

Rewards of Building a High Performing Polymer Team

By Gilles Rochas

It has certainly been an adventurous journey over the past five years.

During this time, OQ Polymer Marketing has scaled from a small team of 15 people to more than 100 working across global working streams from sales, marketing, supply chain supported by manufacturing to IT, finance, legal, HR, procurement and many other vital roles in between.

We may be a relatively new business, but our fresh approach, willingness to be bold and try new ideas have enabled us to develop the skills of new driven talent, both locally and globally and attract highly experienced talents from some of the biggest industrial players. Our growth's two-way approach bridges the gaps between expert senior staff and ambitious hardworking juniors to flourish in a company that supports all levels of learning and career development.

Everybody has stepped up to achieve what many others may have thought impossible in this period of time. We have had to culturally adapt to onboard greater ambition and inspiration, realigning our vision to bigger and better achievements.

Our plan to deliver rapid growth carried a simple objective: to create an organisation that has local presence in key markets and the capability to sell 1.5 million tonnes of polyolefins to the world, a more than five times increase in sales volume.

Against the odds, we continue to make tremendous strides. Since 2020, the company has grown its client base from 300 to 3,000, and the volume of products shipped has jumped from 900 containers per month to 4,000. Meanwhile, the number of grades we sell has more than quadrupled.

This was all, of course, achieved during a well-documented shipping crisis sparked by the global covid pandemic.

So, where exactly are we today? Currently, OQ operates out of 17 countries and covers more than 80 with a range of polymer packaging products, including PP, HDPE and LLDPE.

We have grown from zero footprint outside of Oman in 2016 to a solidified presence in several international markets. OQ expanded into Singapore and China in 2018 and followed that up with moves into India and Turkey in 2019 and Spain in 2020.

In these markets, we have hired and trained local commercial professionals who know the business landscape, customs and cultures, the premise being to create a service-oriented organisation with a local touch, providing complete solutions and better lead-times to compete in the market.

We continue to motivate each other across the whole OQ family – our confidence and trust in each other grows by the day and will only strengthen as the business expands.

Looking externally, our teams readily benchmark with industry best practices and competition, utilising feedback from customers to drive business development and inform progression in our product portfolio.

We've had to join all the dots to generate a complete, end-to-end service offering. This has involved developing a robust and efficient supply chain system with a cost-efficient logistics network, executing localised marketing strategies, and building a new state-of-the-art website to grant easy access to customers and optimise our sales and distribution channels.

Overcoming challenges

Of course, we have encountered many challenges along the way. Each new market and their jurisdictions are subject to different rules and regulatory requirements. This, along with the challenge of being able to attract the right local talent from labour markets we were previously unfamiliar with, made establishing local offices to fit our schedule a difficult task.

At the same time, we had to overcome various logistics hurdles. Establishing Sohar as a major logistics and shipping hub to export our products globally was required for us to execute our ambitious export and growth strategy.

This required patience and persistence. After prolonged conversations with shipping lines to make them aware of the opportunities to support our production and distribution growth plans, we devised various coordinated solutions that have enabled both parties to benefit. Our shipping partners have enabled us to steadily increase our export volumes, while we offered them sufficient time to prepare for our uptake in demand.

Key achievements and learnings

Despite these obstacles, I am extremely proud of how far OQ has become, and even more inspired to drive forwards to even greater accomplishments.

Thanks to our grit, determination and ability to adapt, we have been able to fulfil our new market customer promises around delivery of products. Further, one of our best accomplishments during this rapid growth phase has been building a perfect blend of young talent and experienced professionals, culminating in a team which can respond to challenges and excel in delivering desired results.

Crucially, that perfect blend includes a strong depth of local knowledge. We dedicated significant energy and time into hiring the right people on the ground, this local presence being critical to providing proximity to customers and a seamless service. Together, as a team, we are continuing to make waves and break new ground.

We have learned from our mistakes and taken calculated risks based on our experience establishing OQ in our home market of Oman. The goal has always been to operate like a start-up based on values of openness and flexibility, this fluidity enabling us to accelerate our entry into other countries and drive our growth plans forwards.

OQ continues to broaden its horizons. I look ahead to the next chapter of our story with great anticipation.