

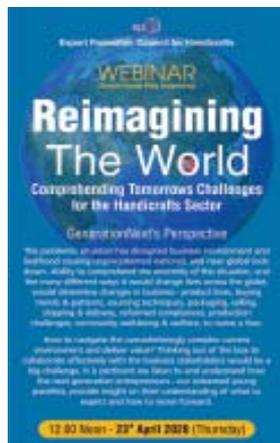
# Reimagining the World

## Comprehending Tomorrow's Challenge for the Handicraft's Sector

### Generation Next's Perspective

Link to recording: <https://youtu.be/Fqml8uvuldE>

**23rd April 2020:** The pandemic has disrupted business environment and livelihood causing unprecedented national, and near global lockdown. It is crucial to have the ability to comprehend



the enormity of this situation, and the many different ways it would change lives across the globe, would determine changes in business - product lines, buying trends & patterns, sourcing techniques, packaging, selling, shipping & delivery, reformed compliances, production challenges, community well-being & welfare, to name a few. So, how to navigate the complex environment and deliver value? Thinking out of the

box to collaborate effectively with the business stakeholders would be a big challenge. It is pertinent we turn our attention to the next generation entrepreneurs - so this webinar had esteemed young panelists, providing insight on their understanding of what to expect and how to move forward.

Moderated by **Mr. Rajesh Rawat, Joint Director, EPCH**, this energetic and enthusiastic webinar was attended by over 500 member exporters (over 690 registered) from PAN India basis including Mr. Ravi K Passi, Chairman, EPCH; Mr. Raj K Malhotra, Vice Chairman, EPCH; Mr. Rakesh Kumar, Director General, EPCH; and Mr. R K Verma, Executive Director, EPCH. The panelists were 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation member exporters from across India. They shared their learning from the older generation(s), their own innovative ideas, experiences & challenges in exports of handicrafts and how they are planning to cope up in the pandemic widespread situation as well as their future business strategies.

**Mr. Rakesh Kumar, Director General, EPCH**, in his opening remarks, spoke of 'adaptability' referring to the current situation where business activities have been disrupted. He welcomed views of the young generation and their 'specific insights' to navigate the challenges posed by COVID-19. Generation Next's insights and revival plans post COVID-19 follow:

#### **Leverage existing infrastructure with newer products of allied industries to work with vacant/idle capacities**

"Fire of our generation and experience of our predecessors bring about a great fusion. Synergies of both can help combat present situation; clear division of work with well-defined roles to avoid overlapping. Seniors have seen quota regime and such times, so we can learn how finances can be managed by cutting down on overheads, preserving the money and maintaining positive cash flows. Seniors can empower the youngsters and hold them accountable for their own actions & decisions. pass on the baton so



Mr. Vikrant Rai, Director, C&R Textiles Pvt. Ltd. and Partner, Indian Arts and Crafts Syndicate, Noida

that we can take more responsibility. In a family constitution, roles, responsibilities, rights & duties need to be defined, everyone needs to be equally motivated & focused, and communications should be open. For Post COVID-19 we would need every trick in the book. I would like to work on technology advancements; already planning to digitize sampling process with use of 3D mapping technology. Future client meetings will be reduced so sampling will be impacted; will include virtual workshops with them. Designers already trained to work remotely. Focus will be on developing new markets and leveraging idle capacities to make masks protective wear & accessories. Good spread of client base has helped with lesser cancellations/postponements. Using lockdown to learn new skills."

About : A Delhi Public School, Delhi University product. Post a Commerce graduation, he pursued his talent in Vocal Music, and also did a PG Management course from Indian School of Business. Heads marketing, merchandising and production operations. Credited with introducing new markets and increasing client base of company as well as successful onboarding big ticket retailers and meeting their stringent Technical and Social compliance requirements. Received UP State's Excellence Award in Manufacturing of Home Textiles (2017).

## Design styles to last 2-3 seasons. Diversify into more product lines with existing techniques, collaborations & partnerships



Mr. Puneet Chhabra, Director,  
VC Overseas Pvt. Ltd.,  
New Delhi

"Real estate was an obvious career option as family is well established in it. Desire to be self-made like my father and start afresh inclined me towards handicrafts. A friend's suggestion to work on a segment with good scope brought me to jewellery designing, manufacturing & exporting. Besides, I thought this field involved creativity, travel, learning from international exposure, etc. Director General EPCH, Mr. Rakesh

Kumar played an important mentoring role and his team at EPCH guided me in the right direction. Operational understanding and documentation took time. I didn't even know what an LC was! Joined a 3 months course to understand the export process. When you start a business bank finances can also add to the challenges. So, I took a loan from my father for the initial investment. Repayed it in 4 years from my earning. It is a learning curve when it's all done by you. The challenges I faced as 1st generation in this field was to create an identity and edge to tide over competition. So, I started designing jewellery by mixing materials and designing components. Our exclusive pieces attracted customers and initially had significant roles to play as 'conversation starters'. In COVID-19 times, my entire team has been supportive, right from my merchandiser to my labour. All my learnings are helping me today to face the worst case scenario."

About: A Delhi boy from a family in the business of real estate. Inception of own business in 2005, post a bachelor's degree in Business Studies from Thames Valley University, UK. A first generation business owner. Specialisation in the field of fashion jewellery, diversified recently to include home decor. Company exports to Europe and USA. Recipient of Rashtriya Udyog Ratna Award (2009).

## Invest on robotics and automation to scale or shrink and combat risk in such situations in future

"Product innovation or changing the course of things at a well settled way of working environment hasn't been a big challenge to me like many others who are second generation entrepreneurs because of my father's forward thinking approach and immense support. Yes, the production part had challenges as

people who had worked with my father had a certain way of doing things and resisted the change. Being a woman it is difficult to make men take orders! This was the biggest challenge. Gradually, they adapted to the new ways, thanks to my parent's support in coaxing them that this was a better way and that we were moving forward with the times. Eventually they felt it was worthwhile. I represent a different product line than what my father has been doing (lamps & lighting). Here, in Moradabad you keep seeing the same products again and again. So many factories bring out similar products - a challenge in this city. So, I decided to take the more design-intricate way. Designing such products helped us build productively on what we already had here. In



Ms. Veenam Shankhdhar,  
Director, DBA Export India,  
Moradabad

today's times 'design' is something that will help one stand out as many manufacturing facilities do have provisions for production. It is the design that defines a company's entity and will assume a very defining role in establishing its identity among peers. I may look like I single-handedly do so many things, but the truth is, it actually appears so because of a strong and efficient team backing me."

About: A Masters in Product Design from FIDM Los Angeles with a 'Best in Class' recognition for her sourcing skills. Director at family business for manufacture & exports of lights and furniture. An explorer by nature, crafted her life's dream with inspiration from life around. Founded BeFarha, a retail brand for home decor that brings fresh designs to direct customers across the globe. Launched it on Women's Day and dedicated it to women across the globe to reinvent a wholly modern approach to home making.

## Have a dedicated COVID compliant factory, complete with a dedicated team

"I joined my family business in 2004 and saw the lows that the recession in 2008 brought with it. How we dealt with it is helping us cope up with the situation now. Our preparedness is showing results. When recession hit, we had financial issues. Payments were not coming in as expected and times were tough. We decided to scrutinize the finances carefully and cut down on overheads. We took the risk of investing and directing our resources in the right course at that time. We spent intelligently and engaged designers from India & our market-USA. Support & guidance came from EPCH. Mr. Rakesh Kumar encouraged me to

participate in fairs, travel overseas, get new ideas, etc. Till then we were not looking at these aspects but gradually we started exhibiting at EPCH fairs. Along the way to where we are today, we managed wasteful expenses and invested wisely by working on competitively priced attractive designs. Today, we are at yet another challenging juncture. I am sure our learning will see us through this too."



Mr. Vishal Khanna,  
President, Brassex,  
Moradabad

*About : A BBA from IMS. Third generation manufacturer exporter in family run business that was incorporated in 1979. Experience spans from working in all aspects of business starting from the basics like production and design. Continues to head their strong design team besides handling marketing and other aspects of business in the hard goods specializing company. Gains exposure in design aesthetics and inspiration from extensive travel and international shows. Instrumental in getting SA8000 certification for his enterprise. Caters to clients like Pottery Barn, West Elm, Crate & Barrel, CB2, Dillard's, Restoration Hardware, etc.).*

**Look to work with our existing customers who are are our best clients, with strategic plans**

"I take pride in my heritage and the learning from my predecessors. They set the foundation and I built on it. Of course both generations think differently and work differently. My father had a traditional business in 1-2 rooms. Over the years, I have modernised it. By joining my father, I was able to implement branding, making our factory compliant to suit buyer requirements. Support from EPCH through its fairs and other interventions mentored us along the way due to which we have been able to take traditional handmade lace products and lace makers' skills to different buyer markets with so much ease. Today's survival is all about learning and implementing modern ways of working to keep up with the competition. We need to sharpen our skills too. In this COVID-19 scenario, orders are not getting cancelled but buyers have brought the whole thing back to the



Mr. Ram Kalavakonalu,  
Director, JJ Lakshmi Exports,  
Narsapur

negotiating table. I hope EPCH will come up with a strategic approach to deal with this predicament. EPCH is doing a commendable job of conducting webinars to guide and update us on varied relevant industry subjects in such times. The present situation has made the buyers look at smart sourcing. French buyers I was talking to recently have indicated that virtual marketplaces and online trade shows will be the thing of the future. We need to go with this flow."

*About : Third generation entrepreneur with advantage of being nurtured by legends within the family. Fortunate and proud of continuing a legacy in lace crafts, dating back to 1954 when post-independent India was a nascent nation - a cauldron of ideas and new energy. Today, this well-established business continues to expand its reach to markets across the world while being deep rooted in ideologies of its founder, late Mr. Ram Chandrudu. The company that began with making petticoat laces for families of the then ruling British as well as missionaries, grew to become one of the largest lace craft exporters in India today.*

**SSALC - Survive, Save, Automate, Lower Expectations, and Stay Alert for Opportunities**

"If you compare me with my father, I would say, both of us had our beginnings in our early 20s, fresh out of graduation, but in absolutely different times, in terms of situations, lifestyles, opportunities, challenges and ambitions. Together we bring individual strengths to the table - he brings wisdom and experience, I bring newness, fresh energy and patience. When these qualities work together in tandem, there is great improvement. There is an immediate effect on business for each idea or decision that either of us takes. Among major hurdles that 2nd or 3rd generation entrepreneurs face are in team building and transitioning of the work force based on your frequency. Having the right kind of people with you to support your growth in your individual onwards journey once you have taken over, is extremely crucial. My father and I have different temperaments but eventually he could understand my business philosophy which was naturally different as our aspirations, just like our times, are different. The steps we take together definitely help in the flow of operations and directly help the overall business. Once that is done, you can implement your own ideas, experiment a little, are



Mr. Shivam Khanna,  
Managing Director,  
Creative Divya, Gurgaon

able to handle the effects & changes of your actions, etc. Major contribution would be the incorporation of social and business compliances. In our industry, it was almost non-existent before me. Now it has become a necessity. In our company the whole process of compliances, best practices, etc. was implemented under me and is still in progress. Buyers today are very much technical and very particular about detail. It needs a lot of patience as well as quick development, at the same time, on any project. Apart from this, we have expanded our various products and material categories imbibed from arts & crafts of various regions of the country, that was essentially also the core of my father's business strategy. It's also important today to understand buyer markets, trends and forecasts to come up with variations in products. Not only are your regular buyers happy this way, you also create scope for new ones. Each business journey is different but having a positive approach is important as there is lot of learning up there. Right now things may not be looking up but there will be many opportunities post COVID-19 and we must be ready to speed up."

*About : Took up the mantles of his family business at the age of 21 and over a decade thence has been credited with client handling in over 40 countries including USA, Canada, UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece, Netherlands, Australia, Argentina, Mexico and South Africa. Led his company's participation to over 50 international exhibitions. A BBA from Delhi's IP University, he heads Divya Exports Group as Managing Director.*

**Its time for compliance, modernisation & digitisation and its time to take our market to the customer**



Mr. Gatik Bhandari, Director, Bhandari Exports, Jodhpur

"Being part of a family that has been into manufacture & exports of furniture and wooden handicrafts since as long as I can remember, it was the obvious choice to become part of this one day, take the reins, and work with my brothers and cousins. But to the surprise of many, I chose to venture into apparel & textiles. Being the youngest, I was often protected and the easiest of tasks would be

given to me while the bigger responsibilities that involved a certain risk factor were taken care of my elders. Consequently, I could neither make mistakes nor learn. I had heard that my father failed several times before he succeeded. I wanted to follow his footsteps. So, in order to prove myself and create an identity that

I had earned for myself, I decided to start a venture of my own but closer to the business my family was doing. So, being in Jodhpur, after furniture, textile related products were the next best choice. Today's situationwise, I think this is the right time for India - sentiments are changing towards us and against China. We can elevate ourselves higher with compliance, modernisation & digitisation; take our market, factories and showrooms to the customer rather than vice versa. Virtual fairs will be significant and a good initiative, because at least from 1 more year from now, no buyer would travel for business. It's our turn to take the travel, virtually!

*About : A second generation exporter who has diversified his 30 years old family business of manufacturing & exports of furniture & handicrafts, to include textiles, garments and e-Commerce. He always had a passion towards entrepreneurship and Indian craft. His vision is to digitize the traditional handicraft business and promote its growth through the digital platform.*

**Increase runway, diversify to utility products. Focus on importance of cash in hand**

"I have been into exports since 2 years. Me and my partner had no background in handicrafts. This is our first exposure to this



Ms. Somya Suresh, Co-founder, Nurture India, Noida

sector. We did jobs in our respective fields for 5 years each before we decided to take up our joint ambition and venture into the handicrafts space. The journey started with unlearning and relearning everything and starting from scratch with a burning passion of working with artisans, their crafts and seeing how their clusters function. We started by traveling to the remotest corners of the country to learn about materials,

processes and craft traditions to be able to work on them and improve upon them for a larger audience. What we came out with is what differentiates us from others. Then the next step was marketing, getting to buyers and bringing in the business. I have been troubling Rakesh sir with my endless questions and inhibitions. I got a lot of inputs and guidance from him as well as EPCH. The journey has been fabulous till now in terms of all the learning that we have done. We have gained our understanding and are still learning. In 10 years I have a vision to establish a global brand that stands for quality, is eco-friendly and sustainable all through the value chain including welfare of artisans, their

clusters and the environment - that is the 360 degrees vision we are working on."

About : *An English Honours Graduate from Delhi University with PG Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication from Xavier Institute of Communications, Mumbai. A fashion journalist who has worked in the digital publishing space across e-Commerce and content. Core competencies include designing, craft & trend forecasting, artisan & operations training and social media marketing. After having served as Jr. Fashion Editor at POPxo.com, co-founded Nurture India in 2018. It is a brand specializing in wooden craft forms, exploring unseen craft forms and bringing them prominently on the world map.*

### **Plan on making your back office work from home**

"Talking of how I have been able to convince my father to implement my ideas into the business and managing its affairs I would say, it's been a good learning curve. I am not as experienced as many of the other panelists here.

I have joined business in 2017 but I have really have worked my way up. My father made me work in various departments in his factory, from production to finishing, to dispatch, logistics, finance, merchandising, etc. That has really helped me learn about all these and understand each aspect very well to get my fundamentals strong. The journey continues and it's getting better every day. I am learning new things and this is the good part of the industry. Being in a family business has more advantages than disadvantages and especially if you are a second generation in it. If you are a third or fourth generation you might have problems if you don't have a good family constitution in place. The biggest advantage I see as a next gen is that your business can reap benefits of the right mix of decades old experience and fresh energy of the youth working together - this is a deadly combination. Secondly, your long term vision, trust and honesty are not issues at all. But of course getting your ideas across may take a while at times as your parents still have to accept that you are grown up, responsible and capable. But as my dad is gradually taking me seriously and letting me be an integral part of the business. For me implementing my notions has not been that difficult because my father is open to new ideas, even on small matters. Recently I changed the payroll policy. Likewise, I have been experimenting on pilot



Mr. Aditya Vikas Agarwal,  
Director of Operations,  
Vikas Exports, New Delhi

projects and trying out new things. Talking about the situation that this pandemic is bringing about, I feel exports will be effected as there will be diseconomies of scale. Importers and buyers will move the production to their own countries. Its time to cognizance of the opportunity and grab that share of the domestic market that imports had been fulfilling. Furniture has been a strength sector in India with its resources and labour force. And here it is also comparatively not tough to skill people in this sector and turn things around. The long term future of this industry is extremely bright and we will find a way to fight this pandemic and come out stronger"

About : *A Bachelor of Science with Honors in Management from Cass Business School, London. A second generation exporter and experienced entrepreneur with a demonstrated history of working in the import and export industry. Skilled in negotiation, analytics, sales and business communication. A passionate and ambitious businessman with a strategic approach to product, design, and creativity with technology and quality control.*

### **Understand our buyers' needs and fulfill them for sustainable livelihood of our artisans**

"My journey as an exporter of natural fibre products from a remotest corner of North East India, started with an experiment.

I came to Delhi as a civil service aspirant. When that path dint open up I studied export management. Based on that, I did a job in Delhi and there I realized the potential of NER products in the form of handicrafts and how they were sold through exporters to various countries. This changed my outlook. I wanted to do something in this field and contribute to livelihoods in my area of the North East. I left my job and started



Mr. Shantanu Sutradhar,  
Proprietor, Barak Valley,  
Assam

working with artisans scattered in the Barak Valley (bordering Bangladesh and an area of constant insurgency). This place already had a rich tradition of basket weaving, dating back to the time of World War II. However, it was all quite unorganized. That is where I intervened and organised them. I supplied their products to Govt. agencies, emporiums, etc. Then in 2002 we were selected by EPCH under their project. That was the turning point of my life. We were brought right in front of buyers. We were exposed to the entire world. But we were not capable to cater to them in terms of variety, design and finishing of products. But EPCH made

a program in such a way that we were taught how to address these issues through a practical approach. Participation in fairs brought in phenomenal changes as we were also learning through our interaction with buyers from so many countries - this exposure was not just for me but many handicraft entrepreneurs in the North East who got groomed by EPCH to reach where we are today. Till then there were no direct exports from our region. EPCH's program helped us upscale. We were able to mobilise artisans in our region in an appropriate way and create our space in the world. Talking about problems, I feel, logistics was an issue and a basic packaging facility was even 100 km away. But EPCH's intervention has helped us here too. Present scenario in the region - distance continues to be a deterrent while we also lack technical know-how, skill and finances. With COVID-19, we are facing problems like withholding of orders. At NER we are always fighting with natural calamities. Our inherent nature is to emerge from challenges. We will evolve. When things better we need to find some innovative methods to bring down production costs because overseas buying capacities and costs will be influenced. Even if China is out of the buyers' list lets know that we will be competing with Vietnam and other South Eastern Nations. Technology will play a major role by helping in minimising raw material processing and cutting down lead time. Challenges will be there but opportunities will be many. We should be ready to produce in big bulk. Marketing will happen online and virtual fairs will help NER exporters. Now it is also time to have a NER specific website. We are so scattered. A common platform will help us showcase products collectively.

*About : First generation entrepreneur. Identified cane & bamboo craft clusters in Karimganj, Assam and motivated the artisans to produce export quality items in the year 2000. Got selected by EPCH under its project in 2002 and initiated exports to various countries. Effectively utilised platforms like EPCH trade shows and connected Karimganj to the global market. Credited for being the first exporter to ship a full 20ft container of cane products from ICD, Amingaon, Guwahati in 2000. Presently managing 400 artisans in the cluster. Has a Diploma in Export Management.*

### **Look at business with domestic market in India and reach markets that are not effected by COVID-19**

"As the third generation entrepreneur and with elders in the family ready to guide me, I am getting a lot of liberty and motivation to take my decisions. My father instills a lot of belief in me. Before pursuing my Masters in Design, I did a BBA. So, this amalgamation of business and design education has given me a balance in thinking. It's kind of an advantage to think in monetary terms as



Mr. Namit Khanna,  
Nodi Exports,  
Moradabad

well as creative terms. Having this advantage of being predisposed to think outside the box, a change I would like to bring about in terms of design is focusing on minimalism that I strongly advocate. Products should be simple. Today is the time to enforce 'less is more'. And trust me designing simple things is one of the hardest to do. At this time we must genuinely focus on this to save costs and maximise production. We must look at making products that use minimum resources. Simple, sleek designs (maybe detachable ones) that can be stacked and packaged in groups will not only save costs but will also occupy less space and involve lesser hassles while handling or storing. During these times, it is crucial to design the right thing and save expenses rather than just targeting profits. Packaging is also as important as the product itself as defines the aesthetics of the product and also adds to the overall value. Now we should be moving to a more sustainable way of packaging. In conclusion I would say that first we must design the right thing and then we must design the thing right."

*About : Having schooled at Sherwood, Nainital and Modern School, New Delhi, Namit got his BBA Degree from Narsee Monjee University, Mumbai and then went on to do Masters in Product Design from Domus Academy, Milan, Italy. He is an active force in Nodi Exports Inc., which was started back in 1996 from a 100 sq. ft. room and has evolved into two 2-lakh sq. ft. factories. They make decoratives, gifts, furniture, lamps & fixtures, etc. primarily in metal and wood. Nodi Exports has been awarded by UP State for being 'Leaders in Growth & Performance 2016-17' and nationally for 'Outstanding Export Performance in Metalware' by EPCH.*

**Mr. Ravi K Passi, Chairman, EPCH**, shared his recollection of the times when he had started his business and expressed his appreciation at the vibrant and hopeful thoughts of young exporters. **Mr. R K Verma, Executive Director, EPCH**, remarked, "I am really happy that we are asking the next generation for new ideas and new concepts. These challenges will be converted into opportunities with a positive approach and this young generation will surely guide the fraternity through this storm." Mr. Verma also mentioned of how EPCH is now going the virtual way, adapting new technologies and working on a virtual fair for the future. ■