

CBL Munchee Shines In The International Arena



Ceylon Biscuits Limited, a major player in the food industry in Sri Lanka has recorded another milestone to add to its list of achievements. At the 2011 CMO Asia

Brand awards held in Singapore, Munchee was awarded for Asia's Best Employer Brand and for Asia's Best CSR Practices. In addition to this four of its brands; Munchee, Ritzbury, Tiara, and Lankasoy were awarded prestigious Brand and Marketing Excellence awards.

Nandana Wickramage, Group Director/Head of Marketing and Sales, Ceylon Biscuits Limited (CBL) who was also Awarded the prestigious personal award 'Marketing Professional of the Year' at the 2011 CMO Asia awards, spoke about the company's achievements and the factors leading to the success of CBL. Touching on 'Asia's Best Employer Brand' award Wickramage described this as a testimony to the manner in which CBL looks after its people. With an employee base of over 5,000 direct and over 10,000 indirect employees, CBL is a company which cared for its employees even during times of recession states Wickramage, adding "We are very proud that we have been able to look after our people. Our employees progress in their career along with the company's growth. We have employees who have been working with the company from its inception, 43 years ago. We all work as a team and we call it the Munchee Family." Many leading international brands were present at this competition and Wickramage considers it an honor that a Sri Lankan brand was able to achieve such recognition.

Munchee was also awarded "Asia's best CSR practices award." Wickramage describes the major CSR activities undertaken by CBL, these encompass several areas; education, sports, arts and culture and community development. Speaking about education Wickramage says "We focus on preventing children from dropping out of school at an early age. Specially in rural areas if the father who is usually the breadwinner, has demised or is injured, the children in the family are affected. Often the child is sent to work as a domestic and is unable to attend school. Such children will grow up with a vengeance and will become a problem to the society in the future. As a corporate institution, prevention of this is our responsibility."

Munchee's CSR initiative *"Munchee Tikiri Shishyadhara"* addresses this problem by working in rural areas and identifying children who drop out of school at early stages. Discussions are held with the key figures involved in the child's life; the school principal and government officers in the area, and the child is put back in school and provided with financial support to continue his or her studies.

Around 1,500 children have been supported through this initiative. Says

Wickramage, “We are very proud that some children who dropped out of school at around ten years of age, are today completing their higher education in medical college and other universities thanks to Munchee.”

Another initiative undertaken in the field of education is the ‘*Adyapana wedamulu’* training programme. Explaining the background to this programme, Wickramage points out that children in rural areas often have inadequate educational facilities, sometimes even lacking teachers in school. As a result, these children find it difficult to face government examinations, such as the year five scholarship, GCE Ordinary Level and Advanced Level exams.

Under this programme, CBL arranges for teachers from the National Institute of Education to travel every weekend to rural areas where they conduct training programmes for school children. In 2010, over 75,000 students preparing for the year five scholarship exam, over 30,000 O/L students and over 15,000 A/L students were assisted through this programme.

In relation to community development, CBL implements the *‘Munchee samaga gamata sarana’ programme*. As a result of its wide distribution network, CBL has many employees who work in the field and thus are aware of the needs of each area. For instance, explains Wickramage, some villages lack proper roads and bridges. “Last year we carried out over 25 such programmes and constructed bridges, roads, libraries, and educational centres in rural areas,” he states. In some areas assisted through this programme, CBL also took steps to construct water tanks in schools which lacked water facilities. The districts where such programmes were carried out include Jaffna, Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Says Wickramage “as a company which serves the community I don’t think we should wait for the Government to do everything; whenever we can support the system we should do so. Improving the living standards of our community will support the entire industry some day.”

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The other area which CBL is active in, is encouraging sports activities. The company supports the National Volleyball Championship and cricket and soccer at a school level. Wickramage points out that in order to develop any sport, it’s vital to support it at the lower levels and encourage school children to become involved saying,

“Supporting the school level sports does not necessarily give us adequate brand publicity but surely it will someday be of value to our nation.”

In addition to the CMO Asia awards, Munchee was also awarded the Exporter of the Year award for three consecutive years, 2007, 2008 and 2009 at the Presidential Export Awards. Touching on this Wickramage says “Our key export markets are Australia, England and New Zealand and our brand is also very popular in the entire European market. We have been able to compete in this market because we manufacture according to international quality standards. Another factor is range; even in the category of biscuits, we have a huge variety of products to offer.” Wickramage also emphasises that there are no double standards for international and local markets since it is the same quality of product that’s supplied all over the globe.

“It’s not just about export but also about developing the overseas market for our brand. Today Sri Lanka should be concentrating on developing global brands. There is no point in being a bulk supplier and letting others make the best by developing their own brand names. We have commenced this, for example we have Munchee branded vehicles running in the streets of London. In Australia we are available in the top end supermarkets. This is really good for a Sri Lankan brand,” he points out.

Speaking about the future, Wickramage emphasises that CBL’s strength has always been innovation. “We’ve been able to come up with new products all the time. The consumer is constantly changing. We research what the consumer likes and then we keep developing.” In keeping with this tradition of innovation, CBL plans to develop and continue it’s onward path “We hope to grow further, make a mark for Sri Lanka, and show the world what Sri Lanka can do,” Wickramage says in conclusion.

