

Aurik/Finweek *Business Accelerators*

Handling with care

Entrepreneur: Ashley Mulligan
Company: Kushesh Trading

You have to hand it to Kushesh Trading, a specialist courier service for medical consumables. In just four years, this player has expanded in size and reputation so much so that it's taking business away from competitors of various sizes, including from the larger multinational companies.

But, it wasn't always easy. In its early days, the firm, founded in 2008, worked on building an impressive system and carving a niche for itself. No doubt, the strategy wasn't only innovative and unique (in the consumables arena) but also appealed to the medical manufacturing market. Still, no client signed up. And, there was no income to speak of, but that didn't deter the husband-and-wife team. "For the first two years we ate brown bread and water," quips Ashley Mulligan, Kushesh MD and co-founder.

That was then. The business is now marching ahead with confidence. Kushesh, whose staff complement has grown to 20, with the number of vehicles up from a mere two in the early days to almost 20 now, is on a steady trajectory. However, management isn't resting on its laurels.

Organic growth is part of the game plan. Part of this would help the firm achieve critical mass, but would also involve setting up new branches and

eventually achieve a national footprint. While branching out comes with high costs, it's outweighed by the potential benefits that come with a widened footprint.

"We've built a strong business, done much to discern ourselves from the rest and feel a sense of achievement. But, we're nowhere near what we'd like to achieve," says husband Ashley, with co-founder Tania Mulligan noting that Kushesh is well positioned for expansion. "We're also helping with the delivery of healthcare to more people because some of the areas we stretch to aren't easily accessible or weren't previously reached (through other formal platforms)."

While noting that the company is still addressing some challenges, by way of footprint, the Mulligans credit the Finweek/Aurik Business Accelerators programme - which offered bursaries to 10 high-impact entrepreneurs on a specialised two-year business development initiative - for powering Kushesh to the success story it is now.

"The programme has helped us to identify some problems in terms of our structure and systems. The process also helped us identify some solutions," Ashley Mulligan explains. "Before the programme, we were deeply involved in our business, the day-to-day issues. We were bogged by such issues but that didn't al-

low us to develop a broader outlook, strategy or expansion and growth. Now we can, now we're able to focus on the bigger picture."

Now, the co-founders are focused not only on client acquisition and client retention but on acquiring more accounts. Broadly, Kushesh's client base has risen to 20 accounts of varying sizes. It's no mean feat in such a fickle industry. The couple gave a glimpse of their bigger plans in the medium term. It's a promising story. Nevertheless, it's notable that, at this pace, there's a risk of Kushesh finding itself completely overwhelmed and failing to deliver.

"Aurik has enabled us to understand our capacity, we know how to push for expansion without lowering our standards," Tania Mulligan says, adding that existing clients, as a form of tribute, tend to raise the percentage of work Kushesh does for them thanks to the firm's unique offering in what's known as the "last mile", the point between medical suppliers and hospitals or pharmacists. "The last mile is one of the most critical parts. People come to us because of the peace of mind our service offers," she says.

The model enables them "to deliver products in the right condition, on time, and knowing that consumables [relayed by Kushesh] aren't contaminated because we specialise and keep to procedural requirements at hospitals," Ashley Mulligan says. "We work with people's lives and take that very seriously, so we're not about dropping off boxes. The market knows we're experts."

It's little wonder then, as the Mulligans proudly point out, that the firm, which has not lost a single account, is being approached by a good number of suppliers who choose it as a service provider. It follows then that the four-year-old outfit has overtaken some of their larger rivals as suppliers continue to recognise it for its unique and winning delivery model.

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