

Once A SealMan Always A SealMan: Umar Balwa's 30-Year Entrepreneurial Journey



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Umar Balwa's 30-Year Entrepreneurial Journey

Umar A K Balwa | Founder Sealmatic India Pvt. Ltd.

Umar Balwa's entrepreneurial journey is a story worth a decade of ink. Starting from the late 80s as a Bombay University grad, he saw the establishment of one of the most trusted names in mechanical seals from that era. He was one of the first in this field to bring international expertise and collaboration into the Indian market. His collaboration on behalf of AK Engineering with Burgmann, a premier name in Germany, established an industry behemoth whose legacy continues to this day. And Balwa's recent endeavours with his new brainchild Sealmatic bring his years of experience, international liaison, and business acumen as well as a particular vision of the future to the fore. Here is a look into his 30+ year journey as an old-school new-ideas entrepreneur right from the start:

Early Entrepreneurial Endeavours

Surprising as it might be to hear, Umar Balwa's first entrepreneurial choice was not the engineering seal business. He wanted to go into the textile and garments trade and almost got the financial backing from his father. However, things did not turn

out in his favour and his plans were left hanging mid-stream. Then, a chance foray into mechanical engineering by his older brother provided him with the perfect opportunity for exploring his entrepreneurial dreams. AK Engineering, as his brother's founded company was called, was bounding with potential. All it needed was the right technological backing from international concerns. This is where Umar Balwa's business vision and personal charm came into the picture.

A Heritage Of Bringing Global Business To India

Entering the highly technical and demanding world of mechanical seals required some effort. Despite Mr. Balwa's family's entrepreneurial experience, he did not want to fly off the handle. He began his research by studying premier brands and businesses in the international space. These included **Burgmann, John Crane, Crane Packing, Flexibox, Pacific, Safematic, Borg Warner, Sealol, Durametallic, Eagle, Pillar, and many more.**

Once the research and market study was laid out, Mr. Balwa's efforts turned to find a suitable partner. At that time, not a whole lot of companies were keen on investing in India. The market was very protected and rolling in bureaucratic red tape. Also, the investment itself was a risky process and Mr. Balwa needed to show he had the right chops for the job.

After months of probing the European and US market, he managed to land a meeting with the prestigious Burgmann company in Germany. The competition was high, the stakes were massive and AK Engineering was not the first choice Burgmann went for. However, a turn of luck bent the German giant's attention his way and he seized the moment with both hands.

What followed was an extensive period in the early 90s with Mr. Balwa undergoing several weeks of training. Following this, Burgmann formally entered into a joint partnership with AK Engineering on the 10th of November, 1993.

Making Obstacles Into Opportunities

Mr. Balwa's time with the German company was a life-changing experience. He remarks he was most impressed by the German engineers' discipline and brought that experience back home with him. From that point on, AK Engineering was a prospective enterprise with few peers. Mr. Balwa sought to take on many risky endeavours and several turned successful. As the company's reputation grew, more risky bids came in and several did not go well. However, the company continually grew its reputation and clientele throughout the 90s and 2000s. Things were on a high until a sudden termination of the partnership with Burgmann closed AK Engineering doors too.

This was a major blow to Mr. Balwa's ambitions. For a time, he prospected in other business domains but nothing really caught his fancy. This slump period got broken in December 2011 when one of his old colleagues, Hanif Choudhary approached him with a proposition.

Creating Quality The Indian Way

Sealmatic was first established in January 2012 with a small premise of 220 sq meters with Mr. Balwa and Mr. Choudhary's collaboration. The families of both entrepreneurs came together to support their endeavours and Mr. Balwa took up the long and arduous road to taking the company's name to international levels. He tells us he has been driving through the US and Europe, talking to entrepreneurs, engineers, and potential investors. And all of this has paid off with Sealmatic growing as one of the most reliable names in the mechanical seals across India and the world.

However, Mr. Balwa insists that they are merely scratching the surface. He believes that his experience with AK engineering was a precursor to his work with Sealmatic. The nearly 2 decades of working with German engineering masters and growing with them have helped him develop a keen sense of what the market needs. He believes Sealmatic and the team behind it are worthy of recognition. Even more so, Mr. Choudhary as a partner handling the daily workings of the company leaves Mr. Balwa to bring his international experience in collaboration and mergers without being fettered by the company's demanding inner workings.

Bringing Years Down To Moments

At present, Sealmatic delivers its highly reputed products to over 43 countries. It holds the prestigious API Q1 and ATEX certification and is the only Indian-origin company with this distinction. Through their combined vision and some much-appreciated guidance from Mr. Balwa's older brother Hussein Balwa, the company has expanded its infrastructure. They moved their factory to a brand new state-of-the-art premises in 2017, as chance would have it, on the same date 28 years ago that Mr. Balwa had stepped into the mechanical seal business 28 years ago.

Into The Future

Mr. Balwa says the field of mechanical seals offers a lot of challenges to him as an entrepreneur. It is a dynamic, challenging, and highly competitive arena where new technologies and implements bring new opportunities. Mr. Balwa believes the growing need for global industrial processes means his company's prospects will be on a steady rise. He endorses every single product with his own personal philosophy of "sealing it right to do it well." The future Mr. Balwa sees for Sealmatic seems sealed for success!

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