

## Asian Retail – Changing Life Styles

I first attended the Asia Retail Congress in February 2011 where I had the privilege of accompanying the Managing Director of Rahimafrooz Superstores Bangladesh, the operators of the Agora Supermarket Chain to receive the retail excellence award.

I was delighted to be invited to be in the advisory panel of the Asia Retail congress 2012 and to be a speaker as I had lots to share from my experience of making Agora a winning supermarket chain during the last 31 months as the Chief Executive Officer [CEO] of Rahimafrooz Superstores.

I flew in from Dhaka to Calcutta and Calcutta to Mumbai on the 13<sup>th</sup> night on Jet Airways, which provides you a pleasing flying experience. The drive to the Taj Land's End hotel in the plush and comfortable BMW, with cold towels and mineral water offered by the well-mannered driver gave me a hint of things to come. The welcome at the hotel, check-in and being escorted to the room fitted with all the facilities of a modern 5 star hotel was a great beginning for the upcoming two days.

The beginning of the conference was very emotional with Indian national anthem video projected on the two giant screens in the hall. This was extraordinary with the instrumental version of the national anthem supported by visuals of differently-abled children singing it with sign language! What a treat that was!

Dr Prodipta Sen, Executive Director – Marketing, Retail & Corporate Affairs, Alpha G:Corp Development Pvt Ltd., the chairman of the conference welcomed the delegates and the speakers wishing everyone happy Valentine's Day. It was interesting to note that Valentine's Day is been positioned as a day for peace, harmony and unity, especially in areas where the original meaning of Valentine's Day has not been well accepted.

The key message from the presentation by Steve DelGiorno, VP (Asia Operations), Daymon Worldwide Inc. in his presentation "*Global Private Brand Trends*", was that retailers should develop private brands, not private labels. The penetration of private brands are growing at 15 – 20% per year led by retailers in Europe [35%] and the USA [22%] and retail brands such as Nordstorm [72%] and Walmart [44%] as it is beneficial for both retailers and customers.

Vincenzo J. Ciummo, Managing Director of Global for perception Research Services International, spoke on the topic: *Getting it right in-store: 'How to maximize the efficiencies of your POS investments'*. POS [Point of sales machines] are not only for checking out customers, but the data that is collected and the ability to link them to social media are been used by retailers to get the best out of the POS investment.

Veneet Kanaulia, GM – Marketing, Safexpress Pvt. Ltd. spoke on '*Supply Chain Strategies for Retail*' A key take away from his presentation was that; 'battle for market supremacy will not be fought between enterprises, but between supply chains. As such it is important to invest in developing supply chains that will make the biggest difference.

Anthony D'Onofrio, Vice President Global Accounts/ Source Tagging, Tyco Retail Solutions spoke on the topic "*Intersection between Information Technology (IT) and Security Technologies Equals Much Smarter Stores*". The key take-away was the use of CCTV [close circuit TV] and RFID [Radio Frequency Identification] for much more than reducing shop-lifting. He showed how this technology can be used for product search, shopper behaviours, merchandising decisions, check-out line management and better customer service.

I was up on stage next leading the HR Panel Discussion on "*Building Next-Generation Leaders*". The other panellists were Geetha Ghaneekar, Director HR & Head of Learning and development, Raymond Ltd, Aparna Ranaive, Head – HR & Administration, HyperCITY Retail (india) Ltd., Dheeral Dogra, National Director – Retail, BNP Paribas Real Estate & Infrastructure Advisory Services Pvt. Ltd., and Dr Virendra P Singh, Executive Director- Human Resources & Chief Pupil, RJ Corp /Devayani International Limited/Devayani Food Street Limited. All panellists made a short concept statement with an example, followed by a Question and Answer Session. The key take-away was the next generation leader should have both the adaptive [behavioural] and Technical Skills and leaders should create environments that will drive potential leaders to use the learning opportunities available to develop themselves into future leaders.

The speaker after lunch on day 1 was Robbie Robertson, Managing Director and Co-Founder, e2 and his Topic was "*Designing, developing and managing a truly memorable experience for shoppers*". Robbie highlighted that customers experience more than they understand and as such we need to create experiences that stimulates all 5 senses throughout the customer journey from arrival to departure when shops are designed.

The next speaker Tara Prabhakar, Retail Development Director, TNS Asia-Pacific presented the "*10 Myths of Traditional Trade*". She explained how some of the myths about traditional trade needs to be considered for the success of modern trade. While all myths were interesting, one that caught my ear particularly was; reducing the chaos will make traditional trade more enjoyable to shoppers.

The next two speakers, Peter Magill, Vice President - Global Development Retail, DHL Supply Chain spoke next on the topic: "*Agile Supply Chain Management in growth Countries*" and Rajkiran Kanagala, Vice President & National Head, Business Development, TCI supply chain solutions spoke on the topic: "*Retail Supply Chain and Logistics – In sourcing vs. outsourcing*". They highlighted that the logistic industry [\$ 82 billion] was larger than the IT industry [\$ 76 billion] but the logistic industry is highly challenged due to it not been

recognized as an industry, not organized and low margins. The IT industry is exactly opposite with regard to these three aspects. Outsourcing logistic will help reduce cost and improve delivery time to company's who can then focus on the core business. However it requires trust, patience, letting go of convenience and selecting the logistics supplier suiting the domain of the company.

The day ended with a Panel Discussion titled "*Forest Fire Consumerism*". The panellist were Dr Prodipta Sen, Executive Director – Marketing, Retail & Corporate Affairs, Alpha G:Corp Development Pvt Ltd., Sandeep Malhotra, CEO & Founder, home shop 18, Ajoy Krishnamurti, CEO, Shabnam Singhal, Founder and Owner, Sirius D&E and Debashis Mitra, Director Sales & Marketing, Mercedes Benz India Pvt Ltd. The use of social media by customers has enabled them to have a stronger voice creating a forest fire [rather than a bon fire] to spread good news as well as bad news. Many shoppers make videos of the items they purchase and post them on YouTube, send Twitter messages or update Facebook statuses to spread good or bad news. Such news spreads like a forest fire reaching millions of customers really fast.

Dulles Krishnan, Director Commerce Sales & Smarter, Growth Markets, IBM spoke on smarter commerce: An effective Strategy for the Empowered Customer. The talk focused on the use of information technology to empower the customer to take control and design his/her own shopping experience.

The retail award ceremony started after a short break. The chief guest was leadership guru Dr Marshal Goldsmith, Co-founder of Marshal Goldsmith Partners & Coach, best selling author, world-renowned thought leader and world-class motivational speaker. His key message was a challenge to the audience: Do you get feedback from your family about your leadership? If not how effective can you be leading your team at work? This was very thought provoking for many in the audience.

Among the many awards two Sri Lankan retail Chains, No Limit and Sun Up Supermarkets [Laugfs] won awards. In addition Mr Wegapitiya of Sunup Supermarkets received the retail excellence award for his contribution to the retail industry in Asia. The award ceremony was followed by dinner.

Day 2 started with Ankur Shiv Bhandari, MD (Indian Sub-Continent), Kantar Retail and Sadashiv Nayak, Joint CEO, Future Value Retail speaking on the topic: "*India Retail Landscape- Trends & Implications*".

Next was my presentation: "*The Leadership & Team work that makes a difference in retail Success – The Agora Success Story*". My presentation focused on the use of the elements of the Sensei Human Performance Index [<http://ranjandesilva.com/ranjans-research-projects/>]

The key message was the need to focus on the quality of communication, collaboration and interaction between human and physical assets of the company for its success. The Agora success story was used to illustrate the message.

Thereafter David Blair, Managing Director (South Asia), FITCH spoke on the new customer journey. His key message was the need to facilitate 3 activities of the customer when they come into a retail store; dreaming, exploring and locating. He used examples of Nike, Lego, Uniglo, Ikea and Apple stores to illustrate this point.

The next presentation was on personality development by lifestyle consultants Chaya Momaya, Director, Pagoda Advisors Pvt. Ltd and Sukanya Bose, Director, Planet Design (I) Pvt Ltd. They shared some important tips to enable the delegates to improve their personality to be more effective in the retail industry.

The conference concluded with closing remarks by the conference chairman.

Overall it had a great selection on speakers and topics and it highlighted how the developments in the retail industry change our lifestyles and quality of living.