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S P I R I T S

JOURNEY THROUGH THE LIFE AND WORKS OF THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN A NEW MEANING TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

ALKESH AGARWAL | BIJAY AGARWAL | DINDAYAL GUPTA | HARI NARAYAN SHAH | ISHWARI PRASAD TANTIA | MANISH SHAHRA | MANOJ SARAF
| RUPCHAND SAWANSUKHA | SANDEEP PODDAR | SURESH KUMAR PATNI



EARLY STARTER



A man, who took the hard way to success, backed by a family that can be termed as 'an answered prayer', is today a name to reckon with in the re-fill industry

ALKESH AGARWAL

CEO

RE-FEEL CARTRIDGE ENGINEERING PVT LTD

he lost his father when he was in Class VIII. Two months after that, his mother calls him in a room and says, “Now that your father is no longer here, you need to grow up before you grow old. Whatever you would have done in 15 years, you’d now have to do in two to three years. There are some business issues that need to be settled at the native place in Jaipur, and we are supposed to get a sum of Rs 18,500. I am a lady. I cannot go there. You are the man at the moment. You will have to go there and get the money for the family.”

With this she got him a ticket for Rs 250, boarded him up on a train and he was on his way. He went there, negotiated with others, got the money and returned to Kolkata. That one week helped Alkesh Agarwal grow up by several years. “The confidence boost that I got is still there with me and fuels me to go ahead in life. My mother was like an iron hand in a velvet glove. By the time I was in Class X, I was prepared to take life head on,” he recalls.

IN BUSINESS

Born and brought up in Kolkata, the by-lanes of Lake Town and the Kanchan *pani-puri wala* have been major escorts of his youth. Business was, as they say, in his blood and his life so far seems to be out of a Sidney Sheldon novel. There were instances when he got stranded by posters and banners of corporate and dreamt of owning one some day. Today, he is head of a company that is working on two interesting franchise concepts under the brand name Re-feel Cartridge Store & ClubLaptop. While the former is India’s leading printer cartridge refilling chain with a presence at over 110 locations across 80 cities in India, the latter, a recent introduction, is India’s leading laptop service chain with over 25 stores across 18 cities in India. “I was into IT hardware, supplying a lot of printers and laptops to a lot of companies and individuals. The cartridges were very expensive at that time and a lot of people asked me about what could be done to cut down on the cost.

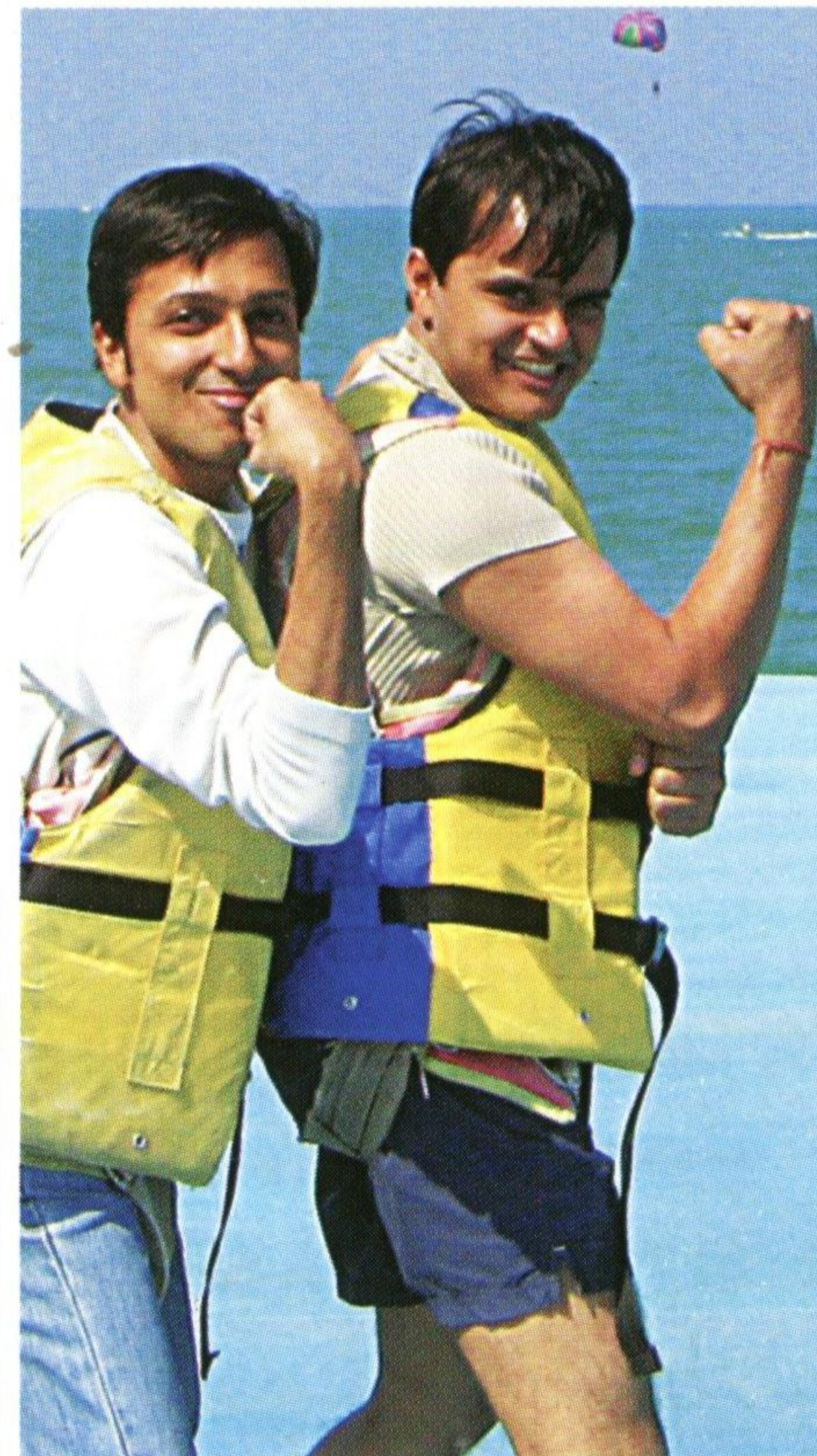


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The alternative was, refilling of cartridges. In India, the industry was at a nascent stage and very unorganised. Quality service was missing. The spark in my mind formed the stepping stone into the industry. Together with Samit, Amit and Rajesh, friends turned partners, I conducted an extensive research for three years on it and came up with what is today called as Re-feel,” he says. Then there was no looking back. The concept took off very well and now the company operates across the country. People keep on wondering what made him choose this area. He says, “Re-filling has strong grounds in India. ‘Use-and-throw’ is a concept of the western origin. To abide by the environmental needs, even the western countries are taking to the refilling mode. India believed in recycling, right from the Vedic age when the feather of a bird was used as a pen. This shows that recycling comes to Indians, naturally. Definitely saving money is one part but concern for the environment also plays an important role. In India, we need to go back to the roots. We need to show concerns for our environment. Continuing with the same ideology we started the multi brand laptop service chain around three months ago to provide quality laptop repair facility to consumers through out India. Since the market is completely unorganised we would like to garner a majority stake in laptop repair segment in India.”

A COMPLETE FAMILY MAN

When he is not doing business, Alkesh is a complete family man. He loves to spend his time with his wife and son at home rather than hang out in a club party. There are times when he tries his hands at cooking as well. The recipe - top secret! He attributes this to the way he has been brought up. “Being the first child of the generation in my family, I am very much the ‘ladla’ of my family. Beholding that post, I have been subject to overpowering faith from everyone in the family. In my case, my family often disguised transitions from failure to success and therefore the people who have been the most close to me, have been my pillars to present day success. To mark specially, I



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would like to mention one influential person, in my grandfather, who with his personality and grandeur stood one of the most respectable persons. I have had a lot to learn from him and also dream to be one, of his persona," he says. Living in a joint family, has instilled in him the ability to co-ordinate a group and motivate people to get the best out of them. After his father passed away, he lost his mother in quick succession. At that time, his uncles and grand parents were by his side with full support. That is another big reason why he is so deeply rooted to his family.

BOSOM FRIENDS

He also thinks that his three partners have been the backbone of his success. Samit Lakhota, Amit Barmecha & Rajesh Agarwal had stuck to him through thick and thin and inspired him to do newer things in life. "They motivate me and replenish my energy. There have been instances when I was in trouble and they have been there within splits of seconds to my help. They are my assets & it has been a wonderful experience working with them for over a decade now," he says.

UNWINDING

Unlike most popular successful businessmen, he manages to find time for his family in spite of his busy schedule. Albeit he hasn't had a vacation in the last three years. "That is probably because my wife has been my support system at all times. She was there when I needed her, to convince me and to reinforce the belief when almost everyone wrote me and my concept off. Now, my wife and I often go out at night when I return from office and have a good time. I did not have any vacation in the last three years but I am planning a good vacation this year. It may be Disneyland or Nicco Park. I only need to spend some quality time with them," he signs off.