

# An Indian Brand

While larger players have been slow in expanding their wings, A&A Modular has turned out to be a sprinter of sorts; it is eyeing to double the store count within three years

Gyanendra Kumar Kashyap



**L**ITTLE DID ONE FATHOM THAT IN A SHORT SPAN of two years Aida Kitchens – the brainchild of A&A Modular Systems – would have 45 retail outlets, that too all franchises. “Our first store came up at Kottayam, in the southern state of Kerala, and since then there’s been no looking back,” shares a proud Gurleen Kaur ([gurleen@aamodulars.in](mailto:gurleen@aamodulars.in)), marketing director of the company.

The Mohali-based company set up by Kaur’s husband, Gurinder Pal Singh Kalsi ([gurinder@aamodulars.in](mailto:gurinder@aamodulars.in)), came into existence in 2004. It had started dabbling in premium customised kitchens right in the beginning through its Aura brand. And Kaur took time from her busy schedule to explain why it was necessary to set up yet another brand. “The Aida brand is for the non-premium segment, and it complements our Aura brand which represents premium kitchens.”

While the modular kitchen market in India is primarily dominated by foreign players, what perhaps differentiates Aida is the fact that it’s purely made in India. “Our strength lies in manufacturing,” Kaur avers. As a matter of fact, with a production facility spread over 1,50,000sft and equipped with fully computerised European machinery, A&A Modular System’s manufacturing unit at Baddi (Himachal Pradesh) is by far the most modern kitchen plant in the country, she claims.

“Inspired by the ever evolving European trends, we have used our extensive infrastructure to develop products which are at par with international design standards, and yet suit the Indian cooking systems,” she adds. “We intend to make Aida a legacy brand,” she says with confidence.

While the Aida network is spread across the length and breadth of the country, Kaur is hungry for more. “We plan to have at least 100 exclusive stores in the next three years,” she shares. At this point, a critical question that crops up is of plant capacity. She dismisses any doubts, saying, “At present we produce 150-200 kitchens a month, while our capacity is 450-500 kitchens a month.”

Clearly, Aida needs more outlets. “We are looking for a new set of franchises in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka.” What is it that she looks for in a franchisee? A potential franchisee, she says, should possess, “a passion for kitchens” besides fulfilling the primary requisites in terms of investment and space.

An Aida franchise usually needs an investment of ₹15 lakh to ₹18 lakh, and must have a floor space of over 1,000sft. The

store should display four-five kitchens, each in a different price range. “In the beginning a lot of handholding is required, and we take pride in educating our partners,” Kaur asserts. The kitchens, which come in a price range of ₹1.5 lakh to ₹12 lakh, are pre-drilled and factory-packed, thereby minimising installation time and dependence on labour. “Besides, we have a strong warranty policy as well as service support which our franchise partners really acknowledge.”

Does the company feel the heat of competition? “Oh, we love competition. In fact foreign players have in a way opened up the market,” she says, explaining that besides the product and delivery systems, it is how well the brand is built that makes the difference. She agrees that brand building is indeed a tough job, and for Aida it has been through word-of-mouth. “Goodwill of architects, and participation in major exhibitions have further helped us in gaining recognition.”

“It takes time, but quality sells,” she quips. “We understand that the Indian style of cooking is way different from rest of the world, and this insight has helped us formulate Aida. Indian kitchens are wet as we use a lot of water, unlike in European countries,” she goes on to explain, adding it was the need of the hour to give the market kitchens that could withstand these unique cooking conditions, and look chic. “Particle board cannot withstand Indian cooking, so Aida kitchens use termite and boiling waterproof hard board.”

A fully equipped and integrated manufacturing set up accords A&A Modular a massive competitive edge. Not only does it help to maintain unerringly the levels of quality with which it wants to be identified, but also enables it to ship within stipulated time frames and support franchisees. Kaur believes that this combination of strengths has allowed the company to routinely produce solutions that are not only luxurious but affordable too.

Prior to venturing into retail, A&A Modular had been a projects supplier. “We have worked closely with real estate developers like Emaar MGF, Sahara and DLF.” As it gears up for a broader market penetration, the company will be leaning on media vehicles to break the clutter. For the record, the company has opted for print media only once, that too in Kerala.

Going forward, it will be interesting to see how its marketing strategy pans out. But Kaur is sure of her sustainability mantra, “Mastering the manufacturing side of kitchens, with the ability to provide a variety of options to the customer, is the only way to grow.”