

# Sweet smell of success

*Ben Hammersley, finance director of Godrej UK, tells Shipshape about the company's recent success stories, plans for future growth, and taking on the big brands.*



Godrej Consumer Products (UK) Ltd, known as Godrej UK, is a sales, marketing and distribution business, specialising in beauty and personal care products. It owns and distributes several well-known brands including Cuticura, Soft & Gentle, Bio-Oil, Riemann P2o and Pro:Voke Touch of Silver.

The company was founded as Keyline Brands in 1990 and was owner-managed until 2005 when it was acquired by the consumer products division of the Godrej Group, a large Indian conglomerate with listings on the Mumbai Stock Exchange. Keyline was Godrej's Consumer Products' first overseas acquisition,

but they now own many companies around the world, particularly in developing markets.

Godrej UK's strategy is to distribute on behalf of strategic partners and to acquire brands which they see have strong growth potential. "We buy brands from companies who no longer want them," explains Ben Hammersley. "We have an excellent record of turning around unloved brands and making them popular again."

For example, the company recently bought the Soft & Gentle brand from Colgate-Palmolive at the end of last year. "As a smaller company we are able to concentrate our energy on reinvigorating the brand. It is working and should allow us to almost double our turnover from where we were in 2011/12."

#### Investing in people

Ben explains that the Godrej Group is "very hands-off" and allows the management team to run the business fairly autonomously. In the past two and a half years the number of staff has increased from 33 to 54. "Our approach is to invest in good people upfront to help drive further growth. We are clearly seeing returns from getting good people early enough."

Despite the challenging economy in recent times, the company has grown significantly. In the past two years the business has seen double-digit topline growth and even better profit growth, despite challenges in the consumer products industry.

"The customer has become even more savvy, they are buying ever more on promotion, and we are competing against the big boys like Unilever, P&G and Reckitt Benkiser. It's a huge performance for a

company of our size to have achieved that kind of growth."

Ben puts the company's success down to a combination of excellent supplier and customer relationships, which allow them to "overplay their size", with "an innovative and entrepreneurial" approach to their thinking. For example, the company has engaged in original social media activities and developed unique new products by working with technology companies.

The company intends to continue its growth through further targeted acquisitions and continuing to grow its existing brands. "As we get bigger we will face various new challenges," says Ben. "Shipleys is helping us to look at how we integrate new brands and making sure we do maintain good processes as we grow."

#### How has Shipleys helped?

"Shipleys has been our auditor for more than five years and has excelled at delivering to our very short reporting deadlines," says Ben, who explains that as Godrej is part of a listed company it has to follow quarterly reporting in addition to the usual annual audit. "There has been good staff continuity and they have always completed the Group reporting requirements within two weeks of a period end, which is very challenging for any company to achieve."

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