



NOAHS ARK CHEMICALS LTD

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Right chemistry

In three years, Bharat Bhardwaj has established himself as one of the chemical industry's leading players.

When Bharat Bhardwaj started Noah's Ark Chemicals in 2001 he vowed to conquer the chemical distribution sector. But like most entrepreneurs, he initially struggled to make an impact. "I was working from my bedroom with one computer, two telephones and a fax line," Bhardwaj said. "That was it."

Nevertheless, three years on Bhardwaj is close to fulfilling his ambition. The company, which imports and exports chemicals used in the foam and paint industries, recorded a £5 million turnover last year. The location has also improved, with the company situated in offices in Cambridge.

Bhardwaj believes demand in China has contributed to the company's rapid growth. "You often hear about the Chinese market, especially with the recent coverage of the Rover demise," he said. "The fact is that 10% market growth is coming from Chinese companies, while European firms are only contributing between 1-2%."

Bhardwaj's eight-year stint in the industry has also aided the company's rise to prominence. Indeed, after studying for a PhD in chemical engineering, Bhardwaj made numerous contacts while working as a trader in the chemical sector. "It's a specialised area containing a small community of people where everyone knows each other," he said. "You only tend to buy from people that you know, so it can be difficult for anyone who is new to the industry."

The company's financial figures have exceeded expectation, according to Bhardwaj. Nevertheless, he admits its success at this year's Queen's Awards is the greatest achievement to date. The company was shortlisted in the international trade category after Bhardwaj's sister applied for the competition, which recognises strong business performance. It eventually won for exporting chemicals to the European Union, China and the US.

"You always think that other companies will win the award and never believe that you could be selected," Bhardwaj said. "We thought, 'why not give it a go and see what happens' and couldn't believe it when we won."

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For Bhardwaj, the company's three employees deserve credit for its award winning success. "It's my employees that have guaranteed this success, and not me," he said. "Without them, I would never have come this far."

Bhardwaj's mother was also sounded out for praise. Indeed, after deciding to start a business, Bhardwaj struggled to secure funding. His mother, however, was more supportive than the banks, and sold her shop to finance Bhardwaj's venture. "I started this company as a family business using funding that was given to me by my mother," he said.

Nevertheless, Bhardwaj's mother revealed her business acumen after striking a deal with her son. "She sold the shop, and I agreed to give her some money each month in return," Bhardwaj said. "It was a nice start and helped me get the business off the ground, but it wasn't a golden handshake."

Bhardwaj admits the pressures of running a company make it difficult to find time for his family. "It's not easy, which is why people who want to work 9-5 shouldn't start their own business," he said. "It requires dedication, and there's no compensation for the amount of time you spend on the company."

But Bhardwaj believes striking a work-life balance is essential for any owner-manager. "Whenever I go on business trips, I always try to take my family," he said. "It gives me the chance to spend time with them, which is really important. You need to have that balance in life."

The next step for the company is to continue expanding and live up to its award winning success, according to Bhardwaj. "I'm looking for more quality people to join the business," he said. "The rate of growth has already been spectacular, but potential clients will now expect us to progress even further after winning the Queen's Award. But that's just a pressure that comes with success."