



Could you give an overview of Hemas Consumer Brands / and your current role in the organization as its Director Market Development & Exports?

Hemas Manufacturing (Pvt) Ltd is a part of the Hemas Group of Companies that has been a well-respected, diversified conglomerate in Sri Lanka with a AAA long-term fitch rating, listed on the Sri Lankan stock exchange since 2003. Hemas has a heritage of over

74 years with an employee base of more than 5,000 and a strong presence in FMCG (fast moving consumer goods), pharmaceuticals, hospitals, leisure, and transportation.

Hemas Consumer Brands is the largest Sri Lankan personal care manufacturer. We manufacture and market some of the most loved Sri Lankan brands such as Baby Cheramy, Clogard, Diva, Kumarika, Fems, Goya, and Gold. We were the sole distributors for Garnier, Loreal Consumer and Nivea but with the current import bans of the country, we are not in a position to import them.

My current designation is the Director Market Development and Exports. This role overlooks future growth areas such as e-commerce and our trade brands business. This role heads exports for Hemas Consumer Brands as well as our overseas business in West Bengal.

Has the persisting economic situation in the country had an impact on the Hemas Consumer Brands progression in the short

STRIVING TOWARDS SUCCESS AMIDST CHALLENGES

A VIEWPOINT FROM FMCG INDUSTRY

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DIRECTOR - MARKET DEVELOPMENT & EXPORTS
HEMAS CONSUMER BRANDS

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run? What are the main areas of FMCG that have been affected the most?

Hemas Consumer Brands manufacturing in Sri Lanka has been affected by the current economic situation like everyone else. The devaluation of the rupee, the shortage of foreign exchange and the huge price hikes in raw materials are the key changes that have affected us the most. For example, palm oil, being one of the key raw materials to manufacture soap, went through a huge disruption in production due to COVID-19, and the existing crisis has added to it.

The global fuel shortages and price increases have far reaching



implications for us and for our partners, such as distributors, many of who struggle to transport goods in the current context even though we manufacture in house. the biggest impact is on the supply chain.

Sri Lanka imports most of the our inputs for production, and this is the reason the current crisis has affected us so many products that are imported have now been curtailed and this has hugely affected companies that have built

their structures around this model of import distribution.

What are some measures that you have taken from a business standpoint to navigate through the current economic environment? To what extent have these initiatives delivered positive results?

This is a very difficult time for the country and for us as a business. During such times, we have to work together as a team. There are no past experiences or theories for us to depend on. However, the pandemic taught us some techniques, such as having shorter meetings, prioritizing things, etc.

Even in this kind of a crisis situation, we will concentrate on our employees, our consumers, and the country at large. We have a plan in place to ensure that all our



employees are fully equipped to navigate this difficult economic period. Also, we ensure that our consumers have adequate goods to consume. Further, measures have been taken to categorize our portfolio so that in this context of scarcity, decision makers are clear on what to focus on. We are very conscious of the challenges faced by consumers and focused on how we can provide value without compromising on quality, even during these challenging times.

There is also focus and attention on growing export businesses, which can bring in dollar income, which Sri Lanka so desperately needs. I believe in the short run, it is about doing the right things to get through the economic crisis. The environment is still evolving, but we have clarity as a team on priorities and where to focus on. We engage in different short meetings to get an understanding on what to do next so that we can plan in advance for a change because the existing situation is extremely volatile. I would say we are learning and adapting every day. As Sri Lankans, we strive to do our best in these challenging times, while trying our level best to optimize.

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support the most vulnerable people in society with a plan to supply essential food to 200,000 families island wide. Through this initiative we are trying to support the community as best we could

How has the allowance to free float Sri Lankan currency affected the FMCG sector’s revenue maximization potential in both the long run and short run?

There are global supply issues that are not in our control, and they have put huge pressure on many raw and packaged materials that are being used to produce essentials. The

pressure on fuel prices also has inflationary pressure across the supply chain. This coupled with the currency depreciation, has put unprecedented pressure on input costs and has forced all companies to accept price increases to remain viable.

This period is not to focus on profit maximization but to survive and give our contribution to stabilise the country. As a Sri Lankan organization, we must stand with good and consistent policy decisions for the country and have the current fundamentals in place, so as a country, and organizations that operate within this country have a sustainable future.

All Sri Lankan companies should concentrate on generating more dollar revenue. We welcome government support and incentives to nurture this

As a well-known corporate personality with years of experience holding key positions in the corporate sector, you must have witnessed and faced economic situations similar to what we are going through right



now. How different is it this time? And what strategies do you recommend overcoming the current situation?

We have already had our challenges with the terrorist attacks and COVID-19. I would say this is an unprecedented time for the country as we have never experienced hyperinflation before. During the pandemic, we had so many issues as we could not meet people and operate our factories. This time, however, is very tough as it has affected every single person, and organizations have to make an effort to secure the basics, which are usually taken for granted. It is essential to have a nimbler organization where you can move resources to where they are most needed. The current environment is so volatile that you might plan one thing in the morning, but you find yourself in a position where you are unable to implement it by the evening.

It is important to keep looking for pockets of opportunity and developing them for the future. Even doing the correct thing in the long run may unpredictably benefit the organization. Even the import bans may be an opportunity for local manufacturers.

What are the skills and capabilities you expect undergraduate students to develop if they are aspiring to join the FMCG sector in the future?

The field of FMCG can be stressful, and students might struggle with the phases of work. Hence, it is essential to learn to work under pressure and deliver your best. Secondly, teamwork has been identified as the most powerful tool, especially in this field. It used



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to be marketing and sales that were considered to be the key areas in an organization. However, now the supply chain has been acknowledged to be the integral function within an organization.

Finally, being open-minded while being vigilant for opportunities is also imperative since the measures that worked in the past may not work for today or one year later in FMCG. Hence, being flexible and adaptable to diverse situations is the key characteristic that is essentially required for one to be successful in the field of FMCG.

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