



Sundar S

Dovetail's Journey from Local to International Brands

Dovetail Furniture, a pioneer in retail fixture and institutional furniture, established in 1984, has come a long way from working with local brands to well-known international brands. Sundar S, an NID Alumni and co-founder, Dovetail Furniture, shares his entrepreneurial journey, business plans and industry insights.

Back in the eighties, retail design in the country was at a nascent stage and largely unorganized. There were very few workshops that had the design and manufacturing capability to manufacture the designs as per the specifications. Hence it was difficult for international brands that had entered the country to set up their stores as their retail fixtures had to be designed as per their company standards and specifications. Since my co-director John Mathew and I were NID alumni and passionate about design and manufacturing, we saw the growth opportunity in the retail fixtures segment and hence we started **Dovetail in 1984**. Our venture was completely bootstrapped and we took a small loan of Rs. 1 lakh from KSFC. We purchased some tools and machineries and started to operate out of a 2,500-squarefoot shed with 5 workers.

The Journey

Our first project was for erstwhile popular clothing brand **Weekender** and we setup about 50 brand stores for them. As the years passed, we gradually entered other segments viz, educational institutions, office and home furniture. In 1988 we got an opportunity to design and manufacture furniture and interiors for the

Karnataka State Institute for Rural Development in Mysore. It was a proud moment for us as it gave us the recognition as a serious industry player. Another high moment for us was winning contract for Mallya Aditi International School for the complete design, manufacture and installation of furniture for classrooms, staff rooms and laboratories. Likewise, we got opportunity to work for many well-known national and international brands. We were working with multiple clients across segments. Of course, we had a few hiccups in the journey. During the initial days, finding skilled labour and suitable machinery and tools was very difficult. And then during the recession in 2008 there was a slowdown in retail. However, we had to keep our business running and at that point of time we started taking up more school and institutional projects. This in a way helped us to expand and strengthen our educational furniture segment which still remains a core focus.

Working with different brands and growth plans

There is no one-size-fits-all model. Each and every client has their own requirements and we work closely with them to conceptualise and fulfil their requirements. Generally, the concepts that come out of the drawing boards have to be developed using different materials and then engineered to keep the functionality, look & feel intact. Dovetail always brings its wide experience and expertise in Engineering and Design Development into play. We have supported retailers to provide enhanced shopping experience by adding values in Design Development, Engineering, Material specifications, etc. Global brands have

their own prescribed material specifications and we have helped them by offering suitable materials available in the Indian context. All these challenges has only increased our ability to complete the projects in an ease with best outcome.

Companies, especially international brands are now very much concerned about the quality and durability of the fixtures and furniture and consider them as an asset to the organisation. Hence, there is a huge demand for quality driven retail furniture manufacturers in the country. Due to the increased demand for commercial spaces for retail and co-working spaces in recent years, we are seeing a major growth in these business segments.

We are a B2B project oriented company and are looking to further strengthen our retail, school and office furniture segment. In this direction, we are expanding our business across the country and looking forward to



associate with project management companies, architects and business associates. We have invested in a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Bangalore spread across 45,000 sq.ft. with end-to-end capabilities in furniture manufacture & finish.

Today, we continue to work for brands and institutions like Nike, Unlimited, Marks & Spencer, Skechers, Furlenco, Shiv Nadar School, National Centre for Biological Sciences and many more. Another high moment for us recently is working for co-working space giant WeWork.

From a small team to an 180+ workforce, from a 2500 sqft shed to 45,000 sq ft. manufacturing facility, we have come a long way. We are proud of the fact that we are pioneers in retail fixture and furniture in the country. ■