

## Journey of enzyme manufacturer to an ingredients innovator

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Bio-gen Extracts, a manufacturer of active pharmaceutical ingredients, therapeutic enzymes, specialty polymers and nutraceutical raw material, was launched in 2000 by three youngsters who were in their final year of engineering.

Jai Shankar R (Director – Operations), Piyush Mohta (Director- Finance) and Saif Mehkri (Director Marketing) all students of engineering at R V Engineering College, Bangalore, decided to start their entrepreneurial journey in niche space after their graduation instead of scouting for jobs. They launched Bio-gen Extracts with a small initial capital by producing enzymes.

Quickly understanding the market needs and demand, they expanded their operations to active pharmaceutical ingredients. Currently the company is manufacturing 30 odd ingredients catering to different industries such as food, nutraceuticals, pharmaceuticals, etc., and reaching to 400 customers in the Indian Subcontinent, South-East Asia, West Asia, Latin America, Africa and Europe.

Bio-gen extracts in the last 15 years of its operation has emerged as the largest manufacture of Ritodrine hydrochloride. It has successfully filed the Drug Master Files (Common Technical Document) [DMF (CTD)] for Ritodrine hydrochloride in the European market in 2006. The company is also one of the largest manufacturers of Lutein, Natural Beta Carotene, Soy Isoflavone 40% and Bromelain enzyme in India.

The company, which is growing above the growth rate of the nutraceuticals industry, has already crossed the `100 crore mark in FY 2014-15. Crediting this milestone to the partners, Saif Mehkri, Director Marketing, said, “We have achieved this with the support of our strong network of partners spread across the major cities of the country. Our business partners are not only supporting the growth of the company, but are helping us to understand the requirements of the customers, by sharing

market intelligence, and market trends.”

He further said, “80% of our business comes from the domestic market and rest from exports. We strongly believe that India has a lot of potential and offers a huge opportunity of growth for everyone in the industry. In India, we have a strong customer base including the top 10 pharmaceutical companies. In the global market mainly in the USA and the European Union we have a good network of exclusive distributors who are bringing in business for us.”

On maintaining sustained growth, Saif Mehkri said, “Despite many issues before the industry, we are witnessing a sustained growth mainly because we cater to the needs of the customers by offering customised products and value added products. This has helped us to build and maintain a strong customer base for us in the last five years.”

Bio-gen has invested significantly in research and development facilities and labs in order to stay at the forefront of product and process innovation in the nutraceuticals space, which it entered in 2003. The company is constantly adding new talent, methodologies and practices to its ever growing R&D unit which has helped the company to prepare and test new formulations in record time and help bring new products to market.

In terms of therapeutic targets Bio-gen is focused on gynecology, orthopedics, hematology and anti-malarial segments. Now it is working on developing products/ingredients for, lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, chronic liver disease, stroke and osteoporosis. Currently it has a strong work force of more than 100 people working in shifts at three manufacturing facilities.

Research & development and innovation have been a part of the company’s efforts to stay in the forefront of innovation in the industry and pass the benefits to its clients. R&D talent at Bio-gen is experienced and comes from the best universities in the country. The team goes to lengths to ensure that no compromises are made in all undertakings.

Bio-gen’s R&D facility at the Dobaspet manufacturing plant near Bangalore with its state-of-the-art technology and talent has enabled the company to have several product innovations; the most recent of which is ‘Garlic Extract’ product. This is a proven product with multiple benefits such as cholesterol reduction, blood pressure control, and helps balance lipid profile among others. This product was developed entirely in-house and is currently undergoing final rounds of clinical trials.

Sharing the latest developments at R&D centre Saif Mehkri said, “We have been studying active ingredients found in organic garlic to understand its value and possible applications for blood related ailments. Our studies show that the active ingredients found in garlic, is highly beneficial in reducing blood pressure (BP) in patients with high BP. We have successfully tested several batches of our formulations with promising and desirable results. What interests us even more is the fact that this is a completely natural formulations with no side effects. ”

Saif Mehkri, who believes that private players are more target driven as compared to public sector players, said, “We are aware about our strengths and limitations, we are on the look out for partnerships and alliances to drive future growth. In this regard, we have already been discussing with a few companies wherein we will invest and take up manufacturing of innovative products after conducting clinical trials etc. We are also keen on making investments or supporting companies who are working on developing innovative products.”

The company has been focused on providing its client with the latest in nutraceuticals and food ingredients while reducing their risks of introducing new products or new product categories to the market. “Our clients also benefit from the new opportunities we extend to them as a result of new findings or developments from our ongoing R&D pursuits. This is something that makes us considerably unique among other players in the space. Our clients enjoy the benefits of all our breakthroughs and show great enthusiasm and support towards our R&D endeavours,” adds Saif Mehkri.

Commenting on the growth and rise in the number of customers over the years, Saif said, “There has been many cases in the industry where entire product batches have been contaminated and rendered unsafe to use because several factors like mishandling, lack of inadequate quality control in sourcing or processing or packaging. Contrary to this, we maintain strict levels of quality and handling to ensure that such incidents never occur in our processes, from sourcing to delivery.”

Besides, he said “We source all our material from certified raw material manufacturers and suppliers of repute, with whom we have built a relationship and trust over the years. We take our relationship with our suppliers and partners very seriously. Our sources are all at par with the industry standards and maintain strict guidelines for quality. All our vendors go through a strict selection process and need to qualify to be accepted as a vendor/partner at Bio-gen Extracts.”

Bio-gen Extracts offers complete transparency from source to shelf to ensure that the ingredients are not only of the highest

quality and standards but also gives its clients greater control over products and processes to keep their end of the promise to their customers and partners. The systems laid out to improve transparency and accountability go beyond policies based on the GMP guidelines that cover the manufacture of nutraceuticals to meet the requirements of safety, identity, potency, strength, quality, purity, uniformity and stability. With improved transparency, its customers can be assured that they have more understanding of the quality of ingredient they purchase.

A team of 25 quality control and quality assurance personnel follow a strictly regulated system at every level of operations monitoring around the clock and processes that are under strict scrutiny at all times.

Bio-gen continues to follow the best of packaging practices available today for each product type and requirement. It also has partnered with certified packaging providers that have the best of technology and processes to bring ready-to-brand products as per needs of customers.

Bio-gen has set up its third facility as per EU GMP standards at Dobaspet in 2013 at cost of `20 crore. The new plant is a state-of-the-art facility that conforms to quality and safety guidelines of the industry. With this Bio-gen is a HACCP, GMP, HALAAL & KOSHER certified company that strives to maintain the highest standards of quality across its portfolio of products and processes.

With this new facility, the company is all set to maximise its manufacturing capacity of 25 metric tonnes per month for the production of active pharmaceutical ingredients and nutraceutical actives. Some of the machines installed include reactors (SS & GLR), centrifuges, filtration setup, dryers, size reduction equipment, etc. Its focus will be on carotenoids, bioflavonoids and semi-synthetic molecules.

Commenting on the future plans, Saif Mehkri said, "At present we are conducting clinical studies on our products and soon we will be launching these in the market. With our new facility, we are hopeful of achieving `250 crore by 2018."

Sharing his concerns, Saif Mehkri said "the country needs strong food safety Act, which can be implemented across the nation. In this regard a lot needs to be done to bring awareness among the public. Even the regulators too need regular training to get updates on the latest in the industry. Otherwise the industry finds the growth path a bumpy ride. Hence, all stakeholders need to work together for the growth of the nutraceuticals industry."?

**Achievements:**

- Udyog Shiromani Award by the National Economic Institute of Development for Excellence in Quality and Management – 2008
- Partners in Excellence award from Abbott Healthcare – 2011|
- Innovative Partner award from Abbott Healthcare – 2012