

Clear focus

Bhandare Opticians adopts new modern business techniques after the induction of new blood in the top management

One of the oldest firms of its kind, Bhandare Opticians was set up in Mumbai 80 years ago. Rhea Bhandare, a fourth generation member of the founding family, joined the business last year. Now a partner in the firm, Bhandare had earlier worked in an international management consulting firm, a multinational public relations firm and a large Indian retail conglomerate.

Bubbling with new ideas, she is responsible for managing and expanding the business as well as starting and heading a new e-commerce business in optical retail. Here, she talks on a variety of subjects including winning in a competitive field and emerging trends in the industry.

Your field is getting very competitive. How does your company plan to distinguish itself from the rest?

Bhandare Opticians is different from competitors in numerous ways. We offer personalised service at all our stores. We make sure to meet every customer's needs – whether it is a particular model or frame that might not be available in our stores, contact lenses in an emergency, or products to be shipped across the globe. We have been known among generations of families in India as a trusted and dependable company.

You worked at various places before joining the family firm. What have your past work experiences taught you?

These various work experiences made me realise the need for incorporating strict standard operating procedures in our stores, so that we can operate in an efficient manner. Training of staff and a robust IT system are extremely important. Also, marketing your



brand well is a key ingredient to a successful retail business.

You are now heading the e-commerce business in optical retail at your firm. What are your plans?

We will be going online later this year. We have a lot of tourists, NRIs, young professionals and businessmen as our customers. They are often travelling and call us to send them products no matter where they are in the world. I felt going into e-commerce will

help us better serve our clients and reach out to a much wider audience as well.

You graduated in History from the University of Pennsylvania. How then did you get into management?

While I was in college, during my summer holidays, I would always come back to Mumbai and intern at different companies and industries. During my third year, I interned at KPMG Business Advisory. I thoroughly enjoyed

the experience and that is when I decided I wanted to get into management consulting.

What are some of the new trends in eyewear? How has it evolved in the past five years?

In sunglasses the retro Wayfarer look is back in fashion. Aviators are also much sought-after. In eyeglasses, plastic Wayfarers are in demand. Also, three-piece rimless and half-rimmed frames never seem to go out of style. New styles are introduced in eyewear every season.

These days eyewear companies are paying a lot for the promotion of frame designs. Is this by any chance being done at the cost of the quality of the lenses?

When buying eyeglasses or spectacle frames, a consumer chooses the type of lens he or she wants. This will be dependent on price and quality. At Bhandare Opticians, we usually explain the different features of each product lens to our customers, so they can decide accordingly. In sunglasses as well, usually the bigger the brand, the better the quality of the product. These days the average Indian consumer is quite knowledgeable, aspirational and fashion-conscious. They do their research on the brands and are usually willing to spend on eyewear.

You have been a four-time junior national squash champion. Has your background in sports helped in disciplining you in your professional life?

Playing competitive squash has taught me a lot of things. However, my two biggest learnings have been on how to be goal-oriented and how to relate to people from all walks of life. Constant competition taught me not to get deterred from the bigger goal on hand. Set-backs are a part of life – whether losing a match, people trying to put you down or unforeseen difficult circumstances. But I learnt how to be true to myself, move ahead with renewed strength and focus on other goals.

Interviewed by Charlene Flanagan