

Pharmaceuticals specialist generates international success

Amber pharmaceuticals specialist Vitrum Glass has maintained strong customer loyalty for its niche Mumbai business for more than four decades, as Mr S S Parmar, Director and Sumit Gupta, Senior Vice President of Marketing explained exclusively to *Glass Worldwide*.

Empire Industries-Vitrum Glass was established to become India's leading manufacturer and supplier of amber glass bottles and ROPP caps for the pharmaceutical industry. Originally founded in 1929 to make ceramic tiles, it was during the early 1960s that Vitrum Glass first started to produce glass containers for the beverage and cosmetics sectors. Initially utilising semi-automatic manufacturing technology, this successful production transition is attributed to the organisation's influential Chairman at that time, Mr S C Malhotra, who accurately predicted the glass industry's growth potential in India.

By the mid-1970s, the area surrounding the Mumbai glassworks had become a manufacturing hub for many multi-national pharmaceutical organisations, so Empire Industries Ltd subsidiary, Vitrum Glass refocused to make pharmaceutical glassware instead. Subsequently, the pharmaceutical giants have relocated elsewhere but have continued to source much of their glass packaging requirement from Vitrum. And in the intervening years, the glassworks has continued to operate at the heart of one of the city's most prosperous real estate areas.

Current Director of the Vitrum Glass operation is Mr S S Parmar, who has been working in the international glass container industry for 37 years. He started on the production line at JG Glass in 1979, subsequently becoming Plant Manager and Technical Director. Spells followed at Universal Glass in New Delhi, ACI Glass Packaging in Australia and Kioo Ltd in Tanzania, all the while developing his knowledge of technical issues and plant management skills. Mr Parmar returned to India in 2009 as Vice President – Technical at Vitrum Glass, where he was promoted to President of the works and then Director of the Vitrum Glass division in 2011, with responsibility for overseeing all operations at the Empire Industries subsidiary. "It is an advantage for a technical person to manage the company because I know every customer, their businesses and challenges and they know me" he comments.

Senior Vice President of Marketing, Sumit Gupta has been associated with the glass industry for 15 years, the last 10 of which have been at Vitrum. "During this time, the way we do business in India and internationally has changed



Mr S S Parmar, Director (left) and Sumit Gupta, Senior Vice President of Marketing at Vitrum Glass.

completely" he says. "Vitrum is now more strategically focused and we run a more customer-centric organisation. With this outlook, changing demand etc cannot catch us unaware because we have a clear understanding of the markets."

An important mentor to both individuals was Vitrum's former Director for many years, Rajindar Singh, who was largely responsible for converting the glassmaker's facilities to fully automatic operation, overseeing its ongoing modernisation and its conversion to natural gas melting. He was also highly influential at the All India Glass Manufacturers' Federation, including a key role in lobbying the national government to permit the importation of advanced production technology. "He opened many doors" says Mr S S Parmar "but having retired in 2010, he passed away just one year later at the age of 84. Rajindar Singh was totally active within the company on a daily basis until he retired", a life-long philosophy that comes as no surprise to his many friends and colleagues throughout the world.

A FLAGSHIP ENTERPRISE

Empire Industries Ltd is a diversified business group with interests in real estate, construction, food and metal forming equipment etc. Vitrum Glass is the only manufacturing business, however and enjoys a flagship position within the group. "Being focused on manufacturing containers for a specific industry, we have consolidated our position as a supplier and have built a reputation as a reliable source" Mr Parmar explains. "Although a medium-sized company, we have a respectable position as a quality and organised producer of container glass." >



The Mumbai glassworks features four 8-section triple gob production lines.



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Dedicated to the production of amber ware from 5ml to 650ml capacity, the glassworks has been upgraded in recent years to feature a 150 tonnes/day furnace and four 8-section triple gob production lines. It operates at speeds in excess of some European factories and is described as the fastest plant of its kind in India. Some 350 people are directly employed at the site in central Mumbai, many having worked for the organisation for in excess of 10 years. This continuity has helped to build a strong base of manufacturing expertise.

It is anticipated that even higher productivity levels will be required from the existing melting furnace when next rebuilt in two-three years. "Our current location can accommodate increased capacity with the one furnace" Sumit Gupta confirms. "We have already modernised the hot end and are planning to invest significantly at

the cold end as well."

All forming machines were sourced from the Bucher Emhart Glass operation in Singapore and an agreement for energy saving devices has recently been concluded with Global Energy Technologies. Among the glassmaker's other leading international suppliers are Parkinson-Spencer Refractories (feeder expendables), Special Ceramics (refractories), Eclipse (furnace and forehearth combustion systems) and Glass Technology Services (glass technology support). And of its raw materials, natural soda ash is imported from Magadi Soda Co

in Kenya. "Selection criteria is based on the best in the industry, reliability and the supplier's long-term association with our organisation... and needless to say, the overall cost competitiveness for our sustainability" Mr Parmar confirms.

Close proximity to a seaport is a significant advantage to the fulfilment of export orders, with approximately 30% of production currently sold throughout South East Asia, the Middle East and Africa. These efforts are supported by the availability of uninterrupted power and natural gas supplies. "We are dominant in the market because we are so focussed" says the Vitrum Glass Director. "We are looking for further developments in Asia and Africa and even other continents are possibilities for the future. We will increase capacity accordingly and invest in the latest technology."

According to Sumit Gupta, clients are approached with a partnership. "We understand their particular needs and can meet them because we are the only manufacturer in India dedicated to making amber pharmaceutical containers. We have considered diversifying but our strength is our focus – customers know there is one manufacturer that will run amber bottles all through the year without changing to beer or liquor bottles. Having a contract with Vitrum Glass meets all around the year service."

These days, it is increasingly rare to find a manufacturer of Vitrum's size within Mumbai's city limits but the company is acutely aware of its responsibilities, staying away from energy sources that are harmful to the environment. "We always have environmental thinking in mind and have significantly reduced energy consumption" says Mr Gupta. "At 55% recycled cullet use, we are already significantly over the average in India but would like to improve further with a target of 70%." This target is extremely challenging, however because such high cullet collection levels are considered very difficult to achieve.

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Vitrum Glass is dedicated to the production of amber ware from 5ml to 650ml capacity.

RAISING AWARENESS

Although the popularity of amber glass as India's pharmaceutical packaging of choice has fallen to approximately 30% in recent years, Vitrum Glass has realised important growth in the same period. This can be attributed primarily to the company's success with increased international sales, although the company continues to work closely with the AIGMF to raise local awareness of the material's advantages and to regain market share. "AIGMF has been quite successful in its efforts and as an industry, we feel there is a good opportunity for glass to reclaim market share in the pharmaceutical market" says Mr S S Parmar.

This is one of several projects where India's leading glassmakers are working under the AIGMF umbrella to realise benefits for the industry as a whole, including soda ash anti-dumping duties, local life cycle studies and the wider promotion of glass generally. "AIGMF protects the wider interest of the glass industry by continuously interacting and creating a platform for discussion, as well as representing the glass industry to various governmental and non-governmental institutions" Mr Parmar adds. "It also gives us a platform to raise and share concerns as glass manufacturers with similar bodies across other countries that can help us create a global glass community."

The federation's transformation into a modern and more relevant industry trade organisation has been welcomed by the Vitrum Glass Director. "A lot has changed and we see a new beginning at the AIGMF but we still have a long way to go, since the industry faces many challenges relating to falling demand for glass. We need to educate society about the advantages of glass as a packaging medium."

Glass Worldwide is the AIGMF's preferred international journal in co-operation with *Kanch*, an arrangement which Mr Parmar believes benefits all parties. "*Glass Worldwide* is the magazine that keeps us updated on the latest trends and information from the glass industry worldwide. We keep a library of back issues... articles that relate to automation and furnace efficiency have been particularly useful to our business. *Glass Worldwide* is very popular among glass professionals in India and is often a common point of reference and discussion." ■

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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