

# “Aim for the sky, but never lose track of your tread



D D SHARMA, CEO,  
Fluid-O-Matic

The only manufacturer to commission 360 heat sealing plants (battery assembly plants) all over India and overseas, Fluid-O-Matic was founded by D D SHARMA, an electrical engineer (artificer) trained by the Indian Navy in control engineering in 1980. Founded in 1989, Fluid-O-Matic claims to be the ‘brand for the branded batteries’ as all major battery manufacturers across India roll out thousands of batteries every year from the plants manufactured and installed by Fluid-O-Matic.

Talking to SRABANI SEN of *Electronics Bazaar*, Sharma explicits that he is against fully automated battery manufacturing plants as that would threaten to reduce employment and increase maintenance cost. “I love the battery industry and don’t want to venture into any other area as the battery market has a long life ahead, with the advancement of technology and solar options coming up fast,” says Sharma. Excerpts from the conversation.

## Q Can you give some tips to the industry on how to set up battery manufacturing plants?

Passion, dedication and the time you can devote to your work are the most significant components needed for the successful establishment of a manufacturing plant. The size of the plant, which depends on the size of the business you want to do, the quantum of funds you have at your disposal and the turnover target you plan to achieve are also equally prominent issues to be dwelled upon. The plant can be set up within a 50-yard room or can spread over a 5,000 sq m plot.

The minimum cost required to establish a plant is Rs 0.5 million. It is important to understand the market—about how to do profitable business. Everything else, we provide—we install the plant, we provide the expertise, we provide training as well as the personnel. The manufacturer also needs to research the market—whether he can sell his product and withstand the competition or not. If one is efficient enough, he will surely survive in this competitive market.

Our sole motto is, ‘don’t buy what others sell, buy what you require’. I would advise the new

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battery makers to aim for the sky, but never lose track of where you tread. A bird in hand is worth two in the bush, so one should go for that which meets his needs, budgets and infrastructures. I would suggest not to get carried away by the claims of advertisements. One should study surveys to determine which batteries are successful in the market and why they are successful.

Initially, it is better to have a medium-sized plant and then upgrade to a bigger one. One should not go in for a totally automated plant as that costs a lot more. It is better to have a medium-sized plant, where operation is automatic but the attention given is manual.

We also make fully automatic plants but due to its cost, we have sold only two such plants till now. Till the time a manufacturer is not comfortably settled in the market, he should not opt for fully automatic plants.

### **Q How do you view the domestic battery industry?**

The Indian battery industry is growing at a rate of 30 per cent per annum. A couple of years back, it did see a slump due to dumping of cheap Chinese batteries, but it has picked up since then. It is poised to more than double within four years, given the current rate of growth. The organised sector accounts for a total current turnover of Rs 50 billion and the unorganised sector, about three times that of the former.

However, the industry is still dependent on the technology imported from foreign sources. On the other hand, countries like Taiwan and China have developed their own technologies in the battery field and are competing with the rest of the world. Although, qualitywise Indian batteries are better than those from China, Taiwan or any of the other Asian countries.

### **Q What developments are being undertaken in the battery industry?**

Recent developments are formulated to suit the requirements of different applications. The important aspect that has been considered is the ratio of the weight and the volume of the battery to the power deliverable of the device.

Developments in battery technology have been slow but steady. Battery technology is complex. A small change in a manufacturing parameter can lead to a substantial change in battery performance. It, therefore, requires strict control of manufacturing parameters, apart from focus on technological development.

### **Q How has your company contributed to the Indian battery industry?**

Batteries and battery backups are the most vital aspect of today's technology. Almost each daily activity relies on a powerful battery backup and the quality of the battery determines its functionality. Realising these quintessential facts about batteries, we, at Fluid-O-Matic, have emerged as a one-stop solution for the best battery manufacturing machines and allied technologies. We are a renowned company dealing in various battery manufacturing machines and allied products.

We've designed the first successful and commercially viable heat sealing plant in India in 1996. Our battery machines are being used by all major battery makers. Our USP is economical and low-maintenance battery machines. Also, our activities are not restricted to supply and distribution alone, our focus has always been service to the customer. We proffer free training by conducting lectures and technical discussions, wherein problems faced by clients are scrutinised and technical solutions provided wherever feasible.

### **Q Which machineries do you offer to battery makers?**

We offer battery assembly lines, which include heat sealing machines, welding machines, battery container punching machines, short circuit testing machines amongst many others. All these machines are available in different models to accommodate everyone's budgets—from Rs 0.5 to Rs 5 million. It is extremely exorbitant to import the complete assembly line plant, so people generally purchase an assortment of machineries, the economical version is available in India for nearly Rs 1 million. The Taiwan models are available at Rs 8 million.

### **Q Why should one go in for your machines? What are their advantages?**

Our machines are being used by all major battery makers—Exide, Su-kam, Okaya, Base, Addo, Horizon, Gem, Mangla, Parker Power—all use our machines to make batteries. That's why we're called 'the brand for branded batteries'.

Qualitywise, we can compete with global standards. Be it sealing or intercell welding, we can compete with the best in the world. Many Indian battery manufacturers go for imported machines, but these are not successful in Indian conditions. Voltage fluctuation is high here, which the imported machines cannot withstand. Tem-

perature variation is also quite high here.

Fluid-O-Matic machines are made to suit Indian conditions and the qualifications of Indian operators. These machines are labour-intensive so operators need not be educated. They don't need a degree or any concrete experience to run our machines. All they require is two days' training, which we provide through audio-video media. We also provide detailed manuals on machine operation.

Our machines possess the fault-finding technology. We also custom-make plants as per the requirements of customers. We usually take one month to deliver a plant.

**Q Are your machines cheaper than other manufacturers'?**

Our plants are not cheap, they are economical. Comparatively, the input cost has been kept to a minimum.

**Q What maintenance is required for these machines?**

We do not claim that our plants are maintenance-free but we can state confidently that in a year the maintenance cost will not exceed Rs 5,000 per plant.

**Q Do you face any challenges in this industry?**

The Indian battery industry is not as big as that of USA's or China's. So we have to unite and look towards the export markets in Afghanistan, China and the Middle East, where potential is huge. Battery manufacturers need to pay heed to quality issues.

**Q What is the state of Indian R&D?**

While the battery industry worldwide is investing heavily in R&D programmes and projects, Indian companies are yet to emulate them. Our R&D related activities, in comparison to other countries, are negligible. Indian companies are still dependent on foreign technology.

We have our own R&D division at Fluid-O-Matic. We have the best international softwares and conduct all our tests on powerful computers. After we design the machine, we check its production process, service life, total life and durability. Only after we are completely satisfied do we proceed to make the machine.

**Q What are the environment-related issues pertaining to battery production, us-**

## Fact File

**Year of establishment:** 1989

**Production capacity:** Four plants per month

**Location of factory:** Noida; another one is coming up in Sitarganj near Rudrapur

**Factory size:** 5,000 sq m

**Workforce:** 50

**Exports to:** Africa, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

**Products:** Heat sealing machines, welding machines, hole punching machines, air leakage testers, short circuit testers, shear tester machines and fixtures for N-200

**age and disposal?**

Battery manufacturing methods are not pollution-free. There are complex technological issues related to pollution and environmental control. Environmental control, being technology-intensive, is expensive. Hence, many manufacturers shy away from taking safety measures.

Battery technologists are trying hard to find materials that are not polluting but even today, despite all efforts, pollutant materials are being used profusely. Controlling this pollution is a major issue that needs to be tackled.

**Q What is your outlook on the industry for the next couple of years?**

I am optimistic. The industry will have to work on low volume growth in the short to medium term, focusing on cost reduction in order to maintain profitability. It is also likely that the market will migrate towards higher technology products such as metal clad dry cells, alkaline and rechargeable batteries. ●

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Assembly line plant

