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(L-R) Jagdish Nair,
vice-president of construction
and project management,
Anil Taneja, senior vice-president,
Rajan Taneja, director,
Anish Taneja, president

POTENT POSSIBILITIES

Palm Holdings Group Aims to go Big



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(L-R) Anish Taneja, president, Rajan Taneja, director, Anil Tanega, senior vice-president, Jagdish Nair, vice-president of construction and project management

On our Cover

By Melanie Franner

Palm Holdings Group Aims to go Big

There aren't too many people who can say that the hospitality industry is in their DNA, but the phrase has special meaning for Anil Taneja and his two brothers Anish and Rajan. That's because not only has hospitality been part and parcel of the family tree since the days of their grandfather, it's also played a huge role in the makings of their very lives.

The three brothers currently run Palm Holdings Group of Companies — a vertically integrated, diversified organization characterized by passion and enthusiasm. The company is organized into three distinct divisions: Palm Hospitality, Palm Construction and Palm Ventures. These three divisions, like the brothers themselves, operate in unison to fuel what has become a remarkable growth pattern, unending energy and a team of people who are industry leaders in their own right.

The Orphan

"My grandfather left India to go to Africa at a very young age," recalls Anil Taneja, president, Palm Holdings Group of Companies. "He worked at a bar and eventually raised enough money to acquire the bar and the rooming house upstairs. He and his wife moved into the house and starting renting space on their living room floor to guests who had had too much to drink."

The Kenyan government ultimately expropriated the property but that initial venture into the hospitality industry didn't die. Instead, Taneja transplanted his dream to the United Kingdom where the family led by current chairman, Ashok Taneja, would acquire a travel agency named First Option. The agency would eventually become one of the preferred and largest hotel-booking agencies in England, spreading throughout the United States and Europe.

By this time, Anil's father, Ashok, had put together a team of people to oversee the family operation.

"During the course of their business, my father and his team came to the realization that if the hotels can afford to pay them 30 to 40 per cent commission on their bookings, then maybe the hotel industry was where they should be focusing their efforts," explains Taneja. "They promptly bought up five houses and converted it into a boutique hotel."

From there, it was full speed ahead.

"The team soon realized that there was substantial profit to be made so in the 1990s, the business model changed," explains Taneja. "They sold the travel agency and focused everything on hotels and real estate."

Today, that initial real estate offering has broadened to include 11 hotels across the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. Palm Holdings Group of Companies also has ownership in a variety of office buildings, restaurants and alternative assets, such as land and residential buildings.

Ashok continues to be chairman of the company overseeing his sons' ambition.

Potent Possibilities

Photo courtesy of Teddy Chau



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“My father is overjoyed at how the company has grown,” says Taneja, who has been working within the family business for the last 10 years. His two brothers, Rajan and Anish have been involved during the last six and five years respectively. “With the three of us onboard, we have more manpower behind the company to push so many more projects. The company is more geographically diversified as a result. We’ve been able to separate the business into three different divisions in order to keep the company poised for growth. With the three of us working here, the world is our oyster.”

Three in One

Under the brother’s management, Palm Holdings Group of Companies segregated its business into three distinct divisions. Palm Hospitality was officially formalized in 2014 as the hotel-management arm of the company. It offers full-service management on behalf of hotel owners for major brands, including IHG, Marriott, Starwood – and others.

“Our goal with this division is to become the preferred management compa-

ny for major brands and lending institutions,” states Taneja. “We also want to become the preferred operator by customers and tourism agencies.”

According to Taneja, the Palm Hospitality division can deliver significant results.

“Through focused management of the type that we deliver, we have seen lifts of between 10 to 30 per cent on gross operating profits within a two-year period,” he says.

Palm Construction is the newest division to be formalized, which took place in 2016. It builds on the company’s years of experience in doing its own construction projects.

“We found that there is a real demand in the marketplace for what we had already been doing for years,” explains Taneja. “So we’ve built up a team to take on outside contracts, whether they be new builds, repositionings or renovations. We’ve had a fantastic reception to date and already have a few projects signed.”

Although Taneja states that it is too early to talk about goals for this division, he admits that there is a lot of excitement.

“This division is being fuelled, in large

part, by my brother Anish,” he says. “He did a lot of our own conversions over the years.”

The construction team has been honed with the addition of Jagdish Nair as vice-president, construction. Nair brings 30+ years of experience as project manager in the construction industry.

The third division in Palm Holdings Group of Companies is Palm Ventures, which oversees acquisitions and dispositions of hotels throughout the company’s portfolio and externally. It also manages the alternative real estate owned by the family, which includes office buildings, restaurants, as well as residential. This division was formed in 2014.

“This division is exceeding our expectations,” says Taneja. “A big part of our business is being able to acquire properties and refurbish or manage them through our divisions.”

Formalizing the three divisions has already proven to be beneficial for the company. Although each brother is charged with a division, all three work together to create a seamless entity that capitalizes on the inherent strengths.

“The reason we decided to create these three divisions was to make us into a vertically integrated company,” states Taneja. “What excites us is that we have the experience to provide all three services to the market. We see this as a very promising opportunity.”

The Power of People

Separating the company into three distinct divisions certainly constitutes one of the major milestone moments of the company’s history but according to Taneja, it’s not the most noteworthy one.

“I think the most significant milestone moment came during the 2014 to 2015 period where we fuelled our biggest growth in the company’s history,” he explains. “We acquired seven hotels and rebranded three hotels — all within a 24-month period. I think this is a sure sign of things to come, as we’re looking to do even more than that during the next 24 months. We’ve managed to set our benchmark pretty high.”

Of course, none of this growth would have been possible were it not for the experienced team of people who work at the company.

“Our philosophy has always been to have the best people we can and to let them have the freedom to run their own component of the business,” explains Taneja. “I’d be wrong to say that my brothers and I account for this recent growth. Our team of people is who truly led the company forward.”

Juggling different interests in a geographi-

cally diverse organization is no easy task. The company has head offices in both the U.K. and Canada (Toronto). But it still manages to maintain a unified corporate culture throughout.

Some of the key personnel on the company’s executive team include: the aforementioned Jagdish Nair, vice-president, construction; Paul Sutton, vice-president, operations; Marie-France Bergeron, regional director of sales; and Rangan Amir, vice-president, finance.

“I think part of our success is that we collaborate on every aspect of the business,” adds Taneja. “All major decisions, we make together as a team.”

Having this outstanding executive team is part of the company’s successful business philosophy, but its core strength is in maintaining that all-important corporate culture.

The Canadian Component

Although Palm Holdings Group of Companies operates in three countries, Canada remains close to the heart for Taneja and his brothers.

“Canada is home to us,” he says, adding that Canada currently represents approximately 30 per cent of Palm Holdings Group of Companies’ revenue. “We’d like Canada to represent at least 50 per cent of the business within the next 24 months. The challenge we have is that we also see ourselves expanding further into the U.S. and U.K.”

At the moment, the company has five hotels within Canadian borders: two in London, ON; one in Waterloo, ON; one in Niagara Falls, ON; and one in Halifax, NS.

The eastern property is the latest Canadian addition. The company acquired the 113-room Quality Inn in Halifax, put it through some extensive renovations and turned it into a Holiday Inn Express — which opened earlier this year.

The Power of Three

The future of Palm Holdings Group of Companies looks promising. With the three brothers – Anil, Anish and Rajan – firmly at the helm and complemented by a team of experts in their own right, one can’t help but believe that the Taneja tradition will not only carry on in the years to come but will continue to thrive in the process.

Another key “three” in the company’s history is part of what sets it apart from its competitors.

“I think we’re different from other hospitality companies in that we have our three formal divisions, which all offer their own advantages,” concludes Taneja. “We also have diversity and geo-

graphical scale. We look at these three components as a strategy where we can hedge the company’s cash flow and where we aren’t subject to a single market’s changing conditions.”

Three does seem to ring true for the Taneja brothers and Palm Holdings Group of Companies. Times have certainly changed from the days of their orphaned grandfather. As to where the company may end up in the years ahead, Taneja is quick to say that any projections would only limit themselves. But given the success experienced to date, one can safely assume that tomorrow will bring with it unending enthusiasm and a driving passion on the part of the Taneja brothers and their handpicked team of people. ●




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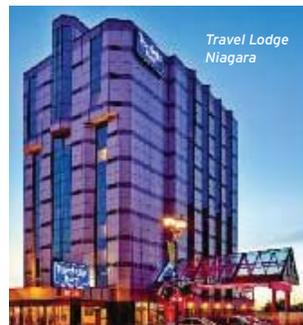


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