

Nick Has A Winning Way With Sales

Nick Jay has plenty to smile about. Almarai's General Manager of Sales has been in the job for 18 months and loves every minute of it.

"The Sales task is very simple – it's all about distribution and displays" he explains, a twinkle in his eye, "and our job is to make sure that our 722 vans visit their 27,000 shops almost every day, delivering 140 different product lines so that the consumers get the freshest possible produce. Fully stocked; freshest date, properly displayed; sales made; job done. That's all we do!" And once again the twinkle in Nick's eye says it all. An understatement if ever there was one.

"If no-one wants to buy, that's a different problem," he continues. "As salesmen, we fill the shelves. If we over fill, there's wastage, and that's our problem. If we supply too little, they are out of stock, so that's also our problem. The trick is to estimate how much to supply so that we achieve maximum sales with the minimum of wastage."

In fact, Nick's main challenge is to forecast the amount of sales, sometimes up to a year in advance, since some products - such as mature cheese - have long lead times. Likewise, to get twice the amount of milk to the shops, you need twice the amount of cows to produce it, and that takes time; so getting accurate forecasts is vital for the Company's profitability.

To help him achieve success, he has a staff of 2,600, which is due to rise to 3,400 by year end. "We have had an unprecedented growth rate of 15% in 2005 (the outlook for 2006

is even higher), and I would put that down to a management style of empowering the staff which gains their commitment to what we're trying to achieve. This management style comes down from the very top echelons of the company and I believe this to be an enlightened approach to dealing with one's fellow workers," Nick explains. "A positive attitude and a smile really do work wonders."

In the 18 months that he has been in the job, Nick has seen a steady increase in turnover.

There are now 5,250 more shops taking Almarai's products, and it is squeezing the smaller competitors. 150 extra delivery routes have been added to the existing 572 Gulf-wide, and every van now has an extra person on board which allows more shops to be reached in less time, with a better job done and ultimately the consumer better served.

Nick has also arranged for an extra 4,000 display fridges to go into the stores this year. So, in Saudi Arabia for instance, three out of every four stores stocking Almarai products have a display cabinet which is heavily branded. "We have examples where a well placed branded fridge has increased sales of the Company's products fourfold," he explains with pride.

Although Almarai's 'home markets' include Saudi Arabia and the GCC countries, the Company also exports across much of the Arabic-speaking world, from Jordan and Lebanon, right across to Algeria and Morocco. Naturally, these territories go for the long shelf life products such as UHT milk and cheese. Nick is looking to double the amount of exports in 2006.



Funnily enough, for such a successful salesman, Nick started his professional life in farm management in the north of England. But it was during the first Gulf War that he saw an advertisement for the position of General Manager of the Arable Division (as was) and he was responsible for the growth of wheat and alfalfa. Unfortunately, the government decided to cut the vast subsidies it paid to arable farmers, and eventually the arable division was absorbed into the mighty Dairy division.

Almarai took a chance on him and moved him into sales – this time in the Eastern Region, based in Dammam.

“It was a leap of faith on the company’s part to allow me to switch disciplines, and I have always been grateful for the amount of faith they had in me,” he said, a more serious tone intruding for just a short while.

Four years later, it was off to Dubai to look after sales in the entire Gulf region, before returning once again to Riyadh in 2003 and promotion a year later to his present position.

Nick tends to work seven days a week. “There are always sales figures to study and issues to deal with,” he explains, though, when pressed, admits to a love of cycling and



collecting vintage vehicles which are cosseted at his Carlisle home in the north of England.

Pride of place in his collection goes to a 1961 Massey Ferguson tractor, and a 40-year-old ex-Saudi Army M151A1 (a Jeep to most of us!), and though Cathryn – his wife for the past 17 years – might not be over-enamored with them, his sons certainly are.

Retirement? Nick has no plans for that. “When it is finally time for me to leave Saudi Arabia, I would like to have a small farm with rare breeds and particularly highland cattle,” he confides. “And of course devote more time to my vintage collection.”

Looking back over his career in the Company, Nick describes his time with Almarai as the happiest days of his life. “Being part of an extremely successful and professional company has given me tremendous fulfillment and firm friendships and I can honestly say that Almarai has looked after me very well. It has truly been the very best time of my life.”

And once again the contentment in Nick’s smile says it all.

