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Fresh & Naturelle: Kunal Pabrai's multicore co that makes ice cream using only natural ingredients

BY [AMIT KUMAR](#), ET BUREAU | UPDATED: MAR 18, 2014, 12:34 PM IST

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Many an enterprise has been built on the ambition of youngsters who wanted to break free from family businesses and make their own mark. Kunal Pabrai, the owner of Rs 6.5 crore Fresh & Naturelle ice cream company, is one such person.

After completing his graduation from Jain College, Bangalore, in 2006, Pabrai joined EY's (formerly Ernst & Young) city office in its risk advisory section. While his career seemed to stabilise, the same was not true of his family venture, Tulika Ice Creams.

It struggled with day-to-day operations, battled price wars on the one hand, and labour issues on the other. Its market was poached by both national as well as local players. Finally, the company folded operations in June 2008, at a time when Pabrai was working at EY's Kolkata office.

When the company shut operations, Pabrai knew that he had to act. So, within three months, he quit his job and started working to help the company get back on its feet. However, the 29-year-old was sure that a new player would be able to survive in the ice cream market only if the product and the hotels and caterers, meant that the company closed the first year of operations with a turnover of a respectable Rs 60 lakh.

However, the 29-year-old was sure that a new player would be able to survive in the ice cream market only if the product and the brand managed to build a completely different identity. This is when the idea of selling ice creams made only from natural ingredients struck Pabrai. So, in August 2008, with a seed capital of Rs 3 lakh, he bought another smaller, but defunct, ice cream factory at Tollygunge, Kolkata, and spent a month bringing it back to life.

To ensure that the products were natural and the best in the country, he put in a lot of effort: the vanilla used in the ice cream was, and still is, sourced from Madagascar. The first ice creams rolled out from the factory by the end of October 2008. He decided to tap the non-branded market initially. "We had built a huge network of caterers and hotels during our days in Tulika, so I started by sending the products to them," says Pabrai.

The reaction was encouraging, and for the next six months, Pabrai continued using them to push his products. "I wanted to ensure that there would be a sustained and strong demand for our product before getting into the retail space," he adds.



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Around April 2009, the first counter was launched at a restaurant in Kolkata. This was just a stall within the premises of the hotel, and while Pabrai supplied ice cream, the restaurant staff handled the day-to-day operations.

This outlet, along with the supplies to hotels and caterers, meant that the company closed the first year of operations with a turnover of a respectable Rs 60 lakh. However, Pabrai knew that in order to grow, it was important for the company to expand. However, instead of spending heavily on setting up retail counters, Pabrai decided to use the franchise model, with the first franchise owned, franchise-operated outlet coming up in Kolkata in January 2010.

As the word spread, the company's reputation grew and it was able to find new customers even though the ice creams were 4-5 times more expensive than the regular ones. There was no looking back and the company expanded with franchise outlets across Kolkata and, currently, it supplies material to over 18 outlets in seven cities across the country. It plans to add two more franchises before the close of this financial year and look to record a revenue of Rs 6.5 crore. While they have one factory in Kolkata, Pabrai is also aiming to restart his family's ice cream factory near Kolkata by the end of 2015 in order to handle the rise in production.

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