

*In conversation with  
Bantwal Ramesh  
Baliga, CEO, Watertec  
(India) Pvt. Limited*

In this month's Hidden Gems Series, we feature the growth story of Coimbatore-based Watertec (India) and the company's vision and strategy to become a leading player in the polymer-based bath fittings and accessories segment in the country

**BY TEAM SMART CEO**



BANTWAL RAMESH BALIGA, CEO,  
WATERTEC (INDIA) PVT. LIMITED

When our editorial team sat down for a chat with Bantwal Ramesh Baliga, the chief executive officer of Watertec, the first thing that we noticed was his deep domain understanding of the bath fittings space. Prior to joining the Coimbatore-based company, Baliga had spent almost two decades in the sector, first at Jaquar Group, the market leader in bath fittings and then as Director and Country Head for Villeroy & Boch, the super premier brand serving elite customers with their sanitary ware products. During our conversation, Baliga gets straight to the point; “The opportunity we have at Watertec is tremendous, considering we’re the one organized player in the polymer-based bath fittings segment. Additionally, our recently launched Nickel chrome-plated bath fittings and many new products are one-of-its-kind in the market,” he says.

While looking into various opportunities available in the country today, and with lots of initiative from the government towards creating housing for everyone by 2022, Baliga is gung ho about the opportunities for Watertec. He narrates Watertec’s positioning very simply: drip-free, rust-free and leak-free. And, not to mention the lower costs of plastic-based products. Baliga adds: “But, what we’re really looking forward to is the opportunity for chrome-plated, plastic-based line of products from Watertec.”

The Nickel chrome-plated product portfolio is exciting for several reasons; first, it looks good, on-par with metal-based products. And, it also has the inherent advantages of Watertec’s other products – lower costs, trusted brand, and rust-free. “Our machineries are all automated and robotic. Our products are time tested, have lots of loyal customers,” elaborates the leader.

Specifically, Baliga points out the opportunity for Watertec in the affordable housing segment. He says, “We’re now gearing up to do institutional sales, offering one-stop plumbing solutions at a budget for affordable housing players. We’ve the absolutely rightly based product for this segment, looking into the budget available with builders across the country.”

### ***Vast dealer network***

As we discuss the presence of Watertec across the country, Baliga is quick to point out the company’s 9000-strong channel partner network. “Our channel partners are at the core of our business. They are our touchpoints with the end customer, and therefore our communication at the stores is critical. We’ve started in-store branding, to help enable strong brand recall amongst customers,” he adds.

For Baliga, who is a seasoned player in this industry, marketing came naturally. He has always realized that plumbers were crucial partners for Watertec, and organized meet ups with plumbing associations and consultants. The company has organized over 1000 meet ups with plumbers every year for many years now and has sponsored the Indian Plumbing Association’s annual events, architects’ awards, design dialogues and even conceptualized a certificate for plumbers. This has been appreciated very highly by the plumber community.

Baliga says, in terms of sales volume, Watertec is probably No. 1 in the polymer market ahead of even most of the metal players in the country. It manufactures almost 25 million products every year. To take the company to the next level,

he’s paying serious attention to customer service, after sales support and strong brand messaging. The company’s 33 branch offices across India now each have an institutional sales person, to directly serve real estate companies and affordable housing players.

### ***The Product Portfolio***

Baliga emphasizes on the need for a complete product portfolio – one that gives them the opportunity to supply each and every product needed for a bathroom and plumbing products in the construction industry. “We don’t want to supply only the few products of the bathroom; the goal is to offer a complete solution to our builders & institutional sales clients.”

In coming months the company also wants to service government-owned organizations – public schools, railways stations, etc. and Baliga is taking early steps to get there.

### ***Tackling key challenges***

When quizzed on the biggest challenges at Watertec, Baliga explained the importance of having right people on the right jobs. “We’ve setup a strong design team for our new innovative products, ramped up the production and sales teams. In sales, we’ve added over 80 people in the last year, and about 100 people in production and as a leader, my role is to enable them to do their jobs extremely well. Setting the right sales policy, which is largely channel partners-driven, is one of my most important activities. I am involved in all the activities in the company delegating responsibilities to my team by providing constant support in terms of innovative ideas, products and guidance to them. Baliga believes in that only team can win if they have passion and work together. Hence a lot of time also goes into working with people and paying attention to the HR function. I am also fairly excited about the GST regime, which will certainly help us in a market that is largely controlled by unorganized players,” explains Baliga.

On the topic of competition, Baliga has a very clear perspective. The goal is



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to deliver to end customers, what they exactly want – high quality products that last for over seven years. Our channel partners help us communicate our positioning. “I’d actually say, we look at our competition with a positive frame of mind – how do we put the Watertec Brand on par with the metal-based players? The answer is we are at par with any metal based player in terms of quality, innovation and service.”

#### **Working with the Board**

Watertec (India) is a three-way joint

venture among Coimbatore-based UMS Group that is part of the GD Naidu group, Watertec Malaysia and Sri Lanka-based South Asian Investments, and Baliga is given a free hand to run day-to-day operations. “It is up to me to spot opportunities in the market place and take it to the board. The idea of Nickelchrome-plated bath fitting is one such,” he says.

Watertec India is currently debt free and the board has set itself a revenue target of Rs. 600 crore by 2020. The company currently grows at over 25%, with healthy

profit margins, and all expansion plans are funded by internal accruals.

Baliga has also set himself a grand goal of becoming one of the top players in the overall segment of bath fittings in the country. And, it is this goal that creates a passion and ensures the goal is achieved. As we draw this interview to a close, Baliga simply says, “The opportunity for Watertec as one of the oldest branded players with the largest market share in the polymer-based segment is tremendous. I am sure we can achieve this goal.”