



TURN THE WORLD

RAJESH MEHRA, PROMOTER AND DIRECTOR, JAQUAR GROUP, AND HIS NEPHEW, PARICHAY MEHRA, ARE SET TO UNLEASH BIG PLANS FOR THE GLOBAL BATH FITTINGS MARKET

BY JAYASHREE MENDES AND MITALEE KURDEKAR

ADAPTABILITY. THAT IS THE VERY NATURE OF water, and who better to understand this than the men at Jaquar. Rajesh Mehra and Parichay Mehra, promoters and directors, Jaquar, have made it their business to adapt to ever-changing customer needs – through an evolution of products and services – and it seems to be paying rich dividends for them.

The uncle-nephew duo makes up the second and third generation of the bathing products brand, which was launched in 1986, as a natural progression from Essco Sanitations, a company that was founded by the senior Mehra's father, the Late NL Mehra, in 1960. Since then, Jaquar has sculpted a fine history. Its name was derived from 'Jai Kaur', in honour of

the Late NL Mehra's mother and it has borne witness to the coming of age of Indian sanitation and bath ware, from modest faucets and bath fittings to finer quality products and finally the launch of the luxury bathing solutions brand, Artize, in 2011. The journey has been long, often arduous, but equally rewarding, and this is reflected in the passion visible in the behavior of factory workers and the tone and tenor of the top management themselves.

"I think the fundamentals always remain the same. There has to be a very honest intent and effort, to create a name in the market. You can create a name only by giving the right products, the best quality, services and value for money to the customers. This

is what our company strongly believes in,” professes Mehra, who handles the corporate side of the business, including marketing and sales. Parichay, on the other hand, is a hardcore manufacturer, deeply entrenched in the two factories at Bhiwadi, while a cousin handles the Chopanki factory. Each member has his role cut out and, as a result, the business functions like a well-oiled machine.

Speaking of machines, the manufacturing unit at Bhiwadi is a seamless integration of machine with man, working optimally and in tandem with one another. The factory is Parichay’s domain, and while Mehra speaks well of how Jaquar has always projected itself as a superior quality Indian brand, Parichay proudly showcases this at their Bhiwadi plants. The total manufacturing area is about 1,50,000m² and the facility is home to over 4,000 workers, who work in three shifts, making an average of 65,000 faucets a day, among other things.

PRODUCTION PROCESS

On a tour of the factory, Parichay explains part of his enthusiasm for the plant by telling us what his grandfather told him many moons ago. “His last words to me were, ‘Beta, inn logo se tu hai, teri wajah se yeh logo nahihai (you are here because of them, not the

other way around)’ and that has stayed with me,” Parichay confesses. So much so that, when it was time to move to automation in mould-making, he chose to retain and retrain his workers to operate the high end technology. Today, five computerised mould-making machines are working round-the-clock to produce precision moulds to build in quality – at the very beginning of the process – at its foundry shop floor. In addition, two such machines have been earmarked for R&D purposes to give a fillip to the development of new products. However, there is still a part of the mould-making that is done by hand at Jaquar. With high production figures and the 3,500 SKUs needed for producing the faucets alone, moulds need to be created day in and day out, given that each mould has a life span.

Jaquar has the complete manufacturing process under one roof – a fully integrated plant. Be it mould-making, casting, grinding, polishing, electroplating, and finally, testing and assembly. There is no fixed assembly line, and Parichay proudly proclaims that he can make a one-off piece for a client and deliver it, unlike other manufacturers who have rigid schedules and set designs in place. Having said that, the factory is constantly online with the marketing team, and engages in demand forecasting, using market informa-

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2. Every piece is made to undergo rigorous tests so that it comes out flawless.

tion plus trends to predict demand.

Parichay passionately speaks of the production processes, explaining that they prepare a core of silica sand to create the space where the water will travel, and here too every SKU has a unique water passage area. An experienced factory worker places the cores into moulds, locks them and then expertly pours 1,000 degree molten brass into the mould. This age old process is called gravity die-casting, since the material flows into the cavity with the force of gravity. "In my whole factory, these are the men I

respect the most as this is a highly skillful job," confesses Parichay.

Jaquar has adopted a worker-oriented philosophy while inducting the latest technology – best of both worlds. This is symbolised by the introduction of semi-automatic low-pressure die casting machines in its foundry. The computerisation of machine operations ensures the highest quality of castings, whereas manual loading and unloading of moulds gainfully employs the existing unskilled workforce. While small pieces are done through gravity die-casting, larger and more difficult pieces require the semi-automated approach. Post this, the product goes through to the finishing stages.

Next, a twin spindle VMC machine has been customised for machining the products. Each spindle has a 20 tool changer, so about 40 different tools can work in sequence. A VMC is basically a three axis machine, and a fourth axis has been added to rotate the piece. A programme is generated and stored in the machine's memory for repeated use. Polishing comes next. Here, there is some semblance of an assembly line in place. Since grinding is highly abrasive, 10 people work on different polishing steps, including the use of a cotton wheel. After this, the products undergo electro plating. The quality control team picks up



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each and every component once again, whether it is a screw, a lever, a faucet or a shower, and rechecks it in the most thorough manner for defects, functionality and durability. Managing unmatched quality with high production sets Jaquar apart from many other manufacturers in the same space.

Parichay, for whom the factory has been a learning ground, describes his team as completely 'metal people', meaning that they do not do any plastic or rubber work in-house. They deal entirely in brass, which, of course, is their main raw material. "In our country, the faucet manufacturing or bathroom manufacturing industry is not yet that evolved. Whatever ancillary suppliers we have here are exclusive to Jaquar and are situated in a 4-5 km radius. Of course, the bulk of my supplies come from European countries, and other Asian countries," offers Parichay. The brass comes in many forms, including tube, extruded rod or even sheet form and is brought from countries like Germany and Italy, and some domestic suppliers. Jaquar treats brass with utmost reverence. The brass shavings and powder generated during machining and grinding operations is meticulously recycled in



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3. The company operates on a clear principle: to get the Indian consumer the best of international standards.

house. A powerful hydraulic machine converts scrap into easy-to-store and easy-to-melt briquettes.

The latest feather in its technology cap is the commissioning of Kuka robots for grinding operations. These have been specially designed and developed to replicate the exact sequence hitherto performed by a number of workers operating in tandem. Needless to say, few of the existing employees underwent rigorous training in Europe to operate and maintain these robots.

R&D

With a presence across 30 countries, Jaquar is a firm believer in maintaining good quality and fine design. "We don't have dual standards. Whatever we are producing for the Indian market, goes abroad. I am not saying what we are producing for the global market comes to India, but what we are producing for the Indian market is sent there. Because in India, our principle is very clear; that is to get the Indian consumer the best of international standards," professes Mehra. The efforts can be summed up with its tagline: Proudly made in India, for the world. Obviously, this requires a strong Research and Development (R&D) department. At Jaquar, this does not just include engineers, but people who have been working in the development of products at the company for perhaps 20-40 years. Given that it's a functional product, the end result needs to be a combination of both the design sensibility and functionality. And these men envision both aspects, clearly. "Recently, we have been challenging ourselves. Why just a couple of designs a year or why just three or four? Why not 10? If we can do it, then why not? And why just designs, why not better processes? Why not more durable products for the market? So there is no such dotted line that restricts us in terms of number of new products a year," says Parichay. As part of their



latest offerings, they have introduced an award winning cleverly concealed wash basin faucet, that is displayed on-site, a soon-to-be-released state-of-the-art shower cubicle that uses a customer's preferred data to prepare the temperature of bath water and the type of shower settings requested, beforehand, in order to save the customer's precious time and ensure an optimal showering experience.

ORIENTATION CENTRES

Jaquar doesn't call itself a pioneer without reason. "For the first time in the history of the Indian bath fittings industry, we came up with a standardisation in product. The specifications conformed to certain standards, which, at that point of time, were the British standards, and ours was the first brand in the country, which totally complied with those standards. Secondly, we decided to understand the need of the Indian market, basically the Indian consumer. In India, the usage conditions are very unfriendly from the product point of view. For example, the quality of water is an issue, with physical and chemical impurities, lack of pressures and so on. These were the challenges in the Indian market, so we have designed our product accordingly," states Rajesh Mehra.

They have also consistently come up with initiatives that benefit consumers and, in turn, affect their

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business positively too. The most important initiative that they introduced in the market was the concept of customer care services. It was a completely alien concept in this field. But Jaquar has had it from day one. In terms of marketing too, they have had sales teams going to the consumers, meeting and educating them, before convincing them to invest in a Jaquar product. Mehra wanted this to be an awareness exercise, not just a sales pitch. Market development is the mantra at Jaquar. So a few years back, they decided to take this service up a notch by introducing their own orientation centres, where customers can come and experience their range of prod-

4. The factory façade at Bhiwadi.



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ucts, learning about them and finding the perfect one for their needs. This unique service is provided at 22 locations, spread across the length and breadth of the country, and visited by 60,000–70,000 people on a yearly basis. Jaquar doesn't sell from the orientation centers, using them purely as a value addition tool. In fact, within the next three months or so, Jaquar plans to launch its first orientation centre for the overseas market, in Singapore.

THE COURSE AHEAD

"In terms of product portfolio, the vision of the company is to be a global leader in providing complete bathing solutions for inspired living by customers," declares Rajesh Mehra. As a means to achieve this, he has made it his mission to ensure that the complete bathroom ware set comes from one source and, more importantly, from one brand. "A

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Fully integrated manufacturing plant; one of the largest setup in Asia
- Adhering to global quality and certifications
- A zero waste plant recycling over 47,963 kilo litreS of water every day and 11,680 tonnes of brass recycled every year
- Embracing green philosophy with 2.6MW of solar energy produced.

dealer may also have all these products available in his portfolio, but then he is dealing with different brands. So what is unique about Jaquar is offering complete solutions under one single brand, with coordinated designs and all the services that the customer needs," he adds. Another unique strength is that the brand covers the entire customer segment, from the entry level or value segment to the middle segment, which is the premium segment, and to the top or luxury segment. Not many brands can compete with this kind of a portfolio, which is proving to be a huge plus for Jaquar. In fact, they are so confident in their business that both Rajesh and Parichay openly state that they welcome any competition, saying that it only shows them in a better light. Jaquar's dynamic business plans are helping them maintain their leadership position in the competitive Indian market, and may well see them flood overseas markets in the near future.

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