

BUSINESS FRONTIER

The Leading Voice of Business Excellence

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COVER STORY

Steering Forth a Revolution in Packaging

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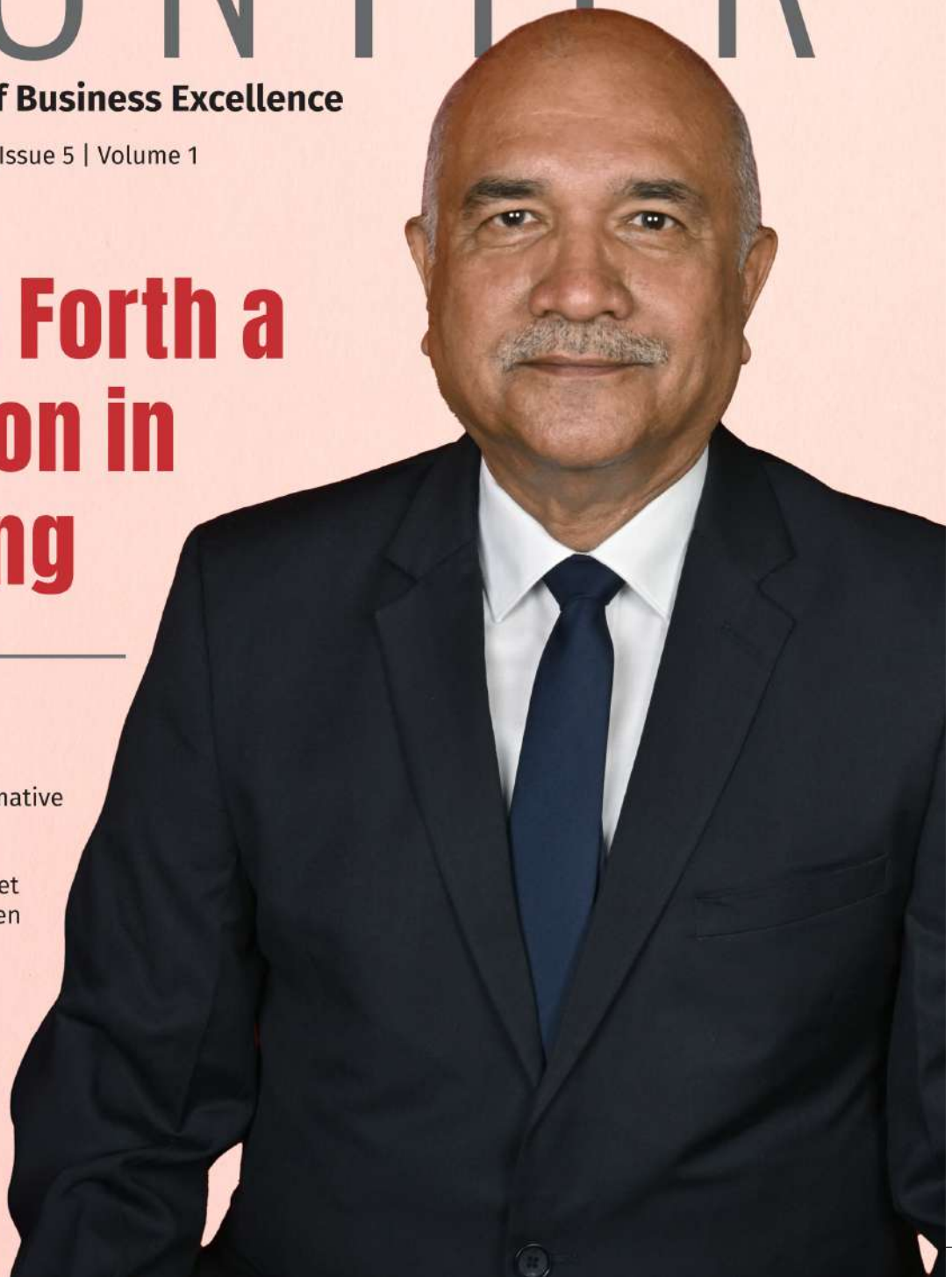
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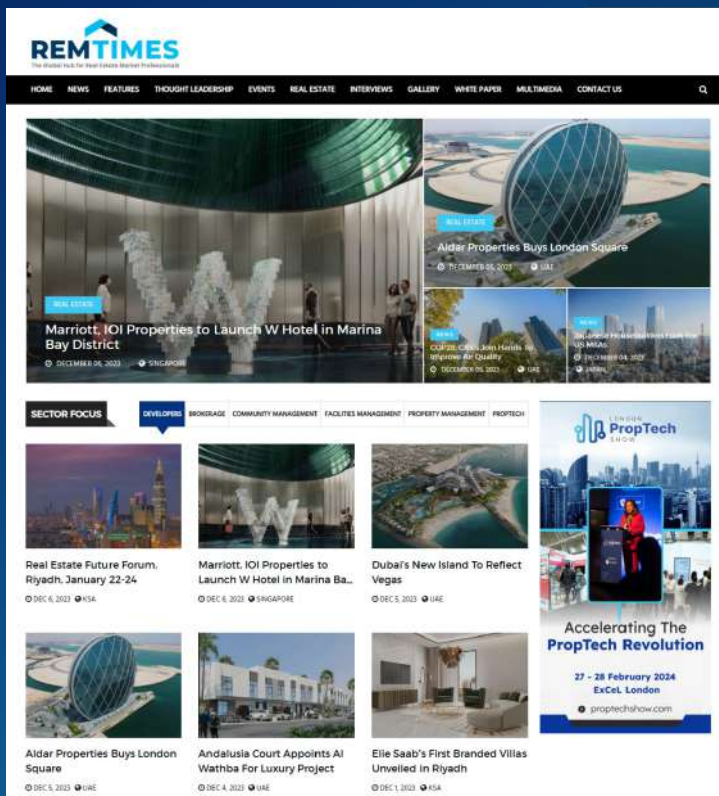


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From the EDITOR

Happy Reading!

Dear Readers, _____

As we wrap up yet another whirlwind year, it's hard not to reflect on how much the world around us continues to evolve. Business today is no longer just about profits or products—it's about purpose, resilience, and the ability to adapt to change. That's the essence of this final edition in the debut year of **Business Frontier**.

In these pages, you will meet leaders who inspire, challenge norms, and redefine success. From the trailblazing women breaking barriers in industries like finance and technology to entrepreneurs who've turned personal passions into global brands, every story here is a reminder of what's possible when vision meets determination.

What struck me most while putting this issue together is the human side of every success story. Take our cover story, for instance — a compelling interview with Ranjan Munshi of Pioneer Enterprises. His journey is a testament to resilience, showing how he transformed some of life's toughest moments into a springboard for innovation in the packaging industry.

Equally inspiring are the stories of Mitsuru Nakata, President & CEO of Nakata Manufacturing, and Sho Muraki, SAP Consultant and Chief Sales Officer at Anfini Inc. These stories remind us that behind every successful venture is a deeply personal story—one of challenges faced, lessons learned, and victories celebrated.

As we head into 2025, I hope this edition leaves you with not just ideas but also the inspiration to pursue your own goals, whatever they may be. Whether you're leading a team, launching a startup, or simply looking for fresh perspectives, I hope you find something in these pages that resonates with you.

Thank you for being part of the first year of our journey at **Business Frontier**. Here's to a new year filled with opportunities, growth, and stories worth telling—and to many more inspiring years and editions ahead.

Until Next Time. Happy Reading!



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EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF HOSPITALITY

Julianne Holt-Kailihiwa, CEO of Sumo International Inc., LLC, stresses upon the importance of mentorship and networking for women in hospitality



The hospitality industry offers a vibrant and dynamic career path for women. However, navigating this path can come with unique challenges. At **Sumo Sushi & Bento**, we are dedicated to empowering women and providing them with the tools and opportunities needed for career advancement. Here, I share some personal insights and advice for women pursuing careers in hospitality, emphasizing the importance of mentorship and networking.

A Culture of Continuous Learning

In the fast-paced world of hospitality, continuous learning is crucial. The industry is always evolving, with new trends, technologies, and customer preferences emerging regularly. To stay ahead, it's important to embrace a mindset of lifelong learning. Seek out training programs, workshops, and certifications that can enhance your skills and keep you updated on industry developments.

At Sumo Sushi & Bento, we prioritize continuous learning by offering our team access to various educational

resources. This commitment to ongoing development ensures that everyone is well-equipped to meet the demands of the industry and deliver exceptional service.

The Power of Mentorship

Mentorship plays a pivotal role in career growth, especially in the hospitality industry by sharing their experiences, offering valuable advice on navigating career challenges. For women, having a mentor who understands the specific obstacles they may face can be particularly beneficial. Supporting our female team members by fostering a supportive environment where women can thrive and achieve their career goals.

Networking: Building Connections

Networking is essential for career advancement in hospitality. Building a strong network can open doors to new opportunities, provide access to industry knowledge, and offer support from peers and mentors. Engage with industry associations, attend conferences, and participate in networking events to expand your professional connections.

We encourage our team members to network both internally and externally. By connecting with industry leaders and peers, our employees gain valuable insights and opportunities for collaboration and growth.

Developing Strong Communication Skills

Effective communication is a cornerstone of success in hospitality. Whether it's interacting with guests, leading a team, or collaborating with colleagues, strong communication skills are vital. Focus on honing your ability to articulate ideas clearly, listen actively, and engage with others in a meaningful way.

Embracing Growth Opportunities

Stepping out of your comfort zone and embracing growth opportunities is key to career advancement. We are committed to nurturing talent from within by providing our female team members with opportunities to take on new responsibilities and advance their careers. By promoting from within, we create a pathway for growth and development that benefits both our employees and our organization.

Our Industry Today

The hospitality industry today offers a wealth of opportunities for women who are committed to their professional growth. By embracing continuous learning, seeking out mentorship, building strong networks, developing communication skills, advocating for themselves, and embracing growth opportunities, women can achieve remarkable success in their careers.

Our management teams are dedicated to supporting the career advancement of women in hospitality. Through our commitment to mentorship, networking, and continuous development, we empower our female employees to reach their full potential and thrive in their professional journeys.

EV SHIFT SLOWS DOWN CAR SALES IN EUROPE



European car sales are slowing down, forcing big car companies like Ford and Volkswagen to cut costs. Car sales in October only grew by a tiny bit, with some countries like France, Italy, and the UK seeing fewer cars sold. Even Germany, Europe's biggest car market, didn't see a big increase.

One big reason for this is the shift to electric cars. This change isn't happening as quickly as expected, and people are finding it harder to afford cars because of rising prices.

To save money, Ford is cutting thousands of jobs, and Volkswagen is

considering closing some of its factories. The UK is a bit of an exception. Car sales there are up because the government is offering big discounts on electric cars.

In Germany, where Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government scrapped aid late last year, EV sales declined 4.9 per cent in October, and are down more than a quarter after the first ten months. Porsche AG and Mercedes-Benz Group AG have dialled back their EV ambitions in recent months, citing slower-than-expected momentum for plug-in models. With stricter rules coming up next year, car companies that don't sell enough electric cars could face big fines.

Many people are now choosing hybrid cars, which use both gas and electric power. This is helping companies like Toyota, whose hybrid car sales are increasing. Overall, the European car market is facing tough times, and companies are having to adapt to these changing conditions.

"As we head towards the end of the year, carmakers are increasingly rolling out discounts and deals to sell off any unsold stock," said Felipe Munoz, Global Analyst at Market Research Firm JATO Dynamics in a separate statement. "This is helping registration figures stabilise and shouldn't be mistaken as an indication of market recovery," he added.

‘We Want Our Staff to Feel Empowered’

Mitsuru Nakata, President & CEO of Nakata Manufacturing, talks about the importance of maintaining integrity and fostering a creative culture

Over the last 11 years, **Mitsuru Nakata, President & CEO of Nakata Manufacturing**, has led the company into its second century of innovation and growth. As the fifth-generation head of the family-owned business, Nakata has transformed the company, integrating cutting-edge technology and engineering excellence to stay competitive in the evolving manufacturing landscape. Successfully blending tradition with modernity while embracing technological advancements, Nakata’s strategic vision and commitment to fostering a culture of creativity and innovation have positioned Nakata Manufacturing as a leader in the global market.

In an exclusive interview with **Business Frontier**, Nakata discusses how the 100-year-old company adapts to market shifts by merging hardware with software for innovative solutions, and emphasizes the importance of fostering a creative culture, maintaining core values of integrity, and continuously focusing on customer satisfaction.

Can you share some highlights of your professional journey and the experiences that have shaped your career?

I have been with Nakata Manufacturing for the past 10 years. Before joining the company, I worked at a Japanese trading firm where I was responsible for finance, accounting, and project management. It was quite different from the manufacturing industry, but I found my way to Nakata after my father encouraged me to join. At first, I wasn’t particularly passionate about manufacturing, but as I gained experience, I grew to appreciate the engineering, design, and innovation involved in our industry.



You mentioned that your father encouraged you to join Nakata. Did you always have a dream of working in this field, or was it more of a natural progression for you?

To be honest, I didn’t always dream of entering manufacturing. My father’s influence played a big role in my decision to join, but initially, I didn’t understand the full extent of the industry. However, over the past decade, I’ve come to realize how important and meaningful this field is. I’ve developed

a deep respect for the engineers and designers who create the machinery and technology that power our world. It’s a very rewarding career.

Nakata Manufacturing has been around for over a century. How has the company adapted to changing times while preserving its legacy?

Nakata was established over 100 years ago, and I’m currently the fifth generation leading the company.

“
While Japanese culture has historically been associated with long work hours, I think the younger generation is starting to embrace a healthier balance.”

Our founder’s philosophy of integrity and reliability remains central to our operations today. While the industry has evolved, we’ve maintained a commitment to innovation, always seeking to apply new technologies in our products. Our legacy is built on trust with our customers, and that’s something we strive to uphold in everything we do. Despite changes in the market, our core values of integrity and contribution to society guide us forward.

How do you ensure that Nakata remains innovative and competitive in the market, especially given the challenges the manufacturing sector faces today?

The manufacturing industry, particularly in Japan, has faced its share of challenges, including a declining workforce and reduced activity in some sectors. However, Nakata’s approach has always been to combine engineering excellence with cutting-edge technology. We’ve integrated both hardware and software into our solutions, which sets us apart from other manufacturers that may focus only on one or the other. By merging these two aspects, we create unique products that offer advanced functionality. Our goal is to motivate our team, keep them engaged with new ideas, and continuously push the boundaries of what’s possible in manufacturing. This combination of hardware and software is one of the reasons our products stand out in the market.

What specific strategies do you use to foster a culture of creativity and new ideas?

At Nakata, we prioritise creating an atmosphere where free discussion is encouraged. We want our staff to feel empowered to trust their potential and knowledge. It’s also crucial that our team loves what they do, as passion often leads to innovation. We strive to set

concrete goals and paint a clear picture of the future, helping our employees see the value of their contributions. By showing them the potential of our company and industry, we inspire them to aim higher and think creatively. I believe that innovation thrives when people are motivated and see the bigger picture.

In terms of technological advancements, how do you work towards improving your offerings?

We are actively implementing the latest IT technologies and software solutions to provide our customers with higher-value services. For example, we have developed a system that collects data from our machines and monitors their current status in real-time. Through this system, we aim to help optimize our customers’ operations and enable preventive maintenance. Additionally, if any issues arise on-site, analysing the historical data allows us to implement appropriate measures. Furthermore, we believe this will enable us to provide more accurate and rapid service support even for remote locations.

Nakata Manufacturing has had an impressive legacy. How do you maintain a balance between preserving this legacy and adapting to modern demands?

Our philosophy of integrity and reliability, which has been passed down through generations, remains at the heart of our operations. However, we also recognize the need to innovate and adapt to changes in the industry. Our company’s success lies in our ability to integrate new technologies while staying true to our values.

Over the years, Nakata has evolved from a company that was primarily into the blacksmithing of agricultural tools (forging) and signal safety for the Japanese rail business to one that designs and manufactures advanced machinery. We focus on continuous innovation, ensuring that our products meet the ever-changing needs of our customers. This balance between tradition and modernity is crucial for our long-term success.

What sets Nakata Manufacturing apart from other companies in your market?

Nakata stands out because we don’t just manufacture machines; we design

and engineer solutions that are highly customised to the specific needs of our clients. While some competitors focus on smaller machines or lower-cost options, Nakata, in addition to focussing on small-scale equipment, also specialises in high-quality, large-scale equipment, which requires significant investment.

We are committed to providing excellent customer support, ensuring that our products have a long lifecycle and that we offer maintenance and parts replacement as needed. This focus on quality, reliability, and customer service helps us maintain our competitive edge in a challenging market.

As Nakata expands internationally, how do you create value for foreign markets from Japan?

We leverage our extensive network of international partners, as well as our participation in global trade associations, to maintain strong relationships with customers and suppliers around the world. For example, we participate in the ITA (International Tube Association) and attend major industry exhibitions in places like Germany every two years. These events allow us to showcase our innovations and stay connected with key players in the global market.

Although Nakata’s headquarters is in Osaka, we’ve installed our products in over 10 countries, and we’re continuously looking for new ways to expand our reach. Our long-standing relationships with partners and our focus on providing solutions that add real value to customers are key to our international success.

How do you maintain a work-life balance, especially in a demanding industry like manufacturing?

Work-life balance is very important to me. While Japanese culture has historically been associated with long work hours, I think the younger generation is starting to embrace a healthier balance.

Personally, I find joy in spending time with my family. I have a young son, and I try to make time for him and my wife. It’s crucial to find harmony between your professional and personal life, and I believe that if you love both your job and your family, you can achieve a sense of balance. For me, a fulfilling career and a happy family life go hand in hand. It’s about loving what you do and finding joy in your personal life as well.

Steering Forth a Revolution in Packaging Solutions

Ranjan Munshi, Founder & Managing Director of Pioneer Enterprises, delves into the company's commitment to redefining packaging through innovation, sustainability, and customer-centric solutions.

In an era where consumer habits and technological advancements are rapidly evolving, Ranjan Munshi stands out as a visionary leader in the packaging industry. As the Founder and Managing Director of Pioneer Enterprises, he has dedicated his career to transforming packaging from a simple necessity into an integral part of the product experience. With an engineering background and a passion for innovation, Ranjan identified a significant gap in the packaging sector early on. This awareness ignited his ambition to elevate packaging standards, emphasizing sustainability and functionality in every solution.

Since establishing Pioneer Enterprises in 1997, Ranjan has driven the company to become a key player in India's packaging landscape. His commitment to innovation and customer-centricity has not only shaped the direction of his company but has also made a lasting impact on the industry as a whole. Under his leadership, Pioneer Enterprises has become synonymous with quality and forward-thinking solutions, reflecting Ranjan's belief that packaging should not merely protect products but also enhance their presentation and safety.

In recognition of his outstanding and invaluable service, Ranjan Munshi has been conferred Honorary Membership of the Indian Institute of Industrial

Engineering, a testament to his contributions and influence in the field. In an interview with Business Frontier, Ranjan speaks about his success story in the ever-changing world of manufacturing and packaging.

What inspired you to enter the packaging and manufacturing industry?

I entered the packaging and manufacturing industry driven by a vision for innovation and disruption. At the time, I recognized a significant gap in the packaging sector, which was often neglected and lacked the value addition it truly deserved. Having started my career in engineering and moved through various sectors, I eventually realized my passion lay in packaging.

My inspiration can be traced back to the early years of my career when I worked in different industries, including engineering and office automation. I noticed that packaging was crucial for both product protection and branding, yet it was often treated as an afterthought. In 1997, I founded Pioneer Enterprises with a mission to elevate packaging from mere utility to an integral part of product presentation and safety.

Our company's name reflects our commitment to pioneering innovative solutions. I wanted to ensure that we weren't just another player in the

market; we aimed to provide real solutions. Our initial focus was to act as a transit damage solution provider, ensuring that products reached their destinations safely and efficiently. This foundational belief continues to drive us today.

What factors motivated you to start Pioneer Enterprises?

The primary motivation behind starting Pioneer Enterprises was survival—both for myself and my family. After spending 14 years in a corporate role, I found myself without a job and realized that I needed to take control of my future. With my background in engineering and experience across various sectors, I felt confident in my ability to make a meaningful contribution to the packaging industry. This journey of resilience and determination continues to inspire me, and I hope it serves as motivation for others as well.

When I founded Pioneer, I had just ₹70,000 in capital and a small team of employees. I saw immense potential in the packaging industry, especially because few people were giving it the attention it deserved. This gap presented a significant opportunity for innovation and disruption. One of my early successes—securing a major order from Bajaj Auto for scooter packaging—affirmed my belief in the venture and solidified my commitment to the company's growth.

“ Consistency and perseverance are crucial. You may face challenges and setbacks, but maintaining a long-term vision and commitment to your goals will help you overcome obstacles. Most importantly, embrace innovation and remain open to new ideas and approaches. ”

Who are your primary customers, and how do you identify and reach them?

Our primary customers include industries that heavily rely on manufacturing, such as Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies, and pharmaceutical firms. We have built strong, long-term relationships with some of the biggest names in the industry, including Reliance Jio, Tata Motors, and Hindustan Unilever.

Identifying and reaching our customers is a multifaceted process. Initially, we focused on understanding the unique needs of our clients through direct engagement and relationship building. As we expanded, we developed a dedicated marketing team that employs both traditional and digital marketing strategies to engage potential clients. In our early days, we relied on mailers and direct outreach; today, we leverage digital platforms to boost our visibility and broaden our reach.

We also participate in industry events and trade exhibitions, which provide excellent opportunities for networking and showcasing our innovative solutions. Our first-mover advantage, coupled with our reputation for quality and innovation, has made it easier to attract and retain top-tier clients.

What sets Pioneer Enterprises apart from its competitors in the packaging industry?

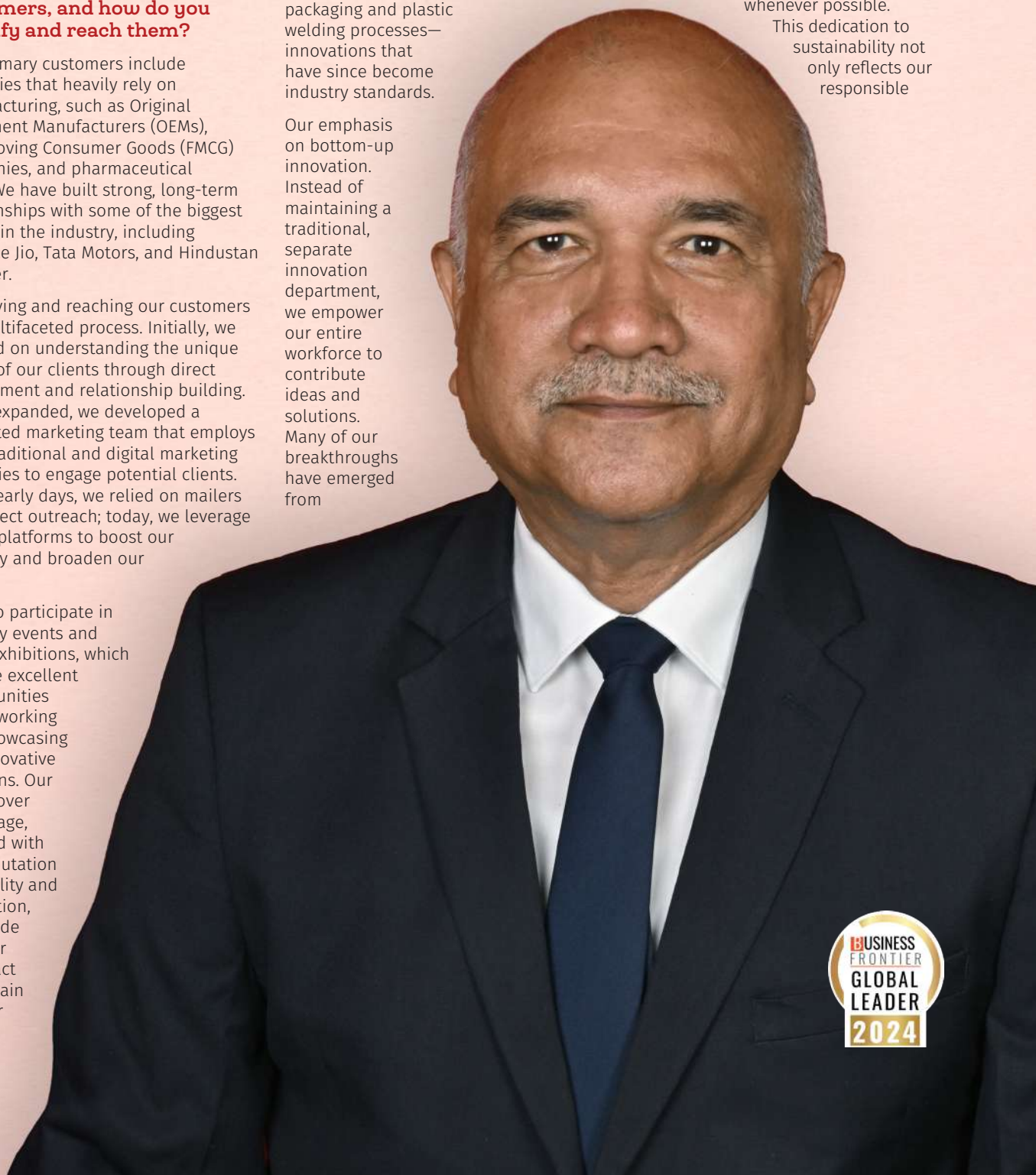
Pioneer Enterprises stands out due to our relentless commitment to innovation and long-term solutions, rather than short-term gains. From the very beginning, we have focused on developing unique solutions instead of merely following market trends. For example, we were the first company to invest in a European air bubble film plant and introduced air cushion packaging and plastic welding processes—innovations that have since become industry standards.

Our emphasis on bottom-up innovation. Instead of maintaining a traditional, separate innovation department, we empower our entire workforce to contribute ideas and solutions. Many of our breakthroughs have emerged from

employees who are directly involved in the production process and have first-hand knowledge of daily challenges and opportunities. This collaborative approach not only enhances innovation but also fosters a strong and inclusive company culture.

Our commitment to sustainability sets us apart as a responsible and forward-thinking partner. We have worked actively to create a circular economy within our operations, focusing on recycling and reusing materials whenever possible.

This dedication to sustainability not only reflects our responsible





practices but also positions us as the ideal choice for clients seeking eco-friendly packaging solutions. We hope that this inspires you to make sustainable choices in your business as well.

What are the biggest challenges you face in the competitive landscape of packaging manufacturing?

One of the most significant challenges we face is the growing demonization of plastic. While plastic is often criticized for its environmental impact, the true issue lies in inadequate recycling systems rather than the material itself. This widespread misconception can hinder our efforts to showcase the benefits of high-quality packaging solutions that utilize plastic effectively and responsibly. Addressing this misperception is critical, as plastic remains an essential material in packaging due to its durability and versatility when properly managed.

Another key challenge is the increased competition resulting from the entry of numerous players into the market. While this has pushed us to innovate continuously and refine our offerings, it also means we must consistently differentiate ourselves to stay ahead. We focus on developing unique products and solutions tailored to meet specific customer needs, which helps

us stand out in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

Navigating regulatory changes concerning environmental standards presents an ongoing challenge. As industry regulations evolve, we must continuously adapt our practices to comply with new environmental guidelines without compromising profitability. This demands ongoing investment in research and development, as well as a strong commitment to integrating sustainable practices into every facet of our operations.

What steps do you take to cultivate a strong company culture focused on sustainability and innovation?

Cultivating a robust company culture centered on sustainability and innovation begins with leading by example. I firmly believe that as a leader, I must embody the principles I wish to instill throughout my organization. This commitment involves actively participating in production planning and engaging with my team to explore and develop better solutions for the challenges they encounter. By demonstrating my dedication to these values, I inspire others to follow suit.

We place significant emphasis on open communication and collaboration, ensuring that every team member—

whether they are janitorial staff or engineers—feels empowered to share their ideas and insights. This inclusive approach creates a nurturing environment where innovation can thrive.

We invest in training and skill development to keep our personnel up-to-date with the latest industry knowledge and advancements. This investment enhances their capabilities while reinforcing our commitment to continuous improvement and sustainability. By equipping our team with the right tools and understanding, we foster a culture where innovative solutions can flourish, ultimately benefiting both our organization and the environment.

What trends do you see shaping the packaging industry in the years to come?

The packaging industry is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by various factors that reflect changing consumer expectations and environmental priorities. One of the most prominent trends is the shift towards a circular economy. As environmental awareness grows globally, there is an increasing demand for packaging solutions that prioritize reusability and recyclability. This trend is expected to drive innovation across the industry, as companies seek to reduce their carbon footprints and

minimize waste. Emphasizing a circular approach not only benefits the planet but also positions companies as responsible leaders in sustainability.

Advancements in technology will play a crucial role in shaping the future of packaging. Innovations such as digital printing, smart packaging, and automation are set to revolutionize how products are packaged. Digital printing, for example, allows for greater customization and shorter production runs, making it easier for brands to adapt to market demands swiftly. Smart packaging, which may include features like QR codes or embedded sensors, offers enhanced tracking and consumer engagement opportunities. Furthermore, automation in the manufacturing process will improve efficiency, reduce labor costs, and minimize waste. Companies that embrace these technological advancements will likely gain a significant competitive edge in the market.

The increasing focus on sustainability will foster more collaborations between packaging manufacturers and brands. As consumers demand more eco-friendly products, brands will actively seek out packaging partners who can help them meet these expectations while ensuring functionality and quality. This collaborative approach will lead to innovative packaging solutions that not only satisfy consumer preferences but also align with regulatory requirements and sustainability goals.

What is your vision for Pioneer Enterprises over the next few years?

My vision for Pioneer Enterprises is to become a leading player in the packaging industry, especially in the realm of sustainable and innovative solutions. We aim to expand our operations into new markets, particularly focusing on the automobile sector, where we see immense potential for growth.

With our extensive experience in polymer engineering, we are developing high-performance materials for electric vehicles (EVs). The need for lightweight materials is critical in the EV sector, and our innovations in producing structurally sound polypropylene sheets from recycled plastics are already making an impact.

How do you manage work-life balance, especially given the demands of running a large manufacturing operation?

Managing work-life balance can be tenuous, especially when running a large manufacturing operation. However, I believe it's essential to maintain a healthy balance between personal and professional life. One way I achieve this is by setting clear boundaries.

I ensure that my family is involved in my journey, which helps me stay grounded and provides emotional support. My wife plays an important role in managing aspects of the business, allowing me to focus on strategic growth while still being present for my family.

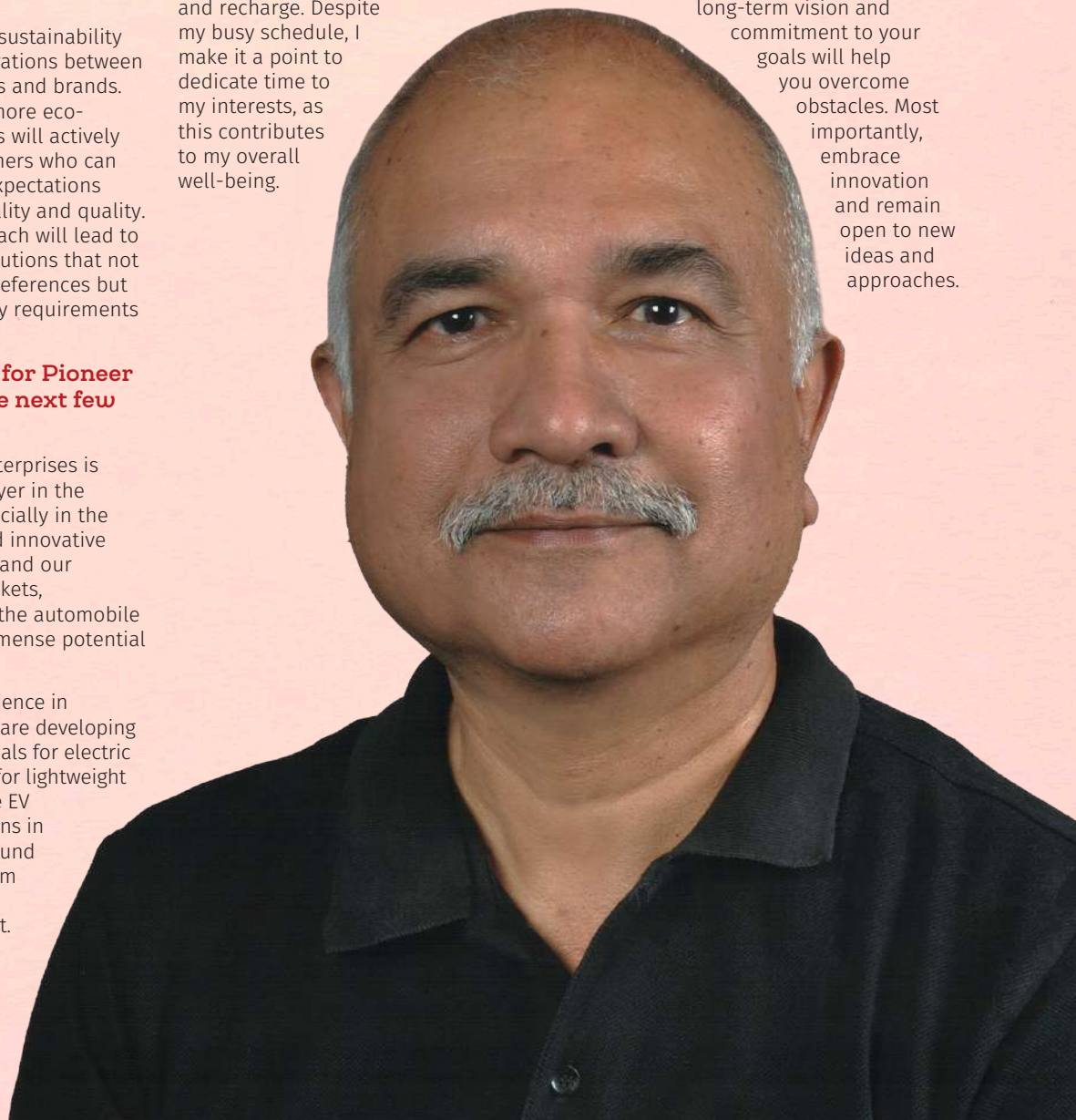
In terms of hobbies, I enjoy music and sports, particularly soccer. Engaging in these activities helps me unwind and recharge. Despite my busy schedule, I make it a point to dedicate time to my interests, as this contributes to my overall well-being.

What advice would you give to aspiring entrepreneurs in the manufacturing and packaging sectors?

My key advice is to believe in yourself and identify your core strengths. Understand the market you want to enter and remain adaptable to the changing landscape. The packaging industry is ripe with opportunities, but it requires dedication and a willingness to innovate.

Avoid a narrow view of your market; instead, think broadly. Consider expanding your reach from local markets to regional, national, or even international levels. Collaboration with established brands and a focus on understanding customer needs can create valuable partnerships.

Consistency and perseverance are crucial. You may face challenges and setbacks, but maintaining a long-term vision and commitment to your goals will help you overcome obstacles. Most importantly, embrace innovation and remain open to new ideas and approaches.



‘Everyday Offers an Opportunity to Learn’

Paul W. McLaughlan, General Director at Schoeller Bleckmann Oilfield Equipment Vietnam Ltd., shares insights into his career journey, leadership philosophy, and the steps SBO Vietnam is taking to address key industry challenges.

With over 36 years of extensive industry experience across seven countries, **Paul W. McLaughlan** brings a wealth of knowledge and leadership to his role as **General Director at Schoeller Bleckmann Oilfield Equipment Vietnam Ltd. (SBO Vietnam)**. A seasoned professional in the oil and gas sector, Paul leads a stand-alone plant that manufactures high-precision components for the global market leader in non-magnetic drillstring components used in directional drilling. In his role, he holds

full P&L responsibility and reports directly to the board of directors in Austria.

As the only expatriate on-site, Paul is known for his hands-on, servant leadership style, which emphasizes empowering and developing employees, fostering strong business relationships, and delivering positive financial results. Passionate about continuous improvement, Paul excels in managing change, motivating teams, and ensuring that SBO Vietnam meets

the highest standards of quality, health, safety, and environmental performance.

In this interview, Paul shares insights into his career journey, leadership philosophy, and the steps SBO Vietnam is taking to address key industry challenges while staying committed to sustainability and innovation.

What motivated you to pursue a career in the oil and gas sector?

Growing up in Aberdeen, Scotland—Europe's oil capital—was a major influence. In the early 1970s, the city transitioned from a fishing hub to a centre of the petroleum industry. Aberdeen played a pivotal role in the development of offshore drilling technology, which was integral to the region's success. I was fortunate to begin my oil and gas career right after serving five years in the British Army. The oil industry's growth in Aberdeen inspired me to contribute to this dynamic and evolving field.

Having worked in multiple countries, what have been some of your most valuable lessons in adapting to different cultures?

One of the key lessons I've learned is the importance of cultural awareness and understanding. By immersing myself in other cultures, I've gained a deeper respect for their beliefs, perspectives, and ways of life. This fosters empathy



and open-mindedness, which in turn reduces conflicts and builds stronger relationships. Cultural awareness is not just about acknowledging differences; it's about celebrating diversity and embracing new ways of thinking. Every day offers an opportunity to learn from others, and that continuous learning is essential to personal and professional growth.

How is the experience of leading a stand-alone plant that produces high-precision components for the global market?

Leading a stand-alone plant that manufactures high-precision components is a truly invaluable experience. What makes it special is working alongside a talented and diverse team. We constantly learn from each other, promoting safe, efficient, and innovative ways to manufacture our products. Our daily focus is on customer satisfaction, ensuring that every decision is guided by the goal of delivering the highest quality products to the market.

How is Schoeller Bleckmann addressing sustainability and environmental impact in its manufacturing processes and product offerings?

Schoeller Bleckmann Oilfield Equipment (SBO) has made significant strides in sustainability. Recently, we received the newly introduced ESG Award, recognizing our commitment to environmental responsibility, social governance, and corporate ethics. This reinforces our dedication to sustainable growth and excellence. We're expanding our capabilities in geothermal energy and carbon capture and storage, reducing emissions, and promoting the circular economy. As CEO Klaus Mader stated, "ESG is more than just a reporting standard for SBO—it's a transformative commitment embedded in our strategy." Sustainability is at the core of our business, opening up new opportunities while driving long-term value.

What are the biggest logistical challenges you've faced in your career and how did you overcome them?

Throughout my career, I've faced numerous logistical challenges, particularly when working across

different countries. However, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of geographical diversification in supply chains. The disruption underscored the need to have multiple suppliers across different regions, ensuring resilience and minimizing risks from global crises. This experience taught me the critical value of flexibility and contingency planning in logistics.

As a leader, how do you keep your team motivated?

Our corporate culture is the heartbeat of our organization, reflecting our shared values of inclusivity, respect, and collaboration. We encourage transparency, where every voice is heard and diversity is celebrated. By empowering our employees to share ideas and contribute to our collective goals, we foster a culture of innovation. We also emphasize work-life balance through wellness programs, flexible working arrangements, and support systems to ensure our employees thrive both personally and professionally. Our focus on continuous learning, team-building activities, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) further strengthens motivation, creating a positive, purpose-driven environment.

What steps do you take for your own continuous learning and professional development?

I believe that continuous learning is essential for professional growth. The starting point is always identifying clear goals and creating a roadmap to achieve them. This includes acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and understanding to remain relevant in the field. It's important to share your goals with others, reflect on progress, and evaluate what's working. This is an ongoing journey that requires patience and persistence, but it is critical for long-term success.

How do you maintain a work-life balance, especially given the demands of your role?

At SBO, we recognize the importance of work-life balance as essential to employee well-being. A strong team around me ensures that we prioritize balance to prevent burnout and stress while promoting overall health. Although it can sometimes

**“
Leading a stand-alone plant that manufactures high-precision components is a truly invaluable experience. What makes it special is working alongside a talented and diverse team. ”**



be challenging to juggle career and personal life, we consistently maintain a supportive environment that fosters both professional success and personal fulfillment.

Looking ahead, what are the key strategic goals for Schoeller Bleckmann over the next few years, and how do you plan to achieve them?

Our strategy is grounded in effective communication, solid values, and continuous improvement. Key to our success has been the dedication of our employees, technological innovation, and our strong reputation in Vietnam and globally. Moving forward, we plan to continue investing in high-quality, complex products, improve market dominance, and meet the ever-increasing expectations of our customers. Our focus on expanding capabilities, including new Capex investments, ensures we're poised for long-term success. We're also committed to nurturing future leaders through a robust succession plan, positioning ourselves for sustainable growth and enduring success. As we chart our course, we remain guided by our core values and our drive to build a legacy of innovation and resilience.

Building a Legacy of Leadership

Dynamic LGBTQ speaker and author, **Victoria Pelletier**, speaks about her organisation **Unstoppable You** which helps individuals lead with purpose

Adam Chin

A fervent C-Suite leader, TEDx speaker, author and diversity & inclusion leader, **Victoria Pelletier's** journey is marked by resilience and a passion for transformation. Harnessing her early life challenges to fuel her mission to help others, Victoria is the **Founder & CEO of Unstoppable You**, a platform that provides strategic advisory services, executive and personal brand coaching, authorship support and more to individuals and organisations.

Recognised as one of the Top 100 Global Outstanding LGBTQ Executive Leaders; Women of Influence; Top 30 Most Influential Business Leaders in Tech and Most Influential Entrepreneur of the Year by several media houses, Victoria's impactful keynote speeches, personalised coaching, and strategic consulting have inspired changemakers across various sectors to lead with authenticity and purpose. Her innovative approach not only fosters professional growth but also highlights the importance of personal strength and empathy in leadership.

As a sought-after speaker and author, Victoria continues to make a significant impact, encouraging individuals to embrace their journeys and redefine their own stories of success. In an interview with **Business Frontier**, Victoria speaks about her company, industry trends, ensuring diversity and inclusion on stage and more.

Can you tell us about your early life and the experiences that shaped your career aspirations?

From a young age, I faced a significant amount of adversity — circumstances that could have easily defined my future



in a negative way. But instead of letting them limit me, I chose to push beyond them. I was determined to rewrite my own story, no matter what the obstacles were.

Resilience became my foundation. I realised early on that if I could survive what life threw at me, I could thrive in the face of any challenge. That resilience wasn't just about survival, though. It fueled an inner drive in me to excel, build something meaningful, and help others navigate their own challenges.

Ultimately, it was those early experiences that shaped my passion for leadership and transformation. I knew that I wanted to help others achieve their potential, and that meant not just surviving adversity but using it as a springboard for greatness. This is what led me to the boardroom, the C-suite, and eventually into coaching and public speaking, where I share my story and empower others to rewrite their own.

What makes Unstoppable You unique, and how is it impacting innovators and change-makers in the United States and beyond?

Unstoppable You is unique because it's not just a business — it's a platform dedicated to empowering individuals and organisations to unlock their full potential. Through impactful keynote speeches, personal brand coaching, career and executive coaching, and strategic consulting services, we deliver tailored, high-touch solutions that inspire real change.

The core of what makes Unstoppable You so powerful is the focus on authenticity, resilience, and purpose-driven leadership. Whether it's a keynote that moves a room to action or a coaching session that helps a leader rediscover their voice, we bring a whole human leadership approach to everything we do. That means we don't just focus on the professional side of success, but also help people cultivate their personal strengths, allowing them to lead with greater empathy, transparency, and intention.

Our impact can be seen across industries, from tech innovators in Silicon Valley to senior executives in global corporations. We help change-makers rethink how they approach leadership, empower their teams, and build their personal brands with

authenticity. By giving them the tools to navigate complex environments with clarity and confidence, we're driving a ripple effect of transformation in the US and internationally.

At Unstoppable You, we believe that when people are empowered to lead as their most authentic selves, their impact becomes limitless—whether they're shaping the future of business or driving societal change.

What are the future goals of Unstoppable You?

The future of Unstoppable You is about expanding our reach and impact. With the release of my second and third books this year, alongside my TEDx talk on healthy resilience, we're in a prime position to leverage these insights to help even more people. The concepts of

“My goal is to help individuals not just survive but thrive by applying the lessons from my books and talks in real-world contexts—whether it's leading teams, scaling businesses, or building personal brands.”

authenticity, resilience, and leadership that I've written about and spoken on are universal, and I'm committed to bringing them to an even broader audience.

A key focus moving forward will be on deepening our work in executive and career coaching, particularly around fostering resilience in leaders who are navigating disruptive and fast-changing environments. My goal is to help individuals not just survive but thrive by applying the lessons from my books and talks in real-world contexts—whether it's leading teams, scaling businesses, or building personal brands.

Additionally, Unstoppable You will continue to provide transformative keynote speeches and strategic consulting, but with a renewed emphasis on resilience and whole human

leadership. We're looking to partner with more organisations globally to foster cultures where people feel empowered to lead authentically and drive meaningful change. Ultimately, our goal is to equip people with the mindset and tools they need to be unstoppable—no matter the obstacles in their path.

Speaking of TEDx, what makes a TEDx event truly transformative for the audience?

What makes a TEDx event truly transformative is the combination of impactful, engaging storytelling with actionable insights that resonate long after the event is over. It's one thing to inspire people in the moment, but the real magic happens when an audience leaves not only moved emotionally but also equipped with practical lessons that they can apply in their own lives.

The best TEDx talks are those that connect deeply with human experiences — where the speaker's vulnerability and authenticity create a bond with the audience. When speakers share stories of resilience, failure, triumph, or transformation, it gives the audience a chance to see themselves in that narrative. But to make it transformative, those stories need to be paired with clear takeaways or strategies that can drive real change.

At the end of the day, a great TEDx event challenges the audience to think differently, feel more deeply, and act with intention. It's not just about ideas worth spreading—it's about ideas worth applying.

How do you stay up to date with industry trends?

I'm an avid learner, and staying curious is at the core of how I keep up with industry trends. I consume a lot of content — you'll almost always find me listening to audiobooks or podcasts. It's the most efficient way for me to stay informed while juggling a busy schedule. Audiobooks keep me up to speed on everything from leadership strategies to the latest in technology, while podcasts give me quick, digestible insights from industry experts and thought leaders.

In addition to that, I'm a huge believer in the power of networking and meeting new people. Whether it's through conferences, events, or just connecting over a virtual coffee.

Envisioning Transformative SAP Excellence

In an interview with **Business Frontier**, **Sho Muraki**, **SAP Consultant and Chief Sales Officer, Anfini Inc.**, discusses his strategies for excellence

A seasoned consultant with a wealth of experience in business process transformation and ERP systems, **Sho Muraki** has dedicated his career to optimising business operations across various industries. After graduating from Keio University, Sho began his career at ABeam Consulting Ltd., where he successfully led projects focused on business standardisation and global implementation in the manufacturing sector. He later joined EY Strategy and Consulting before moving to **Anfini Inc.** in 2022, where he currently heads the SAP business.

At Anfini, a multifaceted consulting firm which also specialises in education and media, Sho not only consults on technological solutions for business process transformation but also oversees initiatives like SAP Consult Media and SAP Consult Labo. These platforms provide valuable insights and training for SAP professionals, ensuring that both individuals and corporations stay informed and skilled in the ever-evolving SAP landscape.

In an interview with **Business Frontier**, Sho discusses his journey and strategies as an **SAP Consultant and Chief Sales Officer**, focusing on effective implementations, team motivation, leveraging technology, competitive differentiation, and work-life balance.

How did your early experiences influence your approach to consulting and sales?

My first job was at a major consulting firm in Japan where I gained experience



“
We constantly focus on the synergy between consulting and our own businesses, such as education and media. By engaging in our own business activities, we have successfully acquired clients through channels beyond just our consulting services. This diversified approach allows us to offer comprehensive solutions tailored to client needs.
 ”

in multiple SAP implementation projects. This laid the foundation for my current work as an SAP consultant and salesperson.

I have always had doubts about the inefficient SAP implementation methods and purpose-driven SAP projects that I observed in large firms. Hence, I now focus on proposals and consulting that contribute to corporate management through effective SAP implementations. Recently, I have also been challenging myself with management agendas beyond just SAP implementation, such as supporting data-driven management using SAP, which has allowed me to expand my own area of expertise.

As the Chief Sales Officer of Anfini Inc., how do you foster a culture of motivation and accountability within your sales team?

Most of our sales team is in its early twenties. While they possess energy and a ‘can-do’ attitude, they sometimes lack basic industry knowledge and experience. However, rather than focusing on their weaknesses, I prioritise recognising each member's strengths. I strive to create an environment where everyone enjoys their sales work and feels a sense of purpose in what they do.

In particular, I encourage open discussions about how we can maintain a positive improvement cycle, rather than blaming anyone for failures. I make it a point to actively celebrate the efforts and challenges they undertake.

What role does technology play in your sales processes, and how do you leverage it?

Our company engages in media marketing, which was originally my idea and plays a crucial role in our sales processes. We actively share information related to SAP and our company's features through owned media, including blogs, webinars, and social media channels. This strategy not only helps us increase our recognition among a broader audience but also positions us as thought leaders in the SAP space.

By providing valuable content, we engage potential clients and build trust before they even reach out. Additionally, we utilise data analytics to track engagement and refine our messaging, ensuring that we address the specific needs and pain points of our target audience. This approach allows us to create personalised outreach strategies, ultimately driving higher conversion rates and fostering long-term relationships with clients.

What strategies do you employ to stay ahead of competitors in the consulting and SAP space?

Most of our competitors concentrate solely on consulting services. But we constantly focus on the synergy between consulting and our own businesses, such as education and media. By engaging in our own business activities, we have successfully acquired clients through channels beyond just our consulting services. This diversified approach allows us to offer comprehensive solutions tailored to client needs.

Additionally, we feed insights and knowledge gained from our consulting work back into our own business initiatives, enhancing the value we provide. We also emphasise continuous learning and adaptation, ensuring that our strategies evolve alongside market trends and client demands, keeping us competitive in a dynamic landscape. This dual approach of running both consulting services and our own business is our unique strategy.

What has been the most rewarding aspect of your role at Anfini so far?

As the sales officer and the head of the SAP business, I find it rewarding to lead the overall business development and expansion of our SAP initiatives. Recently, we have received requests to speak from

various companies and SAP itself, which makes me feel proud that our relatively young company is gaining significant attention and recognition.

This acknowledgment not only reflects our hard work but also validates our innovative approach to SAP consulting. It's exciting to see how our efforts are resonating with the industry, and it motivates me to continue pushing boundaries. I'm also focused on fostering partnerships that will enhance our service offerings and further elevate our brand. By sharing our insights and success stories, we aim to inspire other businesses to leverage SAP effectively, driving collective growth within the ecosystem.

What are your professional and personal goals for the coming year?

In the coming year, I aim to expand the business scale of both our consulting services and our own initiatives, focusing on enhancing our market presence and reaching a wider audience. I believe that by integrating our consulting expertise with our educational and media offerings, we can create a comprehensive ecosystem that adds value for our clients.

Additionally, I aspire to achieve recognition for our efforts in the SAP business, such as winning SAP-related awards. This recognition will not only validate our hard work but also strengthen our reputation in the industry. Ultimately, my goal is to foster innovation and excellence within our team, ensuring that we continuously adapt to market changes while delivering top-notch solutions.

How do you maintain a work-life balance, especially given the demands of your position?

Currently, I don't have any hobbies outside of work. Of course, I refresh myself on days off by enjoying activities like going to the sauna or dining out, but I often find myself thinking about work even then. However, since my well-being is essential, I make it a point to have relaxed work sessions over meals with my colleagues, creating an environment where I can approach work in a more relaxed state.

I also practice mindfulness techniques to help clear my mind and focus on the present. It's difficult to stay constantly alert, so I try to prioritise relaxation and recharge my energy as much as possible during my time off. This balance allows me to maintain productivity without feeling overwhelmed.

BREAKING BARRIERS: MEET THE TRAILBLAZING WOMEN BUSINESS LEADERS

Business Frontier is proud to feature nine passionate women business leaders who are an inspiration to people of all ages

Deepa Natarajan Lobo

In today's rapidly evolving technological and economic landscape, women professionals are breaking barriers and redefining traditional norms to set new benchmarks for leadership

and innovation. With their visionary thinking, these trailblazing leaders are not only ruling the startup world but also extending their influence over international global firms fostering creativity, fuelling progress

and inspiring the next generation of entrepreneurs and executives.

Business Frontier honours these trailblazers who have made a mark for themselves across different industries.



Debarati Guha

Debarati Guha is the **Director Programmes for Asia, Deutsche Welle**, a German media organisation that provides journalistic content in 32 languages. Born and brought up in Kolkata, India, Debarati pursued journalism in New Delhi and completed her PhD in the field. Initially an intern at Deutsche Welle in 2005, she completed a journalism course in Germany. After freelancing for DW, she started working full-time with the organisation and went on to grow by leaps and bounds in it.



Daisy Mauhay

Daisy Mauhay, the compassionate **Managing Director of The Nightingale Placement Agency**, has strived to help the company emerge on top in the recruitment industry, providing talented manpower to diverse sectors spanning healthcare, IT, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and hospitality. With a journey fuelled by a steady passion to help others and nurture a society brimming with hope and love, Daisy prioritises connecting with her diverse teams, understanding their challenges, and collaborating to find solutions.



Ju Young Shin

A passionate leader in the real estate industry, **Ju Young Shin** not only deals with high finance, but also treats her team with motherly care and love. The **Finance Director of Weave Living**, Asia Pacific's living sector specialist which owns, develops and manages properties to world-class standards, the diligent business leader and loving family person has even received an award from the former USA President Barack Obama for her volunteering services.



Karen Cook

A notable figure in the field of finance and business, **Karen Cook** is often dubbed as the 'Queen of M&A' thanks to her strong track record of leadership and expertise in investment banking. Starting her professional journey at the Foreign Office, Karen soon joined Goldman Sachs and has been working at the investment major for over three decades. Currently the **Chair of the Investment Banking Division at Goldman Sachs, London**, the 70-year-old has worked in the field of banking since the 1980s and proves that age is just a number in any field.



Maja Torun

One of the most successful investment bankers in the world, **Maja Torun** is the **Co-Head of Investment Banking, JPMorgan, Paris**. With an MBA from INSEAD, Maja started her professional journey in 2003 with the prestigious strategy consulting firm Boston Consulting and has worked with top international companies such as Merrill Lynch and Deutsche Bank. In May 2020, she joined JP Morgan and has been involved in several major transactions. Renowned for helping clients navigate through a complex financial scenario, and has a deep understanding of the global financial market.



Roshni Nadar Malhotra

Often cited as one of the world's most powerful women, **Roshni Nadar Malhotra** heads the Indian IT giant – **HCL Technologies**, which was founded by her father Shiv Nadar. The billionaire businesswoman and philanthropist spearheads HCL's strategic initiatives in digital transformation, cloud computing, and AI and created history in 2020 by becoming the first woman to head a listed IT company in India.



Tina Ghafurian

With over two decades of experience, **Tina Ghafurian, Chief Operations Officer of Tips and Toes**, has been a prominent figure in the beauty and wellness industry. Tina's journey from fashion designing to the beauty industry is a testament to her adaptability and thirst for knowledge. From establishing her own fashion house at a young age to seamlessly transitioning into the realm of beauty, her story resonates with a blend of ambition and tenacity.



V Amrutha

In the dynamic realm of the technology solution industry, **V Amrutha, Head of Product at ISABEL Health Tech**, stands out as a trailblazer with a wealth of knowledge and experience. With over eight years of expertise in Agile methodologies, project and product management, data management, technology operations, and business finance, the certified project and product consultant has been instrumental in planning and managing multimillion-dollar, multi-geographical projects, aligning business objectives with cutting-edge technology solutions.



Vandana Chopra

With a flair for sales and marketing, ace saleswoman **Vandana Chopra** has carved a niche for herself in the industry with her immense dedication, perseverance and people skills. Currently the **Head of Business Development for India and South East Asia** for the UK-based partition manufacturing company **APTON**, Chopra's role involves travelling across various regions, networking with industry insiders and improving the brand presence and adoption in South East Asia and India.

A GUIDE TO CREATING EFFECTIVE BRAND STORIES

Komal Rukhana, Founder of Mint & Milk PR, chalks out innovative strategies that can help brands create a meaningful impact



In today's saturated market, the brands that truly resonate with consumers are those that tell compelling stories. I've had the privilege of working with diverse clients across various industries, helping them craft their unique brand stories. Hence, I have seen firsthand how effective storytelling can elevate a brand's presence and create meaningful connections. Here are a few pointers that can help brands create a connection with their audience.

The Power of Storytelling

At its core, storytelling is about creating an emotional connection. Research shows that storytelling can improve message retention by up to 65-70% compared to traditional facts alone. A study by the Harvard Business Review found that stories are 22 times more memorable than facts. This is particularly crucial for brands seeking to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace.

Understanding Your Audience

Creating an effective brand story begins with a deep understanding of your target audience. At Mint & Milk PR, we prioritise comprehensive audience research. For example, when a sexual wellness brand we represent was looking to launch a new campaign, we got in touch with journalists in lifestyle, wellness and even

business publications to gauge how this proposed campaign will be perceived by different audiences and help the brand tweak its message accordingly.

Leveraging Unique Brand Values

Every brand has unique values that can serve as the foundation of its story. Our work with a 25-year-old conscious multi-designer outlet provided a perfect example of how history and sustainability could be brought to life. The store was transformed into a fashion museum for a special event, where archives were displayed, allowing both media and fashion enthusiasts to experience the evolution of design through the years. By celebrating the brand's heritage and commitment to conscious fashion, we created a memorable storyline that resonated with the audience, reinforcing its dedication to thoughtful craftsmanship and timeless style.

Crafting the Narrative

Once we understand the audience and brand values, the next step is to craft the narrative. This involves defining the brand's voice, tone, and key messages. For instance, in case of that sexual wellness brand, we intentionally maintained a conversational and inclusive tone. By highlighting sexual wellness as a part of one's holistic well-being rather than mere pleasure,

we changed the brand's messaging from transactional to transformational, inviting the audience to join a community rather than just purchasing a product.

Multi-Channel Storytelling

In the digital age, effective brand stories need to be disseminated across multiple platforms. We employ a multi-channel approach, ensuring that a brand's narrative is consistent yet tailored for different mediums—whether it's social media, blogs, or press releases. For example, to amplify the first kiosk-launch of a celebrity-led beauty brand, we took a 360 degree approach, orchestrating influencer collaborations, interviews with lifestyle journalists, a press conference with the local news media, and a public event with the celebrity.

Measuring Impact

Finally, effective storytelling must be measurable. We utilize analytics tools to assess the impact of our campaigns. Metrics such as engagement rates, reach, saturation rates, and conversion statistics provide valuable feedback, enabling us to refine our strategies and enhance storytelling efforts continuously.

In a Nutshell

Creating effective brand stories is a journey that requires insight, creativity, and adaptability. At Mint & Milk PR, we believe that every brand has a unique narrative waiting to be told. By crafting an interesting narrative that connects your target audience to your brand values in a genuine way, brands can forge deep connections with consumers.

With every project, we strive to turn visions into narratives that resonate, inspire, and drive action. It's a privilege to be part of this storytelling journey with our clients, and I look forward to helping many more brands share their unique tales.



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SMES: A DRIVING FORCE IN THE UAE'S ECONOMY

The initiatives of Dubai government are setting the stage for SMEs to contribute significantly to economic growth, writes **Akshay Nagdev**, Managing Partner, Hedge & Sachs

The Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sector in the UAE has experienced remarkable growth, particularly as the post-pandemic world begins to settle. With COVID-19's disruptions now behind, the SME sector is flourishing, bolstered by strong governmental support and a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. This favorable environment has paved the way for prosperity, positioning SMEs to explore new horizons, especially with the increasing adoption of digital technologies that are redefining the business landscape.

SMEs: The Economic Powerhouse of Dubai

Contributing to an impressive 63.5% of the UAE's non-oil GDP, SMEs play an integral role in the nation's economy. Their significance is underscored by their sheer numbers, with over 557,000 SMEs operating by the end of 2022. As part of its economic vision, the UAE has made the development of this sector a top priority, seeking to attract both local and international investors to strengthen its workforce and create new job opportunities. His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum's approval of Dubai SME's future model is a testament to this Commitment.

Dubai SME has rolled out a diverse range of initiatives designed to nurture entrepreneurial talent, from identifying budding innovators to offering continuous support as businesses grow and expand. The overarching goal is to cement Dubai's status as a global hub for innovation and entrepreneurship, propelling the city to the forefront of international business.

Government Support: The Cornerstone of SME Success

A key factor driving the success of SMEs in the UAE is robust government support. This extends beyond financial aid to encompass training, mentorship,



and other forms of assistance. Notable initiatives such as the Khalifa Fund for Enterprise Development and the Mohammed Bin Rashid Innovation Fund have collectively provided over 1.2 billion AED in support to SME members. Additionally, Dubai's government has introduced programs to attract top talent and entrepreneurs, offering incentives like interest-free loans and dedicated funds, including a \$136 million initiative aimed at fostering business expansion and securing Dubai's position as a global business hub.

The Surge in Entrepreneurial Activity

Dubai's dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem has continued to thrive, positioning the city as a magnet for innovators and business leaders. His Excellency Abdul Baset Al Janahi, CEO of Dubai SME, noted that as 2024 unfolds, the focus will be on capitalising on investment opportunities, fostering innovation, and reinforcing the resilience of the SME sector. During the first half of the year alone, Dubai SME facilitated contracts worth AED 395.4 million for its members, with the total value of contracts awarded since inception now exceeding AED 11.3 billion.

The establishment of new partnerships with private sector entities further signals the city's intent to surge forward in the SME space, promising continued momentum in the years ahead.

Digital Transformation: A Catalyst for Global Competitiveness

At the heart of Dubai's SME success lies a commitment to digital transformation, particularly the integration of cutting-edge technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). By embedding AI within its infrastructure, the government has empowered SMEs to streamline operations, boost efficiency, and scale their businesses with unprecedented speed. While AI presents immense potential, it is crucial for businesses to navigate its challenges carefully, leveraging this powerful tool to enhance competitiveness in the global market.

The initiatives spearheaded by the Dubai government are setting the stage for SMEs to contribute significantly to economic growth, job creation, and global competitiveness. As these enterprises continue to thrive, they will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in fortifying the UAE's reputation as a premier global economic hub.

SOUTH KOREA GRAPPLES WITH RISING INFLATION

The country experiences a weakening Korean won and slowing exports



South Korea's inflation rate climbed in November to 1.5% year on year, from a 45-month low in October, as the country grapples with a weakening Korean won and slowing exports. The figure was higher than October's inflation reading of 1.3%, and lower than the 1.7% expected by economists.

The country's central bank recently unexpectedly cut rates by 25 basis points to 3%, marking the first time that the Bank of Korea had enacted two back-to-back cuts since 2009. The BOK said in a statement that the cut was to "mitigate downside risks to

the economy." South Korea narrowly avoided a technical recession in the third quarter, with GDP growing 0.1% quarter on quarter, according to the bank's advance estimates, following a contraction of 0.2% in the second quarter.

On inflation, the BOK said in its statement that prices had stabilised, and is expected to remain stable due to declining global oil prices and subdued demand pressure. The BOK also lowered its headline inflation outlook for 2024 and 2025 to 2.3% and 1.9%, respectively, down from its previous forecasts of 2.5% and 2.1%.

"The future path of inflation is likely to be affected by movements in exchange rates and global oil prices, by economic growth at home and abroad, and by adjustments in public utility fees," the bank added.

South Korea's currency has weakened against the greenback over October and November, hitting a two-year high of 1,411.31 as tariff fears from the incoming Trump administration take hold. Data from the World Integrated Trade Solution platform — set up by the World Bank — lists the U.S. as South Korea's second largest trade partner.

‘Sustainability has Become a Top Priority for Parents’

Sara Chemmaa, Founder of Citron, which manufactures quality lunchboxes, speaks to Business Frontier about the journey and growth of the brand

Deepa Natarajan Lobo

A former Co-Head at MBC Ventures; Management Consultant at McKinsey & Company and an investment banker with Société Générale, entrepreneur **Sara Chemmaa** comes from a diverse background in finance, strategy and consulting.

The **Founder of Citron**, a company that creates stylish leakproof lunchboxes for children, Sara has built a brand that combines practicality with design. Born in 2018 out of Sara’s personal quest for quality lunchboxes, Citron has grown to offer over 400 products, including a sustainable range, bio-based feeding options, and items tailored for teenagers.

With more than 1.5 million products sold, the brand has become a dominant player in the lunchbox and back-to-school market across the GCC and is available in over 1,000 retail stores across 48 countries. In an interview with **Business Frontier**, Sara discusses the birth and growth of Citron; the challenges she faced during the journey and more.

Can you tell us the story behind Citron?

Citron was born from a very personal need. As a working mother, I struggled to find safe, stylish, and sustainable products for my children’s feeding needs. I couldn’t find anything that met my expectations, so I decided to create it myself. Over the years, what



started as a small, personal project has evolved into a market-leading company that sells innovative lifestyle products in over 47 countries. What really sets Citron apart is that we've stayed true to our founding mission: to make a difference in the lives of children and families. Our customers know that every product we create is designed with their needs at the forefront—safe, functional, eco-friendly, and durable.

What were some of the challenges you faced when starting Citron?

Starting any business comes with its fair share of challenges, and ours were no different. One of the biggest hurdles early on was finding the budget for influencer marketing, which was still a new and unproven avenue at the time. It also took a while to build a community of loyal customers who trusted our products. But by engaging with our customers authentically and building relationships slowly, we now have a truly invaluable community.

More recently, we've had to deal with the rise of imitators and replicas from other brands looking to copy our success. While we can't always take legal action in those cases, we continue to innovate and stay ahead of the competition by focusing on creating strong, quality products.

You made a significant career shift from being an investment banker to becoming the CEO of a children's brand. What was the transition like?

It was definitely a shift, but what's been surprising is how much of my previous experience has helped me in running Citron. The move itself was quite

“Starting any business comes with its fair share of challenges, and ours were no different. One of the biggest hurdles early on was finding the budget for influencer marketing, which was still a new and unproven avenue at the time.”

gradual. When I became frustrated by the lack of quality feeding products for my son, it started as more of a personal project. But when I realized how helpful the products could be for other parents, I saw the potential for something bigger.

After two years of development and perfecting our designs, I made the decision to leave the corporate world behind and fully commit to Citron. While we've grown rapidly over the last four years, we've kept the agility and entrepreneurial spirit of a startup, and I continue to feel inspired every day by what we can accomplish.

Why is the Middle East such an important market for your brand?

The Middle East is a uniquely dynamic and thriving market, especially for family and child-focused brands like ours. It's not just about the growing population—though with one of the world's highest fertility rates, the region is certainly attractive for businesses targeting children and families. But it's also about the diversity and entrepreneurial spirit of the region. Traditionally, the Middle East has relied on imports, which means there are gaps in the market for innovative products tailored to local needs. As a result, there's a huge opportunity to create products here that not only serve local markets but can also be exported. It's a place where creative ideas can flourish.

How do you view the importance of sustainability in children's products?

As a family-focused brand, we understand how important it is to protect our children—not just in terms of safety but also their future. Sustainability has become a top priority for parents, and it's something we take very seriously. At Citron, we integrate sustainability into every stage of our product development—from design to manufacturing to packaging. We've made significant strides in reducing our use of bioplastics and are continually investing in eco-friendly collections and recyclable products. It's essential that parents can feel confident knowing that when they choose Citron, they're not just getting a great product for their child, but also doing their part to help the planet.



What factors should parents consider when selecting the best lunchbox for their children?

When choosing the right lunchbox, functionality and safety should be the top priorities. At Citron, we combine both with great style. First and foremost, make sure the lunchbox is made from safe, non-toxic materials and is BPA-free. Durability is also key—look for a well-made, sturdy lunchbox that's built to withstand everyday use. It's also important that it's easy to open and close, with no risk of leaks. Lastly, ease of cleaning is something every parent will appreciate, as children's lunchboxes can get messy quickly! We've designed our lunchboxes to be practical, safe, and easy to maintain.

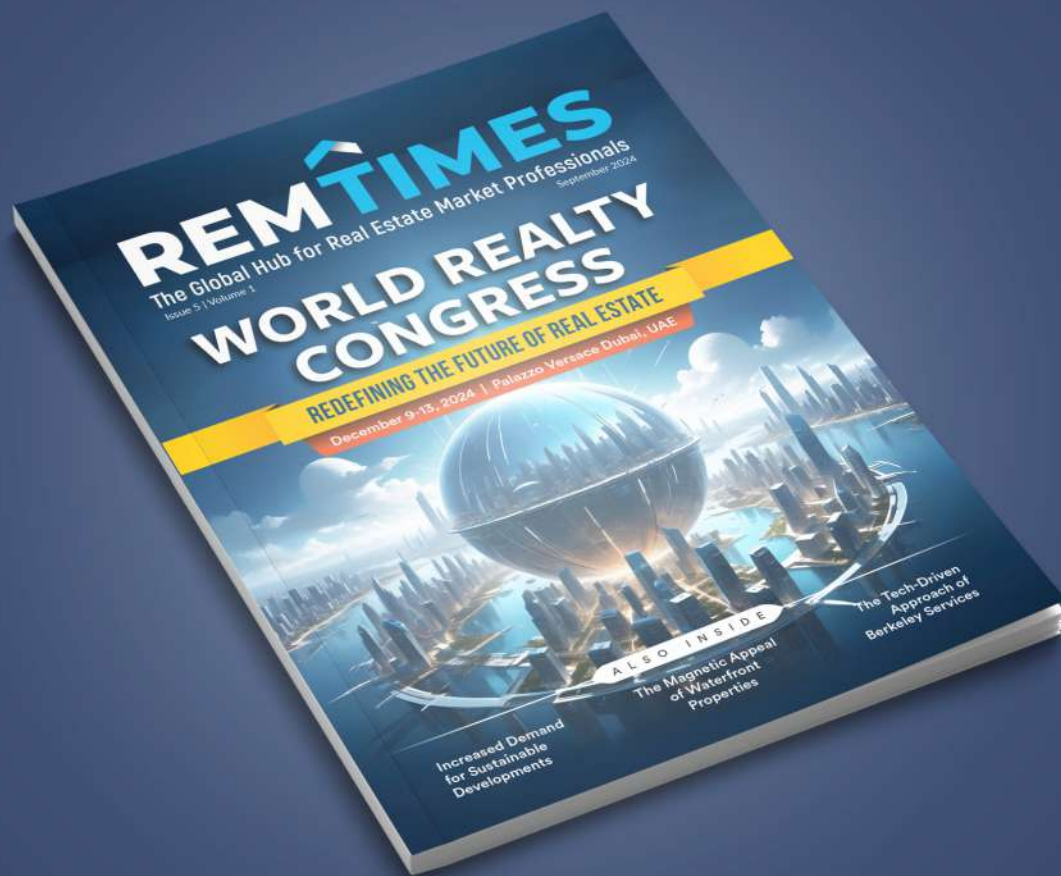
What are your plans for the future of Citron?

We're incredibly excited about the future. In 2025, we'll be expanding our feeding range with new product launches that will elevate the value we offer to our customers. By 2026, we plan to launch a full new collection that will include hydration, lunch, and back-to-school products—plenty of surprises in store!

Additionally, we're making major investments in our direct-to-consumer business and are focused on expanding beyond the UAE. Over the next three years, we plan to open more stores internationally. Our vision is to grow even further while staying true to our commitment to quality and sustainability.

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A Match Made in Culinary Heaven

CEO and Co-Founder Mazen Kanaan of vegan ice cream brand House of Pops, speaks to Business Frontier about F&B trends, veganism, healthy desserts and much more

Deepa Natarajan Lobo



“
I started my career with Unilever and managed the ice cream industry in different parts of the Middle East region like Turkey and Saudi Arabia. It all started when my wife and partner Marcela and I noticed a serious gap in the market when it came to healthy ice cream offerings.”

A frozen dessert business that is also making waves in the healthcare industry for its choicest products, **House of Pops** was started by veteran B2B/B2C and FMCG marketing professional **Mazen Kanaan** and his culinary and hospitality expert wife Marcela Sancho.

With a shared desire to create healthy delights to cater to everyone’s taste buds as well as fitness goals, the two crafted the brand from scratch in their very own kitchen and transformed it into the leading player that it is today in the health, wellness and food sector.



In an interview with Business Frontier, CEO and Co-Founder Mazen Kanaan speaks about bridging the gap between taste and health, the intrigue surrounding veganism and the trends that the F&B market will witness in future.

What made you start House of Pops?

I started my career with Unilever and managed the ice cream industry in different parts of the Middle East region like Turkey and Saudi Arabia. It all started when my wife and partner Marcela and I noticed a serious gap in the market when it came to healthy ice cream offerings.

There really isn’t an ice cream that is both good for you and actually tastes good. It’s always one of the two. The ice creams in our region are also super sugar-heavy, or loaded with ingredients no one can even pronounce, let alone understand. So, it only made sense to develop something together, and that ended up becoming the House of Pops that we know and love. With my ideas and Marcela’s recipes, it was a match made in culinary heaven.

With veganism being a buzzword at the moment, what sets you apart from your contemporaries?

We get this question often! A lot sets us apart. Aside from the impeccable quality of ingredients we use, we are not just a vegan offering. Normally, businesses substitute milk or other animal-derived products with heavy ingredients or perhaps, even allergens.

We work exclusively with allergen-free ingredients, making House of Pops inclusive for all dietary preferences. Instead of almond milk, which naturally is an allergen, we use organic coconut milk and cream. We are also aware that numerous consumers who follow the vegan diet do so with sustainability in mind, as they are aware of the ramifications dairy farms have on the environment. So, to our nature-loving friends we are also a plastic-free vegan brand.

There is also a common misconception that vegan food is not meant for everyone, when that is truly not the case. Being a Lebanese, I can vouch for the fact that we have a wide range

of vegan-friendly food and stews that everyone can consume, whether they are vegan or not. The difference with House of Pops lies in the fact that we deliver products that taste phenomenal to people of all tastes/ dietary preferences.

As a business leader, what core strategies do you employ to keep your team motivated?

Flexibility is definitely one of the strategies that we truly believe in. We are a flexible working space and feel that employees can be productive in any space that works for them, whether it’s home or office. As long as one is able to deliver the business needs, that’s what matters.

Additionally, I feel that sharing the wins and losses of the company with the team is important. We celebrate every win together, because it is the collective effort across different channels that leads to a win – we all deserve the recognition.

What trends will the vegan and food market witness this year?

What we see is very rapid developments in the vegan food sector. It’s no longer the traditional/ stereotypical sense of vegan food. We see a lot of technological advancements in kitchen/ manufacturing. We see an amazing advancement in the textures of plant-based foods, like burger patties and fluffy vegan ice cream that aren’t necessarily heavy on the gut.

I see more and more plant-based substitutes for our favourite foods starting to take over. I also see a lot of developments in the juicing/ smoothies’ sector, with loads of up-and-coming brands that are developing fruit fusions that boost energy, immunity, and overall health.

What are your future goals for the organisation?

I naturally hope to see it grow! As we expand our geographic coverage, we hope to see offices and teams pop up in different countries. For now, we are expanding our footprint in the KSA and will be setting up a dedicated team to manage the operations in the Kingdom as we see endless opportunities over there.

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Revolutionising Hospitality Experiences in India

It's an extremely exciting time for restaurateurs, says **Amit Ahuja**, Founder of AA Hospitality, in an interview with **Business Frontier**

Deepa Natarajan Lobo



Amit Ahuja, the visionary Founder of AA Hospitality, embodies the perfect blend of passion, expertise, and innovation in the culinary world. With over a decade of experience in the hospitality sector, Amit first showcased his leadership at the Hilton Hotel in Bengaluru, India, where he honed his commitment to excellence. His journey into the restaurant industry began with cherished family outings, which ignited his desire to create memorable dining experiences that resonate with consumers.

In 2015, Amit launched The Open Box, marking the start of a successful entrepreneurial journey that would soon include the acclaimed Misu and the award-winning Lucky Chan, recognised for its exceptional pan-Asian cuisine. His ability to identify market niches has led him to demystify pan-Asian offerings, making them accessible and relatable to a broad audience. Through meticulous sourcing of high-quality ingredients and a relentless focus on customer satisfaction, Amit has built a thriving portfolio that continues to delight diners. With ambitious expansion plans across major cities, his vision for AA Hospitality is not just about growth, but about maintaining an unwavering commitment to excellence and innovation in every dining experience.

In an interview with **Deepa Natarajan Lobo of Business Frontier**, Ahuja discusses his journey in hospitality, the booming food industry in India, and his



commitment to creating exceptional dining experiences while planning for future expansion.

How did the early stages of your career help you emerge as the Founder of AA Hospitality (and Lucky Chan)?

My journey into hospitality began after working for 14 years with a developer, where I gained exposure to various departments like marketing, sales, and liaison. Towards the end of my tenure, I was leading hospitality for the organisation, and one of my projects involved a Hilton property. This experience piqued my interest in the hospitality industry, particularly how a hospitality chain like Hilton operates and creates a unique environment for guests. When the opportunity arose in 2014 to create a space on St Marks Road, Bengaluru, I seized it, leading to the birth of 'The Open Box' and marking the start of my journey in hospitality with AA Hospitality.

How would you describe your company's culture, and what role does leadership play in shaping it?

Our company culture is driven by a continuous desire to improve and perfect our offerings. As a leader, I believe in coming to work every day with the mission of making our products, experiences, and overall environment better than the day before. This mindset encourages my team to identify areas for improvement and strive for excellence in

everything we do. We aim to create a fun and vibrant atmosphere while staying true to our goal of being specialists in the Asian food segment.

What do you think of the booming food scenario of India?

India's food scenario is indeed booming, with a growing appetite for diverse and authentic culinary experiences. This is an exciting time for restaurateurs, as

“ The increasing awareness and appreciation for global flavours, particularly Asian cuisine, align perfectly with our vision at AA Hospitality. We are thrilled to be part of this vibrant food landscape and look forward to contributing to its growth. ”

the market is ripe with opportunities to introduce new concepts and cuisines. The increasing awareness and appreciation for global flavours, particularly Asian cuisine, align perfectly with our vision at AA Hospitality. We are thrilled to be part of this vibrant food landscape and look forward to contributing to its growth.

Are there any industry trends or changes that you're particularly interested in or concerned about?

I am particularly interested in the rising trend of creating immersive dining experiences that go beyond just food. At AA Hospitality, we are exploring new concepts such as launching an Izakaya, which will bring a vibrant and authentic Japanese pub experience to our guests. Additionally, we are committed to continuously innovating within our existing brands, regularly introducing new products and menu items to keep our offerings fresh and exciting. This focus on combining new concepts with consistent innovation is a trend that I believe will continue to shape the hospitality industry

How do you see your restaurant evolving over the next few years?

We have ambitious plans for expansion, particularly with our scalable brands like Lucky Chan, Prequel, and Misu. This year alone, we are aiming to open several new outlets across these brands. For us, it's about going all out and not holding back. We believe that our focus on creating specialised, high-quality Asian dining experiences will continue to resonate with our customers and drive our growth in the coming years.

What are the key trends that the hospitality sector will witness in India in future?

The hospitality sector in India is likely to see a continued shift towards specialisation in cuisines, with a focus on creating immersive dining experiences that transport guests to different cultures and regions. There is also a growing demand for restaurants that offer not just great food but also a unique ambiance and overall experience. Additionally, scalability and replicability of successful concepts will be a key trend as brands look to expand their footprint across the country.

What advice do you have for budding entrepreneurs?

Identify your area of specialisation and strive to master it. While it's tempting to explore different verticals, success often comes from focusing on one area and doing it exceptionally well. Also, never settle for perfection; always look for ways to improve your product and experience. Stay open to new ideas, be adaptable, and most importantly, be passionate about what you do.

Why User Experience Matters in Modern Business Travel?

João Carvalho, Managing Director of SAP Concur in Southern Europe, Middle East, and Africa, writes about the importance of offering seamless travel experience to consumers



Business travel has always been an integral part of corporate operations. However, as the world of travel evolves, so too do the challenges both travellers and companies face. The complexities of modern business travel are not limited to the trip itself but extend to the planning, booking, and post-travel phases. Recent SAP Concur research has found that 43% of business travellers now consider the pre-trip stage—particularly planning and booking—to be the most stressful part

of the journey, a 4% increase from the previous year.

What is becoming clear is that the key to overcoming these challenges lies in delivering a user experience that mirrors the simplicity and ease of consumer-grade booking tools. By offering business travellers a seamless, intuitive booking experience, companies can enhance employee satisfaction, increase policy compliance, and reduce risks. As businesses shift toward more sustainable and efficient operations, the role of user experience in business travel cannot be overstated.

The Pre-Trip Hurdles

The pre-trip phase, often involving planning and booking, sets the tone for the entire travel experience. The complexity of corporate booking tools, coupled with rigid policies, can cause frustration among employees, driving them to book outside corporate channels or struggle with time-consuming processes. This is not only inefficient but also detrimental to both the business and its employees. A lack of visibility into bookings creates complications for travel and HR

managers, particularly when it comes to fulfilling their duty-of-care obligations. When companies cannot track bookings, their ability to provide support during crises or unexpected disruptions is severely hampered.

A user-friendly travel and expense (T&E) management system can address these issues by encouraging the use of approved corporate tools. The more intuitive these tools are, the higher the rate of adoption. In instances where employees prefer booking directly with suppliers, professional management solutions can capture and integrate these bookings into the company's T&E system, ensuring compliance and enabling travel managers to provide the necessary support when needed.

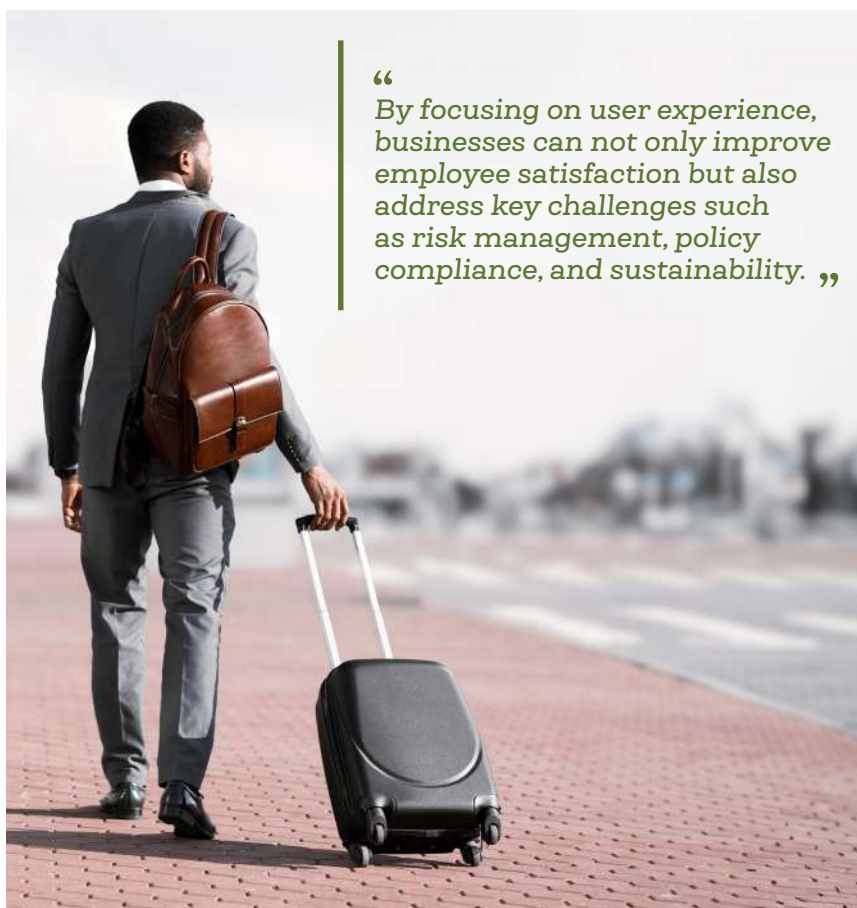
Risk Management and Compliance

Corporate travel policies are often complex and multifaceted, making compliance a challenge. Risk management is another area where businesses face hurdles, particularly in ensuring that all bookings adhere to company policies. A well-designed T&E solution can help alleviate these burdens by incorporating travel policies directly into the booking system. When employees are equipped with clear guidance on policy-compliant options, they can make decisions more efficiently and avoid the manual filtering of options, such as class of service or allowed expenses.

By eliminating these extra steps, companies are not only ensuring higher levels of compliance but also making it easier for travellers to stay within policy without feeling restricted. Additionally, integrating policies into the booking process helps business travellers avoid having to keep track of frequent updates to the company's travel policy, further easing their burden.

Streamlined Processes for Efficiency

Efficiency is one of the primary concerns in business travel, and consumer-grade tools provide a perfect model for the corporate world to emulate. A booking process that requires minimal clicks can significantly enhance the user experience. When employees can book a trip effortlessly—whether it's the flight, hotel, or ground transportation—they are less likely to encounter frustrations, thus improving overall satisfaction.



“
By focusing on user experience, businesses can not only improve employee satisfaction but also address key challenges such as risk management, policy compliance, and sustainability.”

This not only benefits the employees but also travel managers, who are often bogged down with troubleshooting and administrative tasks. With streamlined processes, managers are freed up to focus on more strategic aspects of their roles, such as improving travel policies or enhancing support structures. The ability to manage business travel efficiently, from the initial booking to post-trip expense reporting, is essential for businesses looking to optimise productivity

Supporting ESG Goals Through User Experience

Sustainability has become a core concern for businesses, with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards increasingly influencing decision-making processes. For business travel, this means adopting tools that help travellers make eco-conscious choices without additional effort.

User-friendly T&E solutions can integrate sustainability metrics, such as carbon emissions data for various travel options. When this information

is presented clearly and automatically, employees are empowered to make more sustainable decisions, aligning their travel choices with the organisation's ESG goals. For example, a traveller may choose a lower-emission option, such as rail travel over air, based on the data provided at the point of booking. By incorporating ESG considerations into the user experience, companies can promote sustainability without creating additional hurdles for their employees.

A Paradigm Shift in Business Travel

The future of business travel lies in the adoption of intuitive, consumer-like tools that simplify every stage of the journey. By focusing on user experience, businesses can not only improve employee satisfaction but also address key challenges such as risk management, policy compliance, and sustainability. As companies continue to evolve, those that prioritise user-friendly solutions will be better positioned to navigate the complexities of modern business travel.

14% OF WORLD SUFFERING FROM DIABETES, STUDY SHOWS



More than half of the estimated 800 million adults who have diabetes are not receiving treatment for their condition, research shows. The World Health Organisation had previously estimated that about 422 million people have diabetes, a chronic disease involving blood sugar levels, which can damage the heart, blood vessels, nerves and other organs if untreated. The rise of the condition has seen a corresponding treatment gap as proportionally fewer people seek medical help.

The study was carried out by the NCD Risk Factor Collaboration and the WHO, and is the first global analysis to include rates and treatment estimates for all countries, the authors said. It is based on more than 1,000 studies involving more than 140 million people. Three out of five (59%) of adults aged 30 years and older with diabetes. A total of 445 million, were not receiving medication for diabetes in 2022, three and half times the number in 1990 (129 million).

About 14% of people now have the condition globally, rising to 7% in the past three decades, with much of the burden falling on low and middle-income countries. The rate of diabetes stayed

the same or even fell in some wealthier countries, such as Japan, Canada or Western European nations such as France and Denmark, the study said.

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement that the rise documented in the study was alarming. "To bring the global diabetes epidemic under control, countries must urgently take action," he said, including with policies supporting healthy diets and physical activity, as well as health systems that can prevent, detect and treat the condition.

East Asia and the Pacific, as well as Canada and South Korea, have seen vast improvements in treatment rates for diabetes resulting in more than 55% of people with diabetes in these countries receiving treatment in 2022. The highest treatment rates were estimated in Belgium, at 86% for women and 77% for men.

However, for many low and middle-income countries diabetes treatment coverage has stayed low and changed little over the previous three decades, with over 90% of people with diabetes not receiving treatment in some countries in both 1990 and 2022. In sub-Saharan Africa, only five to 10% of

adults with diabetes received treatment in 2022. In addition, just 10% of people with diabetes in the Middle East and North African region received treatment, according to the study.

In 2022, about 133 million people with untreated diabetes lived in India, more than 50% greater than the next largest number which was in China with 78 million. Similarly, Pakistan had 24 million cases and Indonesia had 18 million cases, the next two countries with the largest number of untreated diabetes surpassed the USA with 13 million untreated cases.

"Our study highlights widening global inequalities in diabetes, with treatment rates stagnating in many low- and middle-income countries where numbers of adults with diabetes are drastically increasing," said senior study author Majid Ezzati of Imperial College London. "This is especially concerning as people with diabetes tend to be younger in low-income countries and, in the absence of effective treatment, are at risk of lifelong complications."

Those complications include "amputation, heart disease, kidney damage or vision loss – or in some cases, premature death," he said.

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