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## How little known Vi-John emerged as a leader in the shaving cream market

*The brand's India volume market share stands at 29.2% in May*

Rajiv Singh | ET Bureau | July 08, 2015, 09:03 IST

*Vi-John's volume market share in India stood at 29.2 per cent in May, over three times that of Dettol, almost four times that of Axe and over seven times that of Gillette.*

Dapper, with not a hair out of place, Vimal Pande is perhaps an ideal brand ambassador for a company of which he is also the CEO. For the past decade, he's been a loyal user of 'Cobra' deodorant, 'Splash' after-shave, '22 degree' talcum powder, even 'BoroShield' antiseptic cream, all brands of the littleknown Delhi-based personal care firm, [Vi-John](#). He's also one of thousands of consumers who annually consume almost 45 lakh kg of Vi-John's shaving cream, in the process making it the largest label in this category. It's also a category that's conspicuous by the presence of a clutch of multinational brands from [Axe](#) ([Hindustan Unilever](#)) and [Dettol](#) ([Reckitt Benckiser](#)) to [Old Spice](#) and [Gillette](#) (Procter & Gamble).

"In shaving cream, we are much bigger than Gillette in India, both in volume and value," asserts 52-year-old Pande. And if being ahead of a global leader isn't enough, he goes on to make another claim. "In fact, we are the largest selling shaving cream brand in the world."

According to the latest Nielsen MAT data sourced from industry officials, Vi-John's volume market share in India stood at 29.2 per cent in May, over three times that of Dettol, almost four times that of Axe and over seven times that of Gillette.

"Even if you put the next four brands together, they won't be able to match our volume and value share in India," affirms Pande, adding that the biggest plus for the brand has been its 'affordability' tag. Vi-John is available across 2.5 lakh retail outlets and at over 1 million other trading channels across the country. The brand makes over 15 lakh shaving cream packs every month, says Pande.

An email sent to HUL and Reckitt Benckiser did not elicit any response.

What the MNCs lose in volume, though, is being partially made up in value. Consider: Gillette's 3.9 per cent volume gives it a close to double value share of 7 per cent; Axe 7.4 per cent volume converts into 12.9 per cent value share. It's only in Vi-John's case that its value share is less than the volume share. Pande grudgingly acknowledges the problem. "We are quite visible on TV. But our profitability is not as high as others."

Even as Vi-John continues with its aggressive intent to further widen its volume lead over its rivals, the price warrior has started working on a strategy to match its volume growth with value. "While the strategy till now was to scale first and reach a sound scale, now the plan is to convert volume into value. So now we will go in for the kill," asserts Pande.



## Lathering Up

Produces over **15** lakh shaving cream packs every month

Available in **2.5** lakh retail outlets and 1 million other trading channels across the country,

Vi-John's Feather Touch is the second largest player in the **₹350**-crore hair removal category. Reckitt Benckiser's Veet is the largest brand

Lip Guard is the **second** largest brand in the lipguard segment. Largest is HUL's Vaseline

The company is making improvements in packaging, quality and more importantly pricing, which would be crucial to push it ahead in the value trajectory. While in 2011, its 125 gram shaving cream pack was available for Rs 20, it now costs Rs 35.

What has worked brilliantly for Vi-John has been the endorsement by Shah Rukh Khan. Celebrity endorsements has played a significant role in brand awareness, helping it make a rapid transition from a business to business brand to a business to consumer brand, explains Abraham Koshy, professor of marketing at IIM Ahmedabad. "Had it not been for the celebrity endorsement, the brand could not have pulled it through."

However, the most discerning element of the strategy that has worked in the favour of the brand is the choice of target segment. While brands like Gillette are targeted at the higher end of the market, Vi-John has chosen to target the mass segment. "This is an intelligent choice as this market has been waiting for a brand relevant to it," adds Koshy.



However, converting volume into value at a faster clip won't be easy. It's a brand game, which has to be played with finesse, says brand strategist Harish Bijoor. "One celebrity will not turn the tide for it. There are a lot more brand parameters that need to be addressed and tweaked."

The biggest problem for Vi-John, according to Bijoor, is that it has not invested in branding. "The product has worked, the brand has not. Not yet. What's missing is brand imagery. And it needs to earn it fast." Oui, John?

Tags : **Business of Brands**, Vi-John, Reckitt Benckiser, Old Spice, Hindustan UniLever, Gillette, Dettol, BE This Week, axe