Driven By Innovation



Established in 2006 as a subsidiary of Rainco, today Light & Shade has grown into an independent and fully-fledged brand. Irshad Akthar, COO of the company talks about how their passion for novelty and innovation has made the Company a trendsetter.

By Archna Balakumar
Photography Indika De Silva

Could you tell us about the Company's journey since its inception?
The Company originally was an umbrella manufacturing company. In 2004, the Chairman and directors wanted to diversify the business and venture into the lifestyle sector. Our key objective has always been to provide lifestyle solutions to customers. Adhering to that thought, we researched about the market and decided to launch Fly Screens. After the decision was made, I underwent training in India

and studied the range of products available there. The products there were new and innovative and we wanted to introduce such products to Sri Lanka too. We wanted to come up with something new and fashionable rather than providing what was already available. That's when we started importing Bamboo blinds from China. It was very challenging in the beginning. We learnt through our mistakes.

With time, we understood the technicalities and improved our production facility at home. In 2006, we participated in a convention and people became curious about the product because it was new. The next year, we participated in the architect's exhibition and the response was huge. We got close to 600 enquiries; That's when we realised the demand for this product. It was during the same time, my colleague Roshan had come back from India after his research on outdoor solutions and shade systems. The management decided to integrate both the new ventures and launch them together under a new brand. We separated from Rainco and established as an independent business. It was a tough journey because introducing a new product to the people is a hard task. But we believed in the product.

What are the products and services offered by L&S Engineering?
Our focus is on providing what is unavailable to our customers, after analysing the markets. That is how we progressed and branched out to different sectors. After capturing the households we introduced novel products for corporate buildings. In the window ware division we launched roller, and Roman and timber Venetian blinds. We were the first company to bring all of these into the country. Later we launched Zebra and Shadow blinds, which were better alternatives to curtains. With these blinds one has the advantage of having sheer effect and cut sunlight. Right now we have about 16 varieties of blinds. We were also the first company to launch remote control blinds.

Sri Lankans love to have big windows. Using curtains however, beats its purpose as it covers almost 25 percent of the window, whereas blinds cover only 10-15cm. Our people welcomed blinds because it facilitated a better functionality of windows.

Light & Shade also offers wall papers of renowned brands such as Versace, Haute Couture and Architect Paper. Currently, the concept of wallpapers has immensely grown and the modern trend is to use elegant colourful wallpapers instead of paint.

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In the shade systems, we offer different types of awnings, canopies, both remote controlled and manually operated, to specifically suit customer needs. We cater such products to the hospitality sector as well as households. Today in Sri Lanka, people are very specific about outdoor living spaces. It is currently a big trend. People like to integrate living or working space with their surroundings and environment. Our concept store-'World of Outdoor' provides a range of outdoor furniture in different types of materials like rattan and wicker, to mention a few. We believe that if the right product is introduced to the market it will definitely become a success.

Shade systems and window blinds are very important for conserving energy. What are the solutions offered by your products to achieve this?
Ours is a tropical country, where air conditions and cooling systems are essential. Therefore it is very important that we conserve and manage energy efficiently. Our blinds are UV coated and it cuts off excess sunlight and heat, especially during sunrise and daytime. The building can enjoy natural lighting without heating up. One can switch off lights and reduce electric lighting inside. Since these blinds help in blocking heat, one can also save on air conditioning.

The Company has made its presence known in overseas markets as well. Can you talk about that?
We have consistently worked towards building our strengths in the past few years. Hence, we believe that, today, we are at the forefront in terms of innovation, technicalities and know-hows of manufacturing, in the local market. Thus, we decided it was time for us to expand globally, seizing the many opportunities in the global arena. One of the main ways by which we captured the overseas market and the hospitality sector was through the innovation of monsoon blinds. Light & Shade is the pioneer in bringing monsoon blinds to Sri Lanka and we have successfully accomplished over 300 projects.

We entered the Maldivian market, first and emerged successful there. Sri Lankan

expatriates there supported us. Following our success in Maldives we ventured into Seychelles and Mauritius too. These are travel and hospitality based economies, hence opportunities were plentiful. Presently we have strengthened our export team and we are studying other markets.

You cater to a diversified clientele. Could you comment on that?
Households were using only curtains back then. We wanted to change that. We figured if we could capture the household market, then automatically our name would be taken into the corporate and hospitality industry through referrals. And it worked for us. 95 percent of enquiries that we get today are based on referrals. That is an indication that we offer top-notch services to our clients. Customers will not recommend the brand if they are unsatisfied. We ensure proper service, timely delivery and high quality products at all times, to all of our clients, irrespective of who they are.

What are the future plans for your company?
We want to be an integrated lifestyle solutions company offering services under one umbrella. We want to be trendsetters in the market. Right now, we are looking at the Smart Home system in which customers can operate blinds, awnings and canopies using their smart phones from anywhere. We have introduced decorative blinds and wallpapers for kids' rooms too. And of course our biggest market, the hospitality sector will be focused on. We also want to introduce specialised fabrics meant for hotels.

Any final thoughts?
Well, we love this brand. We believe in this market and our people. And most importantly we enjoy what we do.