

HATIL's 'slim is smart' has global appeal: Marketing Director Moshiur Rahman

October 18, 2023

Online Desk: HATIL's "Slim is Smart" slogan has global appeal, according to Moshiur Rahman, the furniture brand's director of marketing.

"At our showrooms abroad, we see that customers like our designs and are interested in them," he said. "Those who are looking for furniture like IKEA but of slightly better quality and are willing to pay a bit more, prefer HATIL furniture over IKEA's."

Over a span of 26 years, while being an integral part of HATIL, Director of Sales and Marketing Moshiur Rahman has been witness to some of the most pivotal transformations that the nation's foremost furniture brand has undergone.

During an exclusive interview with United News of Bangladesh (UNB), Director Moshiur shared his personal journey, HATIL's sales and marketing strategies that have propelled it to become the nation's top furniture brand, and future prospects, among other topics.

'Didn't want to take business as a career'

Before stepping into the realm of HATIL in 1997, Director Moshiur Rahman had some different plans in mind.

Despite being one of the five sons of the visionary businessman late Al-Hajj Habibur Rahman, the founder of H.A. Timber Industries Ltd, Moshiur didn't initially aspire to follow in his father's footsteps.

"I completed my bachelor's and master's degrees in English literature," he said.

"I wanted to study English literature and become a teacher, and I also wanted to write," he added.

Despite his involvement with the country's leading furniture brand, Moshiur continued to pursue his desired path up to a certain point.

"I have done some writing, including books of poetry and novels. At some point, I also worked as a teacher at a university (for a few months)," he told UNB.

From 'for those who could afford' to 'for everyone'

As part of the country's leading furniture brand, Moshiur has been a witness to all the significant transformations in HATIL's business, sales, and marketing strategies over the past 26 years.

"Initially, our strategy was to make furniture not for everyone but for those who could afford the very best. However, our strategy has changed now. We are now targeting not only the affluent but also the middle-class," he said.

For Moshiur Rahman, trade fairs have been the most pivotal part of HATIL's marketing strategy since 1995 — the first time HATIL participated in a trade fair.

"Participating in trade fairs was a significant part of our marketing strategy because these trade fairs used to provide us with some breakthroughs. We used to experience a significant boost in sales during each fair," he

said.

“After each fair, we would supply the products showcased for the next one or two months.”

These fairs have assisted HATIL in shaping their strategy, enabling them to offer the same product model at various price points, ranging from high-end to more affordable, depending on the materials used in manufacturing these products.

“We introduced a unique sofa design for HATIL at the 1997 trade fair. We named this model ‘Mela 97’ and it received around 100 orders,” Moshiur Rahman recalled. “We offered the same model at different price points based on the type of wood we used to manufacture it.”

“This is when we started thinking about how to offer our products at a more reasonable price,” he added.

‘Slim is smart’ at the center of HATIL’s success

Like many other brands in the furniture industry, HATIL’s furniture designs differed significantly from the ones we see today.

“Our furniture designs were not as modern as they are now; we used to follow more traditional designs,” Moshiur said, referring to the slim and minimalistic design which is at the center of the brand’s success.

“People nowadays prefer slim-designed furniture because urban apartments are becoming smaller in size,” he said.

Besides designs, HATIL’s strategy to offer its products at a reasonable price has boosted its sales and subsequently its overall growth.

“We tried to change the perception in the market which, prior to 2000, considered HATIL as a costly brand. After 2000, when we introduced processed and solid wood combinations, we were able to offer reasonably priced products,” Moshiur said.

To meet the increasing demands and align with customers’ preferences, HATIL started importing different types of materials used in the manufacturing of furniture.

“Another significant change occurred around 2000. You might have noticed that HATIL’s products used to have varnishing on them instead of the current lacquer finishing. We started importing these lacquer products from abroad, and it required several changes, including in design and materials,” he said.

“Because when using solid wood for furniture, the lacquer finish is not suitable, and this is when we introduced processed wood.”

Materials, Machines and (Skilled) Manpower: HATIL’s foundation of success

The current size of Bangladesh’s furniture industry is at Tk 25,000 crore. Leading the growth across the industry is HATIL, currently the country’s leading furniture brand.

Behind its ongoing success lies its unique design and its quality of finishing, said Moshiur Rahman.

“The two key aspects are HATIL’s design and the quality of its finishing. While many brands are using lacquer, very few can achieve HATIL’s level of quality finishing,” he said.

“We ensure all three elements: materials, machinery and tools, and skilled manpower. For instance, HATIL does not rely on locally sourced machinery; we import machinery of all types from Europe, America and Japan,” he added.

Customer feedback and global trends: HATIL's strategy behind its sleek design

Although materials, machines and skilled manpower may drive a brand's growth, it's not the most important aspect for the customers, according to Director Moshir Rahman.

"What is more crucial to them are HATIL's design, product quality, durability, and after-sales service. Then comes the price. Most customers find HATIL's product price affordable when compared to its quality," he said.

When asked about the foundation of HATIL's "slim is smart" strategy, Moshir explained, "Initially, the concept of slim furniture was not widely recognized among customers. Traditional furniture held greater appeal for most. However, HATIL independently introduced the concept of slim design to the market."

"Besides, HATIL keeps a close eye on global trends. According to these trends, it is observed that people nowadays prefer slim-designed furniture," he added.

Digital marketplace is the future

In an ever-changing age of technology and digital media, the digital marketplace has become a vital component of any business's marketing strategy, believes HATIL's sales and marketing director.

"Digital marketing offers us the greatest advantage of reaching everyone. For example, a significant part of the Bangladeshi population now uses Facebook. We advertise there," he said.

"Additionally, we place advertisements in various online magazines and newspapers in the country. YouTube is a significant platform for our marketing efforts. It helps us reach a large audience."

According to Moshir, HATIL employs a location-based digital marketing approach to guarantee comprehensive coverage in the areas surrounding its 75 showrooms across the country.

Export at the center of future strategy

Much like any other actor within an industry, HATIL's goal is to expand its export growth in the coming years.

"Our position in the local market may only help us achieve marginal growth. For the growth to be robust, we must focus on expanding exports," said Moshir Rahman.

He, however, shed light on the major challenges impacting HATIL's plan for expanding exports.

"Exporting is challenging for us. For example, we have to import 90-95% of our raw materials. Besides, wood and all other raw materials come with high import duties," he said. "Therefore, while facing such high import duties on almost all raw materials, we struggle to compete with other players in terms of pricing."

Due to these challenges, according to Moshir Rahman, HATIL is currently falling behind in terms of seizing opportunities in other countries, despite the global appeal for its finishing, design, and overall quality.

HATIL's Director of Sales and Marketing urged the government to establish favorable conditions for the furniture industry, enabling brands like HATIL to fully unlock their export potential.

During the interview, Moshir also provided insights into the brand's CSR activities, his aim to establish a technical school offering interested students the opportunity to earn a diploma in carpentry at an affordable cost, among other initiatives.