

[TOAST TO YOUR TASTEBUDS]

CELLAR MAGIC

Nikhil Agarwal's business premise is enviable:
It deals with All Things Nice

SRIYA RAY CHAUDHURI

Thirty three-year-old Nikhil Agarwal is a wine aficionado. So are many of us. But the suave and savvy entrepreneur has turned his passion into a successful business model, combining other similar preferences into a marketing model. Agarwal's All Things Nice (ATN) helps different brands market their goods and services to prospective clients. The route is by introducing and educating the Indian consumer on items ranging from wines and single malts to cheese, chocolates, teas, coffees and cigars.

"ATN is a taste experience. Our tasting events are hosted at well-known restaurants, hotels and art galleries, attended by High Networth Individuals who are then possible converts to the brands they taste," explains Agarwal, Director, ATN.

The company also offers consultancy to restaurants and hotels to compile special wine lists, how to best pair wine with the food on offer, staff training etc. ATN also provides global F&B players with their marketing and distribution solutions, especially aiding

them in dealing with India's complex import and export systems. It works with wineries and importers of wine, beer, other spirits and gourmet food companies in their marketing efforts.

The spin-off

Starting off in the sales department of Sula Vineyards at the age of 22, Agarwal was quickly promoted to the import division of the Indian wine giant. Just one and a half years later, he joined the export/sales division of the company. As he gained experience and was



TASTE CASE: Nikhil Agarwal at Dome, InterContinental Marine Drive

TWIST IN THE TALE

One of Agarwal's unique offerings is the Twisted Decadence evenings. Held at top city restaurants, during these sessions guests eat a multi-course dinner while blindfolded or in a blacked-out room. The concept is very popular as part of Europe's experimental cuisine movement. ATN adds wine and food pairings and sometimes even performing artists to the events. "The idea is to reveal the power of our sense of smell and taste by cutting out distractions. We want people to taste ingredients, the delicate flavors in their food and drink, to experience taste," says Agarwal.

ATN's first Twisted Decadence evening was done in partnership with Audi Mumbai West and Dome, Intercontinental Marine Drive. Guests were led to their seats in a partially-lit room, given a silk scarf which was wrapped around their eyes to temporarily blind them before the courses started. Agarwal hopes to conduct many more Twisted Decadence evenings for private groups.

(some of this was savings he made from stock market forays). With its revenue coming from the consultancy services it offers to hotels, restaurants, retail chains and airlines, the ATN portfolio also includes brand launches, events and other programs, which are sources of income for the company.

With a team of seven personnel, ATN today has a community of 7,500 members. Starting up was not a tough ask for Agarwal as he knew most of the people in the industry since his Sula days and even later as a sommelier. "My clients are High Networth Individuals who have the means to afford the luxuries of life. They are well-traveled, understand the different qualities of wine and liquors they consume and prefer gourmet food to regular fare. It helped that hailing from a business family, I knew many of these people at a personal level. They have implicit trust in my judgment and know that if I am offering them a product, it is not just because I have to sell and earn a living. I am as passionate about the good things as they are," explains Agarwal.

Rise 'n' Shine

ATN organizes Shine Nights, where prospective clients are introduced to a particular product/brand. If they like it, there are various ways in which sales can be later made. Till date, ATN has organized hundreds of such Shine Nights, both private ones and those that are thrown open to the public. He has also organized 55 private tastings

till date. "My USP is that I am not selling anything to anybody. I am just introducing you to a particular product which I feel you would prefer to purchase. People trust my judgment because of my past experience in this field. Of course, there are tangible benefits for the brands whose products are tasted at our sessions, because it results directly in more sales for them," claims Agarwal, whose portfolio includes hands-on experience with industry giants like Moët Hennessy, Diageo and, of course, Sula. The entrepreneur acquired his sommelier degree in wine and spirits from UK's Wine & Spirits Education Trust.

Almost as a natural offshoot of his present business, Agarwal hopes to open his own restaurant some day soon. "The logistics and funding options have to be carefully sorted before I can think of selecting the menu and the venue. It's all in my head, of course, but once everything falls into place, I will open my own restaurant," he says.

Of course, he also pays for his extreme love of all things nice. "Every time I go to a restaurant for a quiet drink & dinner with my wife, I check if the wine has been served in the correct glass, if the pairing has been suggested correctly and sometimes spend more time staring at the menu than at my wife. But these situations are most welcome. When my business is all about dealing with the good things in life, how can I not feel good about life too?" he says.

exposed to all the major wine brands across the world, Agarwal's passion for his subject grew in leaps and bounds. "I am a Punjabi, so I love my food and drink. I have been a sommelier for 11 years. I realized a few years back that loving all things nice myself, I would be in a good position to market products that brands in this space offer," explains Agarwal over a simple cup of steaming cappuccino at a Mumbai café.

All Things Nice was launched in 2010, with the then 30-year-old entrepreneur putting in ₹20 lakh of his own savings

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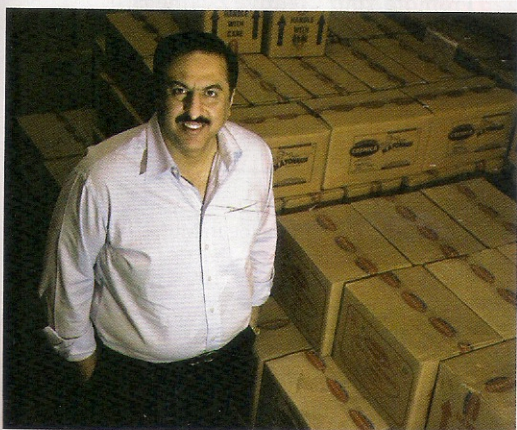
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