

Omni United: Treading in the right direction

By An Jiasheng, Cai Qingwen
Brendan, Chang Kaifeng
and Chee Ping Yi Samuel

“DON'T do the right things for the wrong reasons” is a mantra that entrepreneur Gajendra Singh Sareen lives by.

A former decorated military officer-turned-entrepreneur, Mr Sareen is the founder, president and CEO of Omni United, a tyre manufacturing and distribution company.

The foundation of his business, he says, is its customer-centric focus, providing high quality and affordable tyres to customers, and a reliable and timely supply chain to global partner retailers.

Mr Sareen believes a company will succeed if it is able to solve a real-world problem. However, many ventures fail because people choose

to start a business for the wrong reasons such as fame and fortune. Mr Sareen says he hopes to educate aspiring entrepreneurs that there are no shortcuts in business and that things will naturally fall into place if it is inherently right.

Founded in 2003 in Singapore, Omni United is Mr Sareen's fourth business venture since quitting the Indian military. His motivation for going into business was, he says, survival – he needed a better means of providing for his family. Eventually, he got into the tyre industry when a friend sought assistance in importing tyres. Mr Sareen helped out and hasn't looked back.

In 1994 he decided to relocate, choosing Singapore over Dubai as the result of coin toss. Now a naturalised Singaporean and head of a successful

business, he says he is glad that luck favoured him then.

Today, Omni United has customers in more than 80 countries, offices in the US, the UK and the United Arab Emirates. In 2017, Omni United was awarded the Enterprise 50 award for the fifth consecutive time, recognised as one of the top 50 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Singapore.

With a reputation as “the Ikea of tyres”, Omni United aims to compete against the big names in the industry by offering better and more innovative products at affordable prices. It currently sells more than 6.5 million units of passenger and light truck tyres worldwide annually. The company's flagship brand, Radar, has one of the largest product ranges in the world targeted at every segment of road vehicles.

This year, Omni United's revenue is expected to reach US\$350 million to US\$400 million, an exponential growth from its initial turnover of US\$7 million in 2003.

In the US, which accounts for 70 per cent of its sales, Omni United has expanded its business presence through two strategic acquisitions, namely A to Z Tires & Battery and Interstate Tires Distributor, to form OmniSource United Inc. This has given the firm a nationwide network of warehouses, distribution centres and distributors, making Omni United one of the top 10 tyre distributors in the country.

But while almost three-quarters of the firm's current sales comes from the US, its headquarters remain in Singapore. In Mr Sareen's words: “There is no reason not to be in Singapore. It is a clean place, an organised place, everything is perfect, and it has probably the best tax system in the world.” Mr Sareen says a large part of Omni United's success comes down to the support received from the Singapore government, its legal system and world-class infrastructure that enabled it to tap into opportunities to expand overseas. For instance, when it needed legal assistance and bank references, Enterprise Singapore (previously IE Singapore) was able to help.



“Entrepreneurs should not start a business just to follow other people, or start a business hoping to get rich,” Mr Sareen says. “They should act with the mission to serve and help others.” BT FILE PHOTO

Omni United's success has also been accompanied by a belief in the importance of giving back to its community. Choosing the breast cancer research charities in the US and in Australia as its beneficiaries, Omni United has launched a special Radar “Pink Ribbon” tyre initiative where it

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donates US\$5 for every Radar tyre sold. To date this has generated more than US\$1 million in support of the cause.

The company has also made efforts to improve value chain sustainability, with the Radar brand becoming the world's first tyre to be certified carbon neutral. Omni United has also partnered with the fashion brand Timberland to produce Timberland tyres. The tyres, marketed as the first brand with an end-to-end life cycle, feature a rubber formulation that is suitable for recycling into the soles of Timberland footwear.

For Mr Sareen, Omni United's current success comes back to his principle of doing things for the right reasons. “If you want to be a billionaire, solve a problem for a billion people,” he says. “It is that simple.”

He explains: “Entrepreneurs should not start a business just to follow other people, or start a business hoping to get rich. They should act with the mission to serve and help others.”

■ The writers are students from
NUS Business School



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This series is part of the Enterprise 50 Educational Project between the E50 partners and the NUS Business School. Omni United was among the winners in 2017. The annual E50 ranking is co-organised by The Business Times and KPMG, sponsored by OCBC Bank, and supported by Enterprise Singapore, Singapore Exchange and Singapore Business Federation.