

# AHEAD OF THE PACK

WHEN CEO **GOVIND BHANDARI** FOUNDED CLEARPACK GROUP 29 YEARS AGO, HE HAD LITTLE MORE THAN A GOOD IDEA, AND PLENTY OF DETERMINATION. TODAY, IT IS ONE OF THE WORLD LEADERS FOR END-OF-LINE PACKAGING AUTOMATION.

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**G**ovind Bhandari's drive and determination would put most other people to shame. While many of us used COVID-19 lockdowns as an excuse to sit on the couch and binge Netflix, CEO Govind, a passionate runner who has trekked to Mount Everest Base Camp and conquered Mount Kilimanjaro, climbed the 30 storeys in his apartment building seven times a day to keep fit.

This energy and insatiable ambition has always been present in everything that Govind puts his mind to. As a young man, a few years out of university and fed up with the company he was working for, he decided that he was more than capable of creating his own business. So in 1991, he quit his job and founded Clearpack Group.

"When we started, I wasn't so experienced, and I had no big ideas, no capital, no team, just a dream to build a great packaging automation company," he tells *The CEO Magazine*. "I never thought we might not succeed, though. I didn't have any doubts at any point. I was always confident we'd be successful."

Now, you can name the best consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies in the world and they are our customers. Walk into any supermarket and we have packaged almost all of the products."

Since that day, Clearpack has come a long way. Expanding from its roots in Singapore, it now boasts six factories in four countries and offices in 12. With customers in roughly 80 countries and supported by more than 500 people worldwide, Clearpack is truly a global brand. It manufactures and distributes packaging machines for food, beverages, personal and homecare products, and names Unilever, P&G, Nestle, Kraft, Kelloggs, Reckitt Benckiser, Henkel, BP Castrol, Coca-Cola, Bayer and L'Oréal among its clients.

"At the beginning, we had very simple operations of semiautomatic machines in Singapore," Govind says. "Today, we supply very high-speed, fully automatic packaging lines from primary filling all the way to end-of-line palletising to the top consumer companies in the world. Our decision to acquire and start factories in Europe, especially in Switzerland and Italy, was very important because we are seeing the »



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flywheel effect now – even though it took a lot of hard work to get started, it takes much less effort to keep it moving.”

But Govind admits that he doesn't view what he does as work; in fact, there's no other way he'd rather spend his days.

“As an engineering graduate, it's been a very satisfying journey for me because everything we do revolves around engineering – all of our automation, robotics solutions, everything,” he says. “In the business of building automatic solutions for CPG companies, you face new challenges daily. Each day, you get new products that need to be packed and handed differently. The speeds get faster and faster and the technology is changing constantly, so it's always exciting and I just love what we do.”

By investing in research and prioritising innovation, Clearpack has ensured that it remains at the vanguard of the industry – continually leading the pack in technological advances.

“I still remember the solutions that were very complex in the early days when we were building

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of technological developments in this industry has only continued to accelerate.

“The best advice that anyone has ever given me is, ‘You're dead without innovation,’” Govind says. “Especially today, in our industry, advances will make businesses that can't keep up obsolete quicker than ever before. So you can either complain about it or you can work harder, embrace it and do better than your competitors.”

Regardless of his own passion for Clearpack, Govind is under no illusions that without a dream team behind him, Clearpack would be a fraction of the company it is now. Indeed, the employees are the beating heart of the entire operation.

“You can have the best vision and strategy, but you need a passionate team to execute it,” he says. “The key is the people. Culture is equally important because it makes so much difference to your employee engagement, happiness, productivity and retention rate. We build complex lines and solutions so, without teamwork, it's just not possible.”

However, this culture of trust isn't exclusive to Clearpack's employees. Govind places enormous emphasis on the cultivation of collaborative partnerships, enlisting the help of other companies to produce an outcome that is mutually beneficial.

“There are so many different machines involved in our processes and it's not possible for any company to manufacture all of the machines, because each one is very specialised,” he explains.

“We've partnered with suppliers who understand our requirements very well and have built very close relationships with them. Clearpack doesn't like to make anything that can be done by other companies more efficiently or better. We concentrate on what we do best and outsource whatever else can be done more competitively by our partners, so that we can provide optimum solutions to our customers.”

Looking to the future, Govind isn't afraid of setting his sights sky-high, especially now that he's enlisted the help of someone who will be able to continue his legacy.

“My son Piyush has recently joined the business,” he says, smiling. “He's a graduate from Babson College in America, and I'm excited that he'll be able to take the business forward one day. We are already the leaders in Asia for packaging automation but in the long-term, I would like to see Clearpack Group be among the top five packaging automation companies in the world.

“That's my vision.” ■



machines and now everybody can easily make them,” he explains. “So it's great that we've moved up in the value chain and welcomed the technology, which can provide more complex solutions. Technology is rapidly changing the world and if you don't embrace it and use it to make improvements in designing, manufacturing, marketing and selling your product, you'll be gone in a very short period of time.”

Govind adds that over the nearly three decades that have passed since he founded Clearpack, the rate



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