

Baring a summer truth

The Goa-based Grovemark Methods is making its mark



Grover: finding his place in the sun

For Raj Grover, chairman and managing director, Grovemark Methods Private Limited, summer is the best time of year. The sweltering heat increases the demand for the antidotes his company makes. It's hard to ignore the tagline for its main brand, Care Plus, a sunscreen lotion and spray, "When you bare it's time to care."

It all began in 1992, under the supervision of his late mother Urmila Grover, who was making cosmetic face packs and selling them to beauty salons in Mumbai. Made of herbal ingredients, these products caught the attention of foreigners. Realising that there was a bigger market in Goa, the sunbathers' hub, Urmila and her three children moved there by the late 1990s. Trawling his wares on his old bicycle through Goa's beaches, Grover gained valuable feedback. Shack owners, pharmacists, general store owners and foreign tourists observed that a sunscreen lotion with a range of sun protection factors was not available.

In 2006, holiday-makers in Goa were on the look out for sunscreen lotion once their own stocks were over. Realising the potential for a huge market, Grover, who has a degree in cosmetology from DIBM Cosmetologists' Institute, Germany, stepped in with

Care Plus, which combined traditional Indian herbal and ayurvedic ingredients through a modern process.

The Grovers approached the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) of Goa for a loan to start their business. Sceptical of the product's success, it sanctioned a loan of only Rs3.3 lakh. But sales to foreign tourists put the company on its growth track. Foreigners chose Care Plus because it was available in a range of SPFs – from SPF 2 (low protection) to SPF 40 (high protection). "We ensured that all types of skin were looked after," says Grover.

Expanding business

Today, Grovemark Methods is a Rs10 crore company, spread over 130 sq m at the Verna Industrial Estate, Goa. The entry of multinationals, such as Johnson & Johnson, Nivea and others notwithstanding, Grover is expanding his business. "Our USP is the herbal ingredients that we use as these are not harmful. Foreign tourists apart, Indians too have become aware of such sun protection."

With demand for Care Plus sunscreen lotion touching 80,000 bottles during the summer, Grover has expanded his range with Care Plus Kids, Care Plus Sunblock cream,

Hydem Oil, a tanning oil spray, Skin-O-Tan tanning spray, and After Sun, a moisturiser. Skinova day cream and night cream battle wrinkles. With prices ranging from Rs70 to Rs1,000, depending on the ingredients, which include aloe vera gel, calendula oil and plantago, the products' gross revenues ranging from Rs70 lakh to Rs85 lakh annually.

Grovemark exports its sunscreen lotion to the UK. Endorsements of the products have come from F. Hoffmann of Switzerland while foreign tourists regularly return home with Grovemark products, leading to more overseas enquiries. Demand for Grovemark's moisturisers, sunscreens and shampoos have come in from Thailand, Malaysia, Dubai and Kuwait too.

To meet stepped up demand it is expanding its factory space from 130 sq m to 1,400 sq m with an investment of Rs1 crore. This will increase production capacity to 2.5 lakh bottles a month from the current 1 lakh. It is also increasing its product range of 80 to include those that fight acne and dry skin, cleansing lotions, toners and an anti-pollution and freshness gel.

While Grovemark made a mark initially because of its white-skinned clientele's love of a good tan, there have been enough studies raising awareness in India about the harmful effects of the sun's rays. These have given the sun protection lotion industry ample reason to flourish locally too. For example, research in December 2009 by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, found that 9 lakh Indians are diagnosed with skin cancer annually. Dr. P. K. Julka, professor of oncology, AIIMS, points out that acquiring a tan has to go hand in hand with precautionary measures against excessive exposure to heat and sunburn, such as covering the body and using proper lotions with ingredients that do not have side effects. Says Dr. Ramesh Sarin, senior oncologist, Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, "It may be fashionable for the youth to wear the minimum of clothing, but there is the inherent danger of contracting skin cancer by not using a sunscreen lotion." Such pronouncements are the reason Grover need not sweat at all.

♦ ROBIN ABREU