

All in good taste

Cofresh, an award-winning foods business, is going from strength to strength, all with a little help from friends and family. By **Tim Chapman**

Cofresh is an award-winning HW client that has brought authentic Asian tastes into the mainstream. And the family-run snack foods firm is now preparing for further growth with a new purpose-built factory and big international expansion plans.

Founded in 1974 by Dineshbhai Patel and his wife, Cofresh began its life making traditional snacks for local clubs and shops. The business grew as family members joined – including sons Priyesh and Minesh in 1997. Dineshbhai remains active in the firm and recently received the lifetime contribution award from the Leicestershire Asian Business Association.

With Priyesh leading business development and Minesh leading production, Cofresh has steadily expanded its product range of crisps, nuts and mixes, and diversified into areas such as health and beauty products. “It’s every director’s vision to go and expand as much as they can,” says Priyesh. “We’re doing very well but we’ve not geared ourselves up to make it a risky business – we sleep soundly at night.”

Muscling in

Growth has been helped by demand from the major supermarket chains for products that will both attract customers from ethnic communities and satisfy the increasingly adventurous tastes of the mainstream market. Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Asda, Morrisons and Waitrose all carry Cofresh’s snacks now.

“We’re considered by the multiples to be the best company to approach for the mainstream ethnic market because we’ve met their demands,” continues Priyesh. “Our competitors tend to concentrate on their own cultural communities and groups, but we serve all the Asian communities and try to do more in the mainstream market, although we don’t change our recipes to suit the western palate.”

The spicier ranges, such as the hot balti mix, are actually among the most popular. “My father is always complaining it’s too hot, but there’s a huge consumer base that loves it,” he adds.

Some supermarket suppliers complain about the pressures put on them by the multiples, but Priyesh takes a realistic view: “There are pressures to give them promotions, but it’s a matter of being partners with them. If you can boost sales, then everyone’s happy. Margins are tighter than with independent stores, but the volumes are obviously much higher.”



The Duke of York meets the Patel family, founders and managers of food company Cofresh

Family planning

HW has advised Cofresh throughout its expansion. Appropriately enough for such a strong family firm, the uncle of HW director Manish Patel has acted as accountant for the business since it launched in England in 1974. Manish continued the relationship when he took over the business and brought it into the HW Group.

“HW have been with us for many years and they’ve always been instrumental in our growth,” Priyesh says. “Without them, there are a lot of things we wouldn’t have been able to accomplish. Our new factory was purchased through a scheme organised through HW. We were very tight on time but they managed to pull it off in just two weeks.”

The new multi-million-pound factory was opened in November 2006 by the Duke of York. The 55,000 sq ft integrated manufacturing plant is greatly increasing the firm’s production capacity.

Now with around 50 employees, Cofresh is set for great things. The company is increasing export activities and has set up a sales office in Australia. At home, the company is developing more products and sourcing products from other manufacturers to sell through its customer network. “That will drive sales strongly this year,” says Priyesh. “After all, there’s only so much bombay mix you can sell.” ■