

CUSTOMER IS THE PRIORITY



Kevin SungSu YOU, Managing Director, Samsung Sri Lanka

Kevin SungSu YOU, Managing Director, Samsung Sri Lanka speaks about the global giant's presence in the country. An approach that always gives priority to the customer, Samsung has developed a strategy where it connects to the customer directly through its local offices. Products are customized according to each market, and R&D, innovation and technology are given the greatest importance. The difference with Samsung is that it takes a long term view when entering a market, thus providing support to the country's economy as well.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe. Photography Menaka Aravinda.

Innovation is an inherent quality of Samsung and it has reached one of the top positions surpassing many international brands. How was this achieved?

Samsung is strongly positioned in most of the markets it operates; it is the undisputed number one in the Mobile, TV and Refrigerator categories. As a company we continue to invest in research and development (R&D) capabilities, with many R&D centers located around the world, such as in India, Europe and US, which helps us to have a unique understanding of customers' diverse needs and wants in different markets. Based on these insights we are able to develop technologies or features and functions in our products and services that truly fulfill customer needs.

There are so many such examples. In India, we made the Curd Maestro Refrigerator and in Sri Lanka we have the Yogurt Maestro Refrigerator. In India, curd is popular, while in Sri Lanka it is yogurt, which is why they are named accordingly. We are always looking at various types of such localized innovations.

Samsung was established in 1938 and it has grown to be one of the most powerful conglomerates in the world. Can you speak about the journey of the organization?

Samsung Electronics was established more than 70 years ago. We started as a very small company in the domestic market. Samsung was founded with the purpose of creating products that benefit mankind and move us forward in big and impactful ways. We always think of the customer as our first priority. There were many companies that were number one in various industries, but more than 70

percent of these companies could not survive for more than 30 years.

That is why Samsung always focuses on understanding the customer first and the industry. We look at what type of products will be required in the future. We maintain strategic collaborations and partnerships, to help business and industries work efficiently and seamlessly. This is why we have been able to survive over the years and maintain our number one position, overcoming many challenges.

As you mentioned Samsung has R&D centers around the world. Similarly, Samsung has established many country offices as well. What is the thinking behind the global expansion?

In order to make our presence felt globally, it's best to establish a country office in each market or country we see potential in. Apart from helping us establish a stronger relationship with the local consumer, we are also able to make a valuable economic contribution by generating employment and investing in the market.

What was the thinking behind entering the Sri Lankan market?

Sri Lanka is home to an aspirational, yet diverse set of consumers. Moreover they are extremely tech-savvy and look forward to experiencing the latest innovations that a brand can offer. Our purpose is to offer them our products and services which deliver convenience and an aspirational lifestyle.

Many international brands decide to operate through a distributor or representative. But Samsung decided to establish its own presence and took a long term approach. Why is that?

We set up our office in Sri Lanka more than ten years ago. When we enter a country we take a long term view of the market to see how we can make a positive impact on the country's economy. It would be easier to appoint a distributor and sell the product. But we don't do that - we provide valuable after-sales services as well. Having a strong country presence enables us to communicate with customers and also provide solutions for any problems.

We are currently looking to train youth in repairs of electronics at technical vocational schools, a program we had commenced prior to the pandemic and which will be resumed soon. We want to accelerate this program and produce some talented engineers.

As a Company, innovation and technology have been the driving force of Samsung. Can you explain the importance of these aspects?

We are always trying to manufacture products that would provide more convenience to the customer. As life continues to rapidly evolve, technology and innovation will be very important. Many countries are looking at IoT and the Smart City concept and we too at Samsung are looking at IoT and Smart Products to improve people's lives.

Can you elaborate on the performance of Samsung in Sri Lanka?

In Sri Lanka we are the number one smartphone brand for seven consecutive years. We have also been awarded the 'most-loved electronics brand' in Sri Lanka for two consecutive years in 2019 and 2020 and the 'People's Youth Choice brand of the year' at the SLIM Nielsen Peoples awards in 2020 for three consecutive years since 2018.

We are more focused on connecting with the next generation; Millennials and Gen Z. They are getting stronger and making smarter purchase decisions. They will also be the leaders of the country in the future. We are more focused on the next generation to understand them because their needs change very fast and we need to satisfy them.

We are working with JKH, Softlogic, Singer, Sinhagiri and Damro and we have built a good relationship with them. One retailer cannot cover the entire island so we want to have a more extensive presence for customer convenience. For mobiles we have more than 3,000 dealers island-wide and we also work with leading telcos.

We work with the TRCSL, whilst adhering to their regulations. With the COVID-19 pandemic many new regulations were introduced. We have been able to maintain a cordial relationship with them by abiding with changing regulations.



What are the plans for expansion in Sri Lanka?

We are looking at bringing the full range of products to Sri Lanka. The products that we sell mainly are phones, televisions, refrigerators, microwave ovens, and washing machines, in addition to these products I want to bring air conditioners, vacuum cleaners and also IoT products. I am currently discussing with other operators and partners, for IoT and Smart Life.

You mentioned that products are customized according to the local market. Is that the same in Sri Lanka as well?

Yes, when you look at mobile products, we are developing special features only for Sri Lanka. Before we launch a new product we always test it in the market first before launching the new model to ensure there is a clear demand for it.

You have been with Samsung for 23 years, can you tell us about yourself?

After completing my university degree, I joined Samsung 23 years ago. At first I worked for the Korean domestic market. Thereafter I completed my MBA in the USA. Then, I moved into the global market where I was assigned to the European market. I was responsible for UK, Germany and France, and the rest of Western Europe. My next assignment was in India. South West Asia is developing rapidly. There is great potential in the region. I worked for three and a half years in India as the regional head for Western India. Thereafter I moved to the head office in Delhi, where I was based for two years. Then I moved to Sri Lanka as Managing Director and I have been here for about two years.



Having been in the European and Indian market, how do you find the Sri Lankan market?

The European market is very different from the Sri Lankan market. In Europe, it is more of an operator dominant market, while in India and South West Asia it is the opposite.

Sri Lanka and India are not too different in terms of the market where customers pursue new products. In India people are crazy about new products. If you launch a new product, sales would sky rocket. Sri Lanka is also very similar. I have visited many of our outlets and I have seen that the customers are always looking for newly-launched products based on their online experiences and word of mouth. Sri Lankans are also very quick to understand new technology. They are much faster than the European market.

In Sri Lanka there is a community of people who are using mobiles and who share their experiences online. There are many functions in our mobiles but users do not generally know or use all the functions. The younger generation would use the other functions as well.

Your experience in Sri Lanka?

I love Sri Lanka. It is a very good place to live and because the people are very kind and the environment is beautiful. We are located near the sea, and Colombo is a very convenient location. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have not been able to travel around the country, though I would love to do that. There are so many good places to visit in Sri Lanka. I have already been to Yala and Kandy. My goal is to travel all around the island. I have traveled around the country for work but I would like to see the country as a leisure traveler as well. I have been to Jaffna and Batticaloa on work as well.

I want to say thank you to our loyal customers as it is because of them that Samsung is in Sri Lanka. We are always trying to develop and improve our services and products for the Sri Lankan customer and all suggestions from them are welcome.