

Inside the mind of a creative maverick

Rahul Saraf, Managing Director, Forum Projects has constantly made waves with the uniqueness of his myriad projects, with an industry hanging on his every move

You have been dubbed one of the most creative real estate minds in the country. To what do you attribute this creative streak?

>> From the very beginning, the phrase "this is how it is always done" or "this is how everybody does it" has bothered me. Before the start of any project, I find myself questioning first and foremost the fundamental purpose that the project is meant to be fulfilling. Having clarified to myself this purpose, I have always attempted to redefine the process through which the project is then executed. And I think this has been the primary reason behind the "creative mind" epithet.

As an example, for my first office building Infinity Think Tank in Kolkata, it is this same deep thought that led me to question why office buildings in India have not yet been made to accommodate the upcoming IT boom in India. It was then 1994, and the very term 'IT/ITES' had not yet been coined. The global outsourcing of back-end support services to India had not yet begun. However, under the then central government, the doors to liberalisation had already been opened. In my travels I saw that all over the world, offices had shifted to a computer at every desk, and internet becoming a major means for inter-office and intra-office communication. I took a bet at that time that India will catch up very quickly. So I made Infinity as the first building in India with a dedicated 32-MBPS leased line connectivity, and internationally equivalent environment control systems in terms of temperature, dust, etc. I also wanted it to look modern, so that it becomes attractive to foreign companies looking to take advantage of the Indian liberalisation story. Hence, ACP sheets, which today you see on every building at every nook and cranny across the country, were used on a building facade in India for the very first time for Infinity!

Similarly, when I was doing my first shopping mall project, I realised that India hasn't yet started looking at malls as not pure shopping but also hang-out destinations the way



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the western countries do. I decided to gamble on the love of our country for Bollywood, and placed a cineplex on the top of my Forum mall in Kolkata. This was never done before in India, and at the time it sounded quite silly to spend so much on the structural cost of the building in order to accommodate a heavy cineplex on top. But I continued to believe that like a vacuum, the cineplex would draw people up through the mall corridors, maximising eye-

balls on our shop windows, and thereby supporting footfalls and sales. The rest, as they say, is history. Every single mall built in India thereafter had a cineplex sitting on its roof!

I have several such stories for almost all my projects. These are the stories that excite and motivate me. And perhaps that is the reason well-wishers graciously dub me as a "creative mind".

With real estate companies looking to build next great thing all the time, how do you stay relevant as a real estate developer? How do you ensure you that you've captured the mind of the buyer?

>> We tend not to worry about that. We worry about the purpose our project is going to fulfil. We then worry about what the best process would be to execute the project so that its opportunity to fulfil its purpose is maximised. We don't tend to worry about capturing the mind of buyers. If we build it right, they will come. And they will be more than willing to pay a premium for quality that they believe has been substantiated and not just advertised.

The Forum Group has always prided itself on doing something off the beaten path. As you once said, you'd rather "create the first Mercedes than accessorize a Fiat". So what is the group looking to pioneer next?

>> Up next for us is taking a look at how residences are designed in an expensive city like Mumbai. As prices have gone up over the past decade, developers have done little more than shrink the size of the apartments in order to match buyer affordability. Without revealing too much at this point, we are taking a deep-dive look at finding a solution which meets the buyer's pricing requirements, but at the same time does not compromise on the functional space in which they will be conducting their family life. We believe we are very close to cracking the code on this, and look forward to launching it with our next project in Chennai.

Made in India, for the world

Raman Mittal, Executive Director, Sonalika International Tractors Ltd. has blazed a trail of excellence with his tractors making waves on the global stage

From humble beginnings to becoming one of India's leading tractor brands, what do you think has helped to define the company's success?

>> The key to our success is the passion to be the best in anything and everything we do. This is the quality that has remained common through our three generations and unites us as one. Fundamentally, all our independent creative minds are at work, but, when it comes to decision making, we collectively pool our thoughts to arrive at the final solution. It is the passion that drives us to inquire and understand the exact needs of the farmers, and act upon to develop tailor-made products for them. In order to accomplish this, we have invested in state of the art manufacturing unit, cutting



edge R&D and a team of honed professionals to drive this process and achieve the best.

We at Sonalika have always believed that our customers and their unique needs are of prime importance. Having understood this fact that farmers across different regions of India growing different crops have different needs, which are unique in themselves and cannot be compromised with. Sonalika ITL follows this Customer centric approach to manufacture world class Heavy Duty Tractors and offer a wide range between 20 HP to 110 HP. This has given the company an edge over its competitors to earn trust of over 6 Lakh customers globally and also in becoming the 3rd largest tractor manufacturing company in India.

An extensive and established dealer network, which includes over 800 dealers across India has enabled the customers to have access to the products and related services at their doorstep; a very crucial factor for customer satisfaction.

From making tractors for India and now exporting across the globe, it has been quite an eventful journey. What has been the driver for this unique transition?

>> As mentioned earlier, our innate ability to understand the customer's unique needs and requirements has been a crucial driver for this growth. This has been our core philosophy since Sonalika was established. It has helped us to penetrate deeper into the Indian market and has helped us to expand our base in the international market. We have always strived for customer satisfaction and have made a first-hand attempt to understand the basic needs of the farmers, irrespective of the country they belong to.

Sweet dreams are made of these

Jayesh B. Desai, Chairman, Schmittlen has carved a niche for Schmittlen with his world-class offerings aimed at the discerning consumer

The idea of launching a premium, even luxury chocolate that is made in India is something that was largely unheard of. What drove you to do so?

>> I travel all across the globe and experience with delight the taste of Luxurious Swiss and Belgian Chocolates. The sheer experience of this taste made me start thinking that why the same experience can't be offered to millions of people in India.

This particular thought motivated me to conceptualize and conceive Brand Schmittlen - an offering of Premium luxury Real Chocolate. The same thought of mine has further substantiated post commissioning Pan India Consumer Research wherein the key consumer responses mirrored my thought. The desire of indulging into Premium Luxurious Chocolates, which



Switzerland, UK to name the few. Schmittlen Luxury Chocolates is fully inspired by Swiss Recipe and its delectable taste and with its premium pack graphics making millions of consumers falling in love with the Brand.

Why do you believe that consumers have taken to Schmittlen with such glee? What is it that sets the brand apart?

>> The key differentiator for Brand Schmittlen are the ingredients and its unique offering. Schmittlen Moulded Real Chocolates comes with two broad variants - Milk Chocolate and Intense Dark Chocolate. Both the variants further have different flavor offerings like Roasted Almonds, Rice Crispies, Orange Peel to name a few. To create its unique Real Chocolate Recipe, the key ingredient of

Chocolate - "Cocoa" is imported from Ghana which is the World's Best Source of premium Cocoa. All other ingredients like Cranberries are imported from USA, Almonds from California etc.

Brand Hoppits, which is another unique offering from the House of Schmittlen in Countline category comes with Nougatine and Granola Bars. The key ingredients for Granola Bars are made with oat flakes, granola, and comes with real fruit pieces like Cranberries, orange peel, almonds and enrobed with real dark chocolate. Similarly Hoppits also has first of its kind offering in India with White Nougat and Premium Golden Nougat. The perfection in creating a unique blend of Health and Taste made Hoppits one of the most preferred brand among today's youth and young adults.

tastes at par with Swiss Chocolate experience was the key trigger.

To live up to its full promise of offering "Luxurious Real Chocolate", I created a State of Art Chocolate Manufacturing Unit wherein the machineries are hand-picked from the Best Global Manufacturer of Germany,

An education unlike most others

Lina Ashar, Founder, Kangaroo Kids has built her success on the back of delivering an education that is offbeat yet highly effective

You have tasted great success and enjoyed wide acceptance with what began as an abstract form of education at Kangaroo Kids. What drove you to be an educationist off the beaten path?

>> When I was a young teacher, I entered my first school ready to teach strapping young teenage boys poetry. Unknown to me, the male Principal of the school and many teachers (mostly male) had placed bets on how long I would last. How long can a petite (yes I was petite then!) lady last against strapping (think of what a quintessential Aussie bloke looks like) teenage boys?

The rest is all history. I went on to become the favourite teacher of all the kids. These teenage boys learned poetry with gusto. They entered my classroom ready to learn and always on time. These Aussie bloke teenage guys cried when I left the school to come to India. From unruly lads they transformed into caring, loving, 'en-



gaged with learning' students. How does this stuff happen? High engagement? Discipline? This was the burning question. The answer to the stuff that makes highly engaged learning has been embedded in all our curriculum methodology.

You make a strong case for the holistic development of children as opposed to learning by rote. What is the philosophy behind this?

>> We all inherently know that everyone hires for attitude rather than aptitude. We also all know that our society has been hypnotised into believing that a student who is successful in school will be successful in life. In 1993, we studied people who failed in school but did well in life and studied, defined and articulated 'habits of mind' (perseverance, optimism, resilience etc.) that lead to success. When we designed the curriculum in 1993 we were at the end of the 'Indus-

trial Age' and on the verge of the 'Information Age'.

This year we ushered in a completely revamped 'new age curriculum'. One that will equip our children to face the age they will need to work and flourish in. This is known as 'The Conceptual Age' or 'Creative Age' or 'Age of Imagination'. We played a significant role in breaking the status quo of conventional schooling in 1993 and have this year reinvented our learning vision where the focus is on creativity, critical thinking (including being aware, mindful and responsible consumers), collaboration, problem solving, connecting the dots, imagination and conceptual reasoning.

Kangaroo Kids is probably among the first in the education sector to adopt the franchise model. What inspired you to do so?

>> My existing parents not only inspired me but drove me to this model. I started with no capital and as parents wanted to expand this philosophy to other suburbs and other cities, the franchise model was the only way! All initial partners were parents of the school!

The right man for the job

Sudhakar Adapa, Founder and CEO, Talentvouch is a man on a mission, looking to leverage the power of the crowd for smarter recruitment

In this day of age of widely available social media, how strong a tool is it for recruiters when it comes to getting the right candidate?

>> Social media is a double edged sword. While it captures the entire digital footprint of the candidate, the challenge is how to make sense out of the humongous amount of data that social media throws in. The other challenge is social media throws in data which is not validated, like for example a candidate can boast of a skill but how do you know whether he actually possesses that particular skill?

So the challenge for the recruiter is not data but validation of the data, if you can get that equation right then social media is a great tool for recruitment.

Social hiring as a practice is gaining wide acceptance. What would you say inspired to venture down this path of converging recruitment with a digital means of doing so?

>> Recruitment globally not just in India but globally is broke. It largely has



Talentvouch is an innovation on two fronts on sourcing and validation which is a potent combination which harnesses the power of the crowd

ways; one, by leveraging their social networks to refer candidates and the other leverage their knowledge to validate the skills of referred candidates. So it's not just data but validated data backed by the domain knowledge of the crowd.

So essentially Talentvouch is an innovation on two fronts on sourcing and validation which is a potent combination which harnesses the power of the crowd. While we are already operating in the human resources segment in recruitment and training, we believe Talentvouch has the potential to be a game changer in the recruitment not just in India but globally as well. We have set ourselves an audacious goal of building a global consumer internet company out of India and with Talentvouch we believe we have a good shot at it.

Sustainable Piping Systems Solutions: A Princely Approach

Parag Chheda, Joint Managing Director, Prince Pipes & Fittings Pvt. Ltd. talks about the company's future and its roadmap in a candid conversation

Today's consumer is more evolved than ever. How do you ensure delivering a zero defect product that ticks every box?

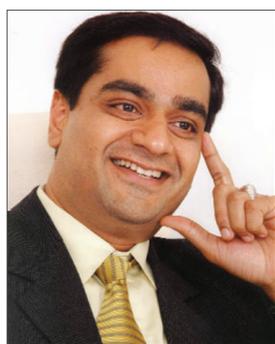
>> Prince Piping Systems has been in the industry for 30 years, manufacturing high quality piping systems that cater to the plumbing, sewerage and agricultural segments.

Prince has always been a lean company, honest to its well defined process and systems. With a strong emphasis on Little Q and Big Q, we endeavor to eliminate defects right at the very beginning and believe that this is the surest way to ensure product quality.

The company has evolved with times and has been successful in providing "best-in-class" technology to Indian consumers, at reasonable prices. Our customers and users continue to inspire us to achieve greater heights. Constant interaction at the grassroots level, helps us comprehend their needs better, and thus provide solutions which address their real concerns. What we are most happy about today's 'Smart Consumer' is his increasing awareness levels, clarity on needs, and willingness to pay for better quality. This drives a manufacturer, like us, to raise the bar further; especially when the consumer is spoilt for choices, local as well as global.

Since change is the only constant and evolution is inevitable, we will ensure that we keep pace with the changing market dynamics. Our industry has a number of players; while most focus only on quality, we decided to look for quality and beyond. We chose the challenging path of "Zero Defect" assurance to our customers. With this approach, we ensure that our products are guaranteed to have no leakages, just "Peace of Mind".

Skilled development is an integral part of our culture; we as a company have envisioned to educate plumbers, farmers and borers on the advantages of using advanced piping systems. The aim is to train and empower a minimum of 50,000 plumbers each year with 'good installation practices' - our small contribution to the 'Skill India Campaign'.



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This also helps us make our 'Zero Defect' process complete.

To me, standardization of standards, plumbing codes and SLA standards are some initiatives that this industry can significantly benefit from. As a corporate, we are ready to adapt to the best manufacturing practices, globally.

What are your thoughts on green plumbing? What does your company do in order to provide sustainable plumbing solutions?

>> 'Sustainable Living' is very close to our hearts and thus well reflected in our products. To add, the use of our products itself makes it green - saving water wastage. 'Every Drop Saved is a Drought Saved', especially when 40% water is wasted during transportation due to leaks and breakages in aging pipelines.

Our initiatives include usage of right polymers and compounding

process, shifting to Ca-Zn stabilizers in place of Pb stabilisers, recycling waste materials, deployment of energy efficient electrical drives, motors & pumps, etc.

By adopting techniques for optimized manufacturing, inspite of increased energy costs, we have been successful in reducing our energy consumption by 20% over the last 5 years.

How strong a role does R&D play for Prince Pipes' future plans?

>> In an industry that is fast changing, it is imperative that innovation becomes an integral part of the system. Improvement in product design and range is vital to cater to the varying preferences of customers. By doing so, it not only helps us to deliver better products, but also to arrive at calculated solutions, and provide the right product for different applications.

History of our introduction of new products like ULTRAFIT Dinlock SWR System, GREENFIT Glass-filled Triple Layer PP-R Plumbing System, DURAFIT manhole & chamber covers, Single-piece Nahani Trap, etc. is a testimony to this approach.

Continuing with our ethos of target driven operations, in the next 4 years, we look forward to gradually progress towards achieving 20% of our revenue through introduction of new products developed in-house by our R&D Team.

Our continued desire to learn is exemplified by our 'General Licensing Agreement' with WAVIN of Netherlands, which provides us with an insight into automation, research and an overall knowledge support for manufacturing more from less!

Taking things forward, in 2016, the market will witness our SILENTFIT plumbing system, specially developed for the hospitality sector, and also our OPVC pipes which will serve as a replacement for large diameter ductile iron pipes.

With the Government of India now investing in the making of 100 smart cities, this will throw up immense opportunities for us and for our research team.

Surely seems like happy times ahead.