

Indo National plans battery of home-care launches



CHARGED UP. Pavan Kumar BVS, Chief Operating Officer, Indo National Ltd

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Pavan Kumar BVS is on a 'national' mission: To realise the vision passed down to him by the third-generation leadership of Indo National Ltd (INL), namely take the over 50-year-old company and the Nippo brand into new product categories.

Founded in 1972, the Chennai-based firm, formerly known as Nippo Batteries, remained a joint venture between the late industrialist P Obul Reddy and Panasonic Corporation, until Panasonic's exit in 2012. The country's second largest manufacturer and seller of dry cell batteries, INL also trades in torches, emergency power products, and LEDs.

INL has chosen to pursue sustainability and long-term relevance rather than short-term gains, says Kumar. It seeks to build a business that thrives for decades through innovations in the battery sector, exploring adjacent markets, or expanding into new categories. Kumar, who joined as chief operating officer earlier this year, brings in over two decades of experience with companies such as Reckitt Benckiser, Walt Disney Company, GSK Consumer, and ID Fresh Food.

INDIAN BATTERY MARKET

India's dry-cell battery market, valued at about ₹1,500 crore, is dominated by zinc-carbon batteries (95 per cent), while alkaline batteries command just 5 per cent. It is the opposite elsewhere globally, with alkaline batteries holding 70 per cent of the market due to a longer lifespan and superior performance, even though they are more expensive.

India, too, is transitioning to alkaline batteries for improved quality and performance. The companies leading this transition will likely dominate the industry in the next two years. Currently, Eveready controls 50 per cent of the battery market, Nippo 25 per cent, and Panasonic and Duracell account for the rest between them.

INL targets a bigger market share in the alkaline segment with its new brand Nippo Thor, supported by a network of 3,000 distributors and 2.6 million outlets. The recycling of alkaline batteries is also more eco-friendly vis-a-vis zinc-carbon variants.

"We've launched nationwide campaigns, including metro train branding in Chennai and Hyderabad, and are focusing heavily on digital marketing to target younger consumers through e-commerce," explains Kumar.

Within 10-11 months of launching Nippo Thor, the company has gained 3-4 per cent of the market and seeks to generate 20-25 per cent of its business from alkaline batteries in the next 18 months. Nippo Thor is being marketed for use in high-powered devices like medical equipment and gaming consoles, as also everyday items like remotes and clocks.

LED, HOME-CARE BIZ

INL is diversifying into manufacturing LED and electrical products, including bulbs and fixtures. It is entering the mosquito racket market with its lithium-ion models; its recent launch, mosquito repellent Nippon Swooper, marks its entry into the home-care category.

Swooper's unique selling point is its use of insect repellent metofluthrin, a Japanese innovation that is both effective and less harmful than other chemicals. INL is working with a Japanese partner to import the chemical for Swooper, which has already seen success in European markets. "Initially we may source from third-party manufacturers, but, as we scale up, we plan to transition to in-house production," Kumar says.

The mosquito racket business, currently at ₹30-40 crore, is expected to grow to ₹100 crore in six months, driven by consumer demand for chemical-free products.

"In the home-care segment, we're focusing on air care products, since there are fewer established brands here, as against saturated categories like toothpaste," he says.

CAPACITY RAMP-UP

INL is also exploring launching rechargeable batteries that last 3-5 years, thereby reducing waste. It is also investing ₹15-20 crore to revamp its plant in Tada, near Sri City, for the manufacture of next-generation battery technology, energy storage systems and consumer electricals. With production capacity of 60 million batteries per month, INL is set to increase this by 20 per cent.

INL is a debt-free company, funding capital expenditure through internal accruals. Last