PILLARS: YOU WENT STRAIGHT FROM GRADUATION TO OWNING YOUR OWN COMPANY? HOW DID SOMEONE SO YOUNG MAKE SUCH A BOLD MOVE?

KAILASH SHETH: My family is into business and my dad encouraged me to start a business as well. After graduating with a degree in Bachelor of Commerce from Curtin University in Perth, I knew that I did not want to work for someone else and was looking for a business possibility to venture into. My ultimate goal was to figure out how to make money.

I was only 22 when I started my own business with a partner. I surveyed the market and learnt that this industry was a niche and no one else was doing it. Hence I saw the potential in it. Initially I did a lot of aggressive marketing, meeting people, reading books and getting loads of advice from my parents and brothers on the business know-how. All the fundamentals came from them and it was they who guided me.

Then my partner and I lobbied clients from hospitals to hotels to commercial property, clean rooms, and pharmaceuticals. Slowly we got small to medium jobs as we started building the confidence level in clients and building up the brand. At the end of 2004, we obtained a very large project from a government hospital. It was a breakthrough for our company. This project was for the initial clean up of four floors. After that we were awarded two years of planned preventive maintenance programme.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE BEING A YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR?

Being so young when I started was certainly to my disadvantage. People used to think why is this young punk telling me all these stories? My age made it harder for me to convince them but I used the right language telling me all these stories? My age certainly to my disadvantage. People used to think why is this young punk telling me all these stories? My age made it harder for me to convince them but I used the right language telling me all these stories? My age certainly to my disadvantage. People used to think why is this young punk telling me all these stories? My age made it harder for me to convince them but I used the right language telling me all these stories? My age certainly to my disadvantage. People used to think why is this young punk telling me all these stories? My age made it harder for me to convince them but I used the right language telling me all these stories?

HOW DID THE COMPANY GROW?

By word-of-mouth especially in the last three to four years. We also did a lot of direct marketing and networking. It took five years to convince people. Today we have a healthy mix of customers from the government to MNCs, SMEs, GLCs and public listed companies. This whole concept is from the States and I go there annually to attend conferences in indoor air quality, to gain knowledge and for continuous education.

Currently I am a certified and registered indoor air quality assessor from DOSH. I am also a certified air system cleaning specialist in Malaysia. To date I am the only person with such certification.

WHAT HPICCUPS DID YOU FACE WHEN STARTING UP?

Acceptance of the solution we were offering was the hardest. Out of 100 companies approached, the acceptance rate was 5%. We had to convince people on the necessity of our offerings.

The second challenge was finances. We tried to keep the cost to a minimum and tried to be self-sufficient and use whatever money we received for our next project. I did not take a salary for a year and we ran a one-man show initially.

Thirdly, it was tough getting competent staff because this field is still new. You can't find good, skilled staff. To overcome that we provided on-the-job practical training and classroom training.