CEO INDIA
MAGAZINE

Sealmatic At 15: A Legacy of Sealing Excellence

CEO Magazine: Today marks a truly special milestone. Fifteen years ago, Sealmatic started as a dream with just a few people and limited resources. The company is celebrating 15 years of resilience, innovation, and growth. I am honoured to sit down with **Mr Umar Balwa** to look back at the incredible journey that brought success to the company, the challenges it overcame, and the bright future ahead. Mr Balwa welcome, and congratulations on 15 years!"

Umar Balwa: Thank you for providing a platform to share our "Sealmatic Beyond 2030" vision and our efforts toward making India a global powerhouse in the engineering industry.

CEO Magazine: "As we begin the interview, I will be posing several questions to better understand your experience, and I welcome any questions you may have for me as well."

CEO Magazine: How did you feel about reinventing yourself from being an MD of a conglomerate to heading a start up?

Umar Balwa: I would like to describe the experience of "reinventing" myself—transitioning from managing a successful established business (Burgmann – conglomerate company) to launching the startup Sealmatic—as an arduous yet fulfilling return to my roots.After decades of success, I had to reintroduce myself to customers as a "beginner" despite my deep expertise in the field of mechanical seals. I would like to describe as being back on the "road" with "bag in hand and aspirations on sleeves," but without a big brand name or "badge" to display. I would like to acknowledge that starting over in my mid-forties required a different kind of energy than my first venture at age 22. The transition involved managing every basic task personally—from writing solicitation letters to pursuing payments from customers. I felt I had more to lose in this "second innings" because I now had an "immensely successful history" and higher personal and market expectations to live up to.

CEO Magazine: What advice do you have for young entrepreneurs today?

Umar Balwa: Based on my 37 years journey as an entrepreneur, I would like to provide several key pieces of advice for young entrepreneurs, emphasizing resilience, discipline, and a long-term perspective. My philosophy centres on, **"Do not just think outside the box—break the box".** (Find Your Calling): I would like to encourage entrepreneurs to find a field they are truly passionate about and stick with it, even when facing significant challenges. **"Start Small But Think Big"**: I advise not waiting for the "perfect" moment or massive capital, but rather starting with a focused product (Minimum Viable Product) and expanding from there. **Discipline, Devotion, and Dedication**: I always emphasize that these three keywords are the foundation of success, learned from my experience with German engineering culture. **"If You Set the Small Things Straight, The Big Things Will Fall Into Place"**: This is my personal philosophy, which emphasizes meticulous attention to detail in the initial stages of a business. Invest in **R&D and Technology**: I stress that for manufacturing, continuous investment in R&D, new technologies (like Industry 4.0), and upgrading manufacturing facilities is essential to staying competitive. **Global Vision**: Iencourage young Indian entrepreneurs to look beyond the domestic market and aim to create a global presence.

CEO Magazine: What are the most important factors that can lead a company to success?
Umar Balwa: Based on my experience building Sealmatic into an international brand, I would emphasize that the most important factors leading a company to success are rooted in a combination of discipline, technical expertise, and relentless persistence.

Discipline and Work Culture: Drawing from my training in Germany, I believe that dedication, sincerity, perseverance, and, above all, **discipline** form the foundation of a successful organization. Further, **Persistence and Commitment**: Overcoming business setbacks through sheer perseverance, commitment to employees, and personal, hands-on leadership. **Strong Team Collaboration:** Building a company that thrives on the collective effort, dedication, and passion of its employees are few of the attributes that come to my mind, besides them there would be so many, as there is no written formula for success.

CEO Magazine: Did you have any doubts during the process of establishing Sealmatic?
Umar Balwa: I would be candid to admit that there were moments during the journey with Sealmatic where circumstances became so trying that I **questioned my decision to begin again.** While my cofounder, Hanif Chaudhary, maintained confidence in my abilities, the process of establishing the company presented several internal and external challenges: **Self-Reflection on the "Second Innings"**: Unlike my start in 1989 at age 22, the 2011 launch of Sealmatic came when I was in my mid-forties. I wondered if myenergy levels had abated and realized I had more to lose, given my established successful history (Burgmann India) in the industry. **Initial Doubts about the Market:** During the early years in the industry (with Sealmatic), I faced significant scepticism from international companies who did not believe that an international mechanical seal company could be established in India. **A "Rough Sea" of Challenges:** I would describe being "thrown into a rough sea" of challenges initially, as the mechanical seal business is notoriously difficult to design, manufacture, and sell. Ultimately, my philosophy of **"Once a SealMan, Always a SealMan"** and my belief that I had found my calling kept me committed to the nascent venture(Sealmatic) despite these periods of doubts, trials and tribulations.

CEO Magazine: Do you think that business can be taught in business schools or learned on the field?

Umar Balwa: From my personal perspective, I strongly advocate that business is primarily learned **"on the field"** through hands-on experience. While I do acknowledge the foundational role of education, my personal philosophy and journey emphasize the following: **Learning by Doing:** I compare business to a craft that requires active participation, stating that you learn it by doing it. Ibelieve that business schools may teach theory or how to follow a defined strategy, but they cannot teach the leadership, resilience, or "out-of-the-box thinking" required to handle complex real-world challenges. I say that while schools provide tools, true business acumen is developed through years of "dedication and experience". Ioften highlight that no amount of theoretical knowledge can fully prepare an entrepreneur for the "trials and tribulations" of a start-up.

CEO Magazine: Do you think research and statistics matter more than gut feeling or business instinct?

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Umar Balwa: Based on my career, I advocate for a balanced approach, emphasizing that **research and statistics are critical, but must be paired with experience and "common sense" (instinct)** to drive business success. While I value structured data—I also heavily rely on personal, hard-earned experience and the ability to "break the box". **The Foundation of Research:** When entering the challenging mechanical seal market in 1989, I did not rely solely on a hunch; Ibegan by thoroughly researching top international brands (Burgmann, John Crane, Borg Warner, Sealol, Flexibox etc.) and understanding the technical landscape. **"No Research Without Action, No Action Without Research":** This mantra, associated with Sealmatic's R&D, highlights that data must be actionable. **Experience-Driven Instinct:** Having spent over 37 years in the industry, I use my ownknowledge (instinct) to interpret data and make high-stakes decisions. **"Common Sense" in Engineering:** While technical data is paramount, I emphasize that, ultimately, "common sense" is essential to navigating critical, complex engineering challenges. **Data in Strategy:** I always use detailed market analysis—such as analysing the demand—to formulate specific, targeted growth strategies like "Sealmatic Beyond 2030". In summary, I view research as the foundation, but experience and business instinct (or "common sense") as the driving forces that convert data into success.

CEO Magazine: You belong to a sound business background but could you shed some light on your personal struggle?
Umar Balwa: My personal struggle is characterized by an initial period of professional dejection and the subsequent challenge of building a high-tech business (Sealmatic) from scratch after losing my first major venture (Burgmann India). **Initial Career Frustration:** Despite coming from a successful business family (real estate hospitality and food processing), my first entrepreneurial ambition—a venture in textiles and garments (1989)—failed to gain my father's support. This left me feeling "dejected and betrayed," spending weeks performing menial jobs for my family as they viewed me as "unproductive". **Forced Entry into a Hard Industry:** At age 22, I was essentially ordered by my father to report to a small engineering company called A K Engineering. I had no prior knowledge or interest in the "difficult and complex" world of mechanical seals, which was entirely different from my family's more straightforward hospitality and realty businesses. **Solo Management of Basics:** In my early days, I had to manage every aspect of the business alone—from purchasing raw materials and writing solicitation letters to physically pursuing customers for payments. "Loss of Burgmann India(2007)": After building a successful 17-year joint venture with Feodor Burgmann of Germany, the company was acquired by a larger conglomerate. In 2007, we were forced to sell our shares, leaving me"bereft of a company I had lovingly nurtured for years" **The Re-entry Struggle**: Instead of retiring or relying on family wealth, I chose to start over in 2011 with **Sealmatic.** This required me to "water a new seed," beginning in a tiny 220-square-meter premise and personally traveling across the US, Europe, and India to rebuild a customer base from nothing.

CEO Magazine: What qualities did you see in your business partner that you put your faith in him?
Umar Balwa: In all my discussions with the media and public at large I have expressed that on the establishment of Sealmatic India, I have always highlighted specific professional and personal qualities in my cofounder, **Mr. Hanif Chaudhary,** that formed the basis of my trust and our successful collaboration with each other. **Operational Competence:** I would state that Mr. Chaudhary's ability to handle the **daily workings of the company** is a critical asset. This allows me to focus on international collaborations, mergers, and long-term strategy without being "fettered" by demanding internal operations. **Deep Industry Experience:** Both of us bring over 37 years of experience in fluid sealing technology. I have always specifically valued Mr. Chaudhary's technical background, including specialized training in Germany and Japan, which ensures the company maintains international quality standards. **Shared Vision and Values:** The partnership is built on a "combined vision" to create a world-class Indian enterprise. I would describe Sealmatic as the "sum total" of our shared dream, pursued with mutual dedication, sincerity, and discipline. **Historical Trust:** We two were colleagues at our previous ventures, **AK Engineering and Burgmann India**, before starting Sealmatic in 2011. This long-standing professional relationship provided a foundation of proven reliability before we formally partnered as founders. I often summarize our collective approach with the philosophy: **The 3D Approach (Dedication, Devotion & Discipline)** emphasizing that our trust is rooted in a shared commitment to perfectionism and technical excellence.

CEO Magazine: How do you maintain the harmony between partners who come from disparate backgrounds?
Umar Balwa: We maintain harmony between cofounders by implementing a clear division of roles that leverages individual strengths and fostering a shared vision that transcends different professional backgrounds. **Complementary Role Definition:** Wedivide responsibilities so each of us can operate without interference. For instance, while **Mr. Hanif Chaudhary** manages the demanding daily internal operations, I focus on international collaboration, mergers, and high-level strategy. **Unified Vision and Legacy:** I view Sealmatic as the "sum total" of the efforts of all associated people, anchored by a common goal shared with each of us that remains intact despite changes in management or ownership over time. **Cross-Cultural Discipline:** Drawing from my experience with German engineering partners, I prioritize "discipline, sincerity, perseverance, and perfectionism," creating a structured work culture that bridges the gap between different business styles. **Familial Support and Alliance:** I emphasize that the families of entrepreneurs must come together to support their endeavours, viewing business partnerships as broader alliances rather than just individual contracts.

CEO Magazine: What are the challenges you faced as an Indian in a demanding foreign market such as Europe, USA and Middle East?
Umar Balwa: I would like to highlight several critical challenges faced while expanding into demanding foreign markets like Europe, the USA, and the Middle East. These obstacles range from initial entry barriers and scepticism about Indian manufacturing to the intense technical competition posed by established global giants. In the early stages of Sealmatic, Iencountered significant resistance when trying to establish international partnerships. **Perception of the Indian Market:** In the early 1990s, foreign companies in the USA and Europe were often disinterested in or dismissive of the Indian market, which was then seen as overly protected and laden with bureaucratic "red tape". **Dismissive Responses:** When soliciting partnerships, Ifrequently received "rude and curt" replies from international customers who did not see a need to establish a mechanical seal presence in India. **Lack of Information:** Way back in the 1980s, the industry was dominated by developed nations where technical information was considered "sacred and confidential," making it difficult for an outsider (Indian companies) to find reputable collaborators. **Competitive and Technical Challenges:** Once Sealmatic began competing globally, the challenges shifted toward maintaining parity with mature international players. **Domination by Global Giants:** I would state that three major global sealing technology players have dominated the industry for nearly 100 years. Competing against these "big boys" requires exceptional technical know-how and application engineering. **Technical Sophistication:** The mechanical seal industry is highly technical and demanding. To compete in Europe and the USA, Sealmatic had to invest heavily in advanced software like **Finite Element Analysis (FEA) and Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD)** to match international design standards. **Maturity Period:** I have always emphasized that it typically takes a period of **10 years** to reach maturity in this high-octane industry of sealing technology. **Rigid** International Standards: To gain acceptance in foreign markets, Sealmatic had to secure prestigious certifications that many domestic competitors lacked, such as API Q1, ATEX, FDA etc. **Long Lead Times:** Entering established supply chains, particularly for pump OEMs in the Middle East, involves long execution periods. For instance, seals supplied to Middle East may take years to reach final commissioning and generate recurring revenue. **High Costs and Regulatory Differences:** Entering foreign markets generally involves higher risks and costs compared to domestic operations. For Europe specifically, strict regulatory standards (such as EU norms on emissions) do pose operational difficulties not typically seen in India. **Customization Requirements:** International projects, especially in the Oil & Gas sector, require unique, tailor-made specifications for each project, necessitating a large, diverse inventory to ensure smooth execution.

CEO Magazine: How do you plan to ensure the success of Sealmatic once the founding partners retire?
Umar Balwa: We have secured a strong plan to addresses the long-term success of the company beyond the founding partners through a strategy of institutionalization and strategic long-term planning. **Sealmatic Beyond 2030:** This strategic roadmap systematically breaks down global markets by geography, sector, and original equipment manufacturer (OEM) business. It assigns specific responsibilities across the organization to ensure the vision is executed by the broader team rather than just the founders. **Organizational Restructuring:** To move away from a founder-centric model, the company has implemented a **flatter corporate structure** and added new leaders to the executive team. This includes creating specialized organizations for Marketing and Technology to maintain a customer-focused approach. **Investing in Human Capital:** The company emphasizes building a **"learning organization"** by continuously investing in highly trained manpower and professional development for its 270+ employees. **Technical Institutionalization:** The company has developed proprietary tools like the **Mechanical Seal Dictionary (MSD) and Seal Selection Guide (SSG).** These systems internalize the technical "application know-how" (AKH) that was previously held by a few members in the company and now making it accessible to the entire engineering team. **Long-Term Revenue Security:** By focusing on securing Original Equipment (OE) contracts, the company ensures "annuity business" that lasts the lifetime of the equipment (25–35 years), providing a stable financial foundation for future leadership.

CEO Magazine: There is an ongoing discussion on the subject of young people and their work ethics today. What are the main differences between young people today and back when you began? Do you have any pointers for them?
Umar Balwa: Today's young professionals aren't just workers; they're a bridge to the future. They blend experience with an innate tech-fluency that makes tools like AI second nature. What I admire most is their refusal to accept 'the way things have always been done.' They trade slow hierarchies for efficiency and trade burnout for a genuine focus on mental health.

The challenge for us as leaders? Engagement. They seek constant growth and intellectual stimulation. If their path stalls, they move on. They value experiences—like travel and dining—over stagnant stability. However, this high-performance drive comes with a cost: a heightened risk of stress and anxiety. Our job is to provide the growth they crave while fostering the balance they need.

Having said the above, I have always emphasized **discipline** as the primary differentiator and the most critical advice for young people. Reflecting on my start in 1989 at age 22, I would like to state that how my training with German engineers taught me that success is built on a foundation of dedication, sincerity, and perseverance. **The Discipline Gap:** I would like to highlight that, back in 1989 when I began, there was a stricter adherence to process. Today, I observe that younger colleagues sometimes prefer to **employ shortcuts** rather than following rigorous, long-term methods. **Earning Your Place:** I always reflect that in my era, young men were expected to "earn their place" in the family business by the age of 20, whereas today's environment is more dynamic and competitive, often offering different distractions or expectations and while the boundary of youth now stretches toward thirty, our generation knew no such luxury; for us, life began in earnest at twenty. Today, youth is an era that lingers until thirty. In my day, we were strangers to such a long childhood; we entered the world of men and women by twenty. **The "Grind" vs. Convenience:** While discussing the energy of youth, I have questions if the same willingness to go through "the grind and the pain" of starting from scratch exists today as it did when I was 22.

CEO Magazine: In a few words how would you sum up your future plans for Sealmatic?

Umar Balwa: I would say in a short summary about my future plans with a bold vision: **"Do not think outside the box — break the box!".** My strategic roadmap, titled **"Sealmatic Beyond 2030,"** focuses on transforming the company into a dominant global player and achieving the following key milestones: **Global Recognition:** I aspire for Sealmatic to be recognized as the **number four mechanical seal** company globally. **Market Share Targets:** A specific goal is to capture a **15% market share** of the anticipated 22,500 new API mechanical seals required by oil and gas sector by 2035. **Expansion into Profitable Segments:** Shifting focus toward high-margin **end-user and aftermarket (O&M) business,** which we expect to enter a "golden period" starting in FY 2028 as current project installations begin requiring maintenance. **Geographic Footprint:** Establishing a physical presence with sales and service centres on **every continent,** with immediate focuses on the Middle East, Europe, and the USA. **Technological Leadership:** Continuous investment in R&D for advanced products like **dry gas seals** and **smart seals** (IoT-enabled) to maintain a competitive edge in critical applications like nuclear and defense.

CEO Magazine: "It has been truly inspiring to hear the journey of Sealmatic over the past 15 years. From a humble beginning to becoming a leader in the sealing technology, the growth is a testament to the dedication of everyone here. Thank you for sharing these memories. It's clear that the foundation built is solid, and the future is bright." With the vision you've shared, I have no doubt that the next 15 years will be even more impactful. Here's to the future of Sealmatic!"

Umar Balwa: Thank you, for taking me through this journey of incredible insights. Fifteen years is just the beginning. To everyone who has been part of this journey, thank you. It's remarkable to see how far we've come, but it's even more exciting to as to where we are going. Fifteen years is just the beginning. Thank you for getting this chance of highlighting the passion, resilience, and camaraderie that has defined these 15 years. This anniversary belongs to the whole team, and we look forward to celebrating many more milestones together."