

'There is a Shift Towards Automation...'

Noida-based telecom components manufacturer NTL Group has managed to shake up the domestic lighting industry by emerging as an integrated manufacturer of LED lamps, and now products for projects and retail.

Its affable managing director Arun Gupta feels that miniaturisation will henceforth drive lighting manufacturing, and that the industry will see greater integration of electronic components into products.

In an exclusive interview, Gupta shares with **SEL** how the OEM is entering retail, and what it's doing in the government-backed public and street lighting space. Here are the edited excerpts:



In what ways has NTL grown over the last 5-10 years?

Things have changed drastically since 2002 when we ventured into the lighting electronics arena. In the B2B segment, from being a pure-play manufacturer of components for OEMs, we have grown into a player to reckon with when it comes to designing and prototyping.

Today NTL has emerged as a reliable ODM (original design manufacturer)

partner to clients. We have also moved the complete lifecycle from concept development to product development, prototyping to production. Earlier, we were manufacturing lighting electronics as per the clients' requirements and according to the specifications provided to us. But, today we have moved up the value chain and are creating products in consultation with clients and providing serious R&D inputs to enhance their products.

How has the manufacturing process itself changed, particularly in the lighting sector? What new processes are being adopted?

The manufacturing process has changed drastically. Electronics manufacturing is a hugely labour intensive process and almost everything is done with manual inputs. Over the years we have witnessed more and more automation coming in and assembly lines becoming more machine dependent than ever before. Traditionally, the electronic components were mounted on the surface of PCBs manually. Gradually, this became automated with the use of auto insertion machines to mount axial components.

Over the years, we have also seen a drive towards miniaturisation of electronic components and change over to SMT components from leaded components that has in turn improved the efficiency and reduced the costs. SMT machines have allowed for the mounting of components on both sides of the PCB. Today there is a lot of emphasis on COB (chip-on-board) technology and integration of electronic components, which further increases efficiency and provides an even greater opportunity for miniaturisation to every LED manufacturer.

Being a non-traditional lighting player, NTL Lemnis clocked an enviable ₹750 crore turnover on the back of a robust OEM business. What's your success mantra?

NTL is an undisputed leader in manufacturing and development in the lighting electronics space in India. Today, we have strengths in driver development, processes and operations. Some of the basic things that need to be looked at when working with customers – both domestic and international – are understanding of the statutory requirements, complete transparency in all dealings, and an unwavering focus on

quality of products. The product must be backed up by strong planning and equally good customer care support.

Success in retail depends on a strong distribution network and an effective consumer-facing branding strategy. Considering that you have largely been an OEM player until your recent retail foray, what is your company doing on these two strategic fronts?

In December 2014, NTL Lemnis launched its complete range of LED products for the retail market. We now offer products under the Pharox brand specially targeted at the Indian audience. The products are already available across Africa, Europe and India. Our company realises that the real touch-point for any retail venture is the distribution set-up and presence across the country. We, therefore, plan to acquire 100 distributors across 17 cities shortly.

In the first phase, some key markets to be targeted in the northern part of the country include Delhi-NCR, Chandigarh, Lucknow and Jaipur. In the western region, the areas being targeted are Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Ahmedabad and Raipur. In the southern region, the cities to be a part of the Pharox revolution include Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatore and Kochi.

We believe that increasing visibility in the market will require rigorous use of both ATL and BTL activities. The conventional ATL activities such as print media, outdoor and online ads will help us create brand awareness and increase brand presence. BTL activities such as participation in seminars, conferences and exhibitions will help us reach the target audience.

What products will you launch for the domestic retail market this year?

We are focused on creating effective LED lighting solutions for the retail audience. Our company already has a

portfolio of over 250 products. NTL Lemnis will constantly be tweaking its portfolio and ensuring that it has end-to-end solutions for any lighting need in the categories of retail, hospitality, IT & ITeS, healthcare, manufacturing and outdoors.

Our company is also committed to producing innovative and better alternatives for the existing products. It's the effort of our R&D which enabled us to launch recently the innovative energy-saving and long lasting LED well glass - the Pharox Warhorse lamp - for replacing conventional high pressure sodium vapour lamps. This latest product is designed for multiple applications such as power plants, steel plants, cement plants and material handling areas. It is already being well received by the industry and we hope that in the future too, we will keep 'wow-ing' customers with more such products.

An estimated 30 million street lighting points across the country are set to be retrofitted with LEDs. How are you poised in the public sector-driven street and urban lighting space?

We have supplied Pharox LED lighting products to several prestigious government and private hospitals. Besides, a number of other healthcare industry projects are in the pipeline. NTL is a major supplier of LED lamps to EESL under the government project for domestic lighting. We are supplying four lakh LED lamps for Guntur, two lakh LED lamps for Anantpur, and 12.9 lakh LED lamps for West Godavari and Srikakulam. Our company has also bagged orders to supply LED lamps to Delhi, UP, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Is new investment on the cards?

We plan to invest ₹50 crore this year on manufacturing, R&D and market development to expand our presence in the Indian market. ●

Mrinmoy Bhattacharjee