will result in all the data to be organised and stored under a single software – whether it be for the purpose of receiving a quotation from a vendor or sending a purchase order or payment detail by the hotel.

Also, a hotel should have a budget for web-based software, which can be used by the hotel as well as its vendor. The IT Executive, Procurement Executive and the Finance Executive should act as change agents to implement this exercise. Once all the data are visible under a single software, the cost of transaction can be reduced in terms of labour and time. In short, the changes could spell a win-win proposition for both hotels and vendors. ●●

Quite often, different vendors use different software and programmes. It has been observed that most vendors use only mails like Gmail, Yahoo, etc., for sending quotation, to receive purchase order copy, and for sending the despatch details. Vendors also rely on their dedicated assistants/ office staff to carry out these functions. In some cases, the dispatch and invoice are sent manually or done offline. In most cases, the despatch details are sent by mail. In short, there is no standard operating procedure or a systematic process for executing even the everyday mundane business activities, which is a sure shot recipe for all kinds of delays and glitches, misunderstanding and confusion.



*The writer is Manager – Purchase, Adarsh Developers, Bangalore and a Research scholar in the Department of Management studies, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.*



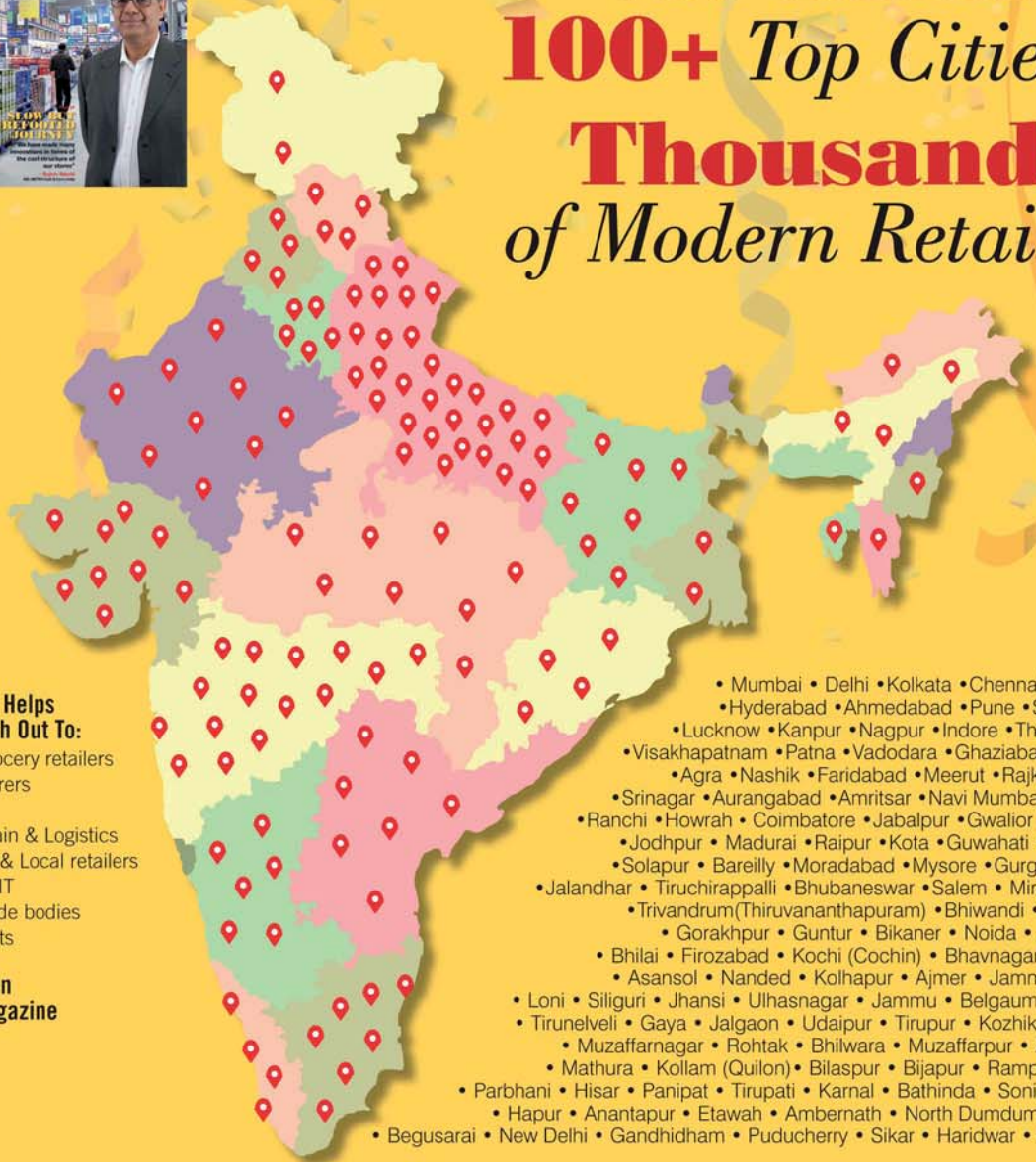
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