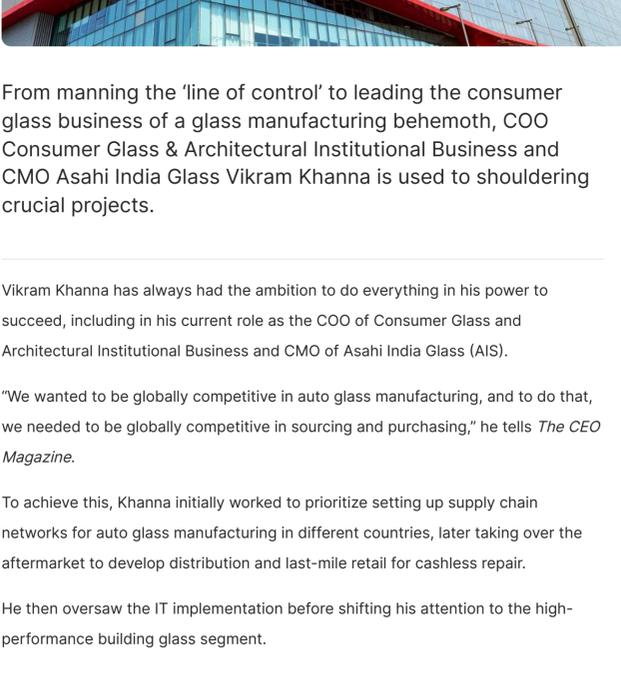


THE GLASS MAVERICK

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4-min read

Leadership



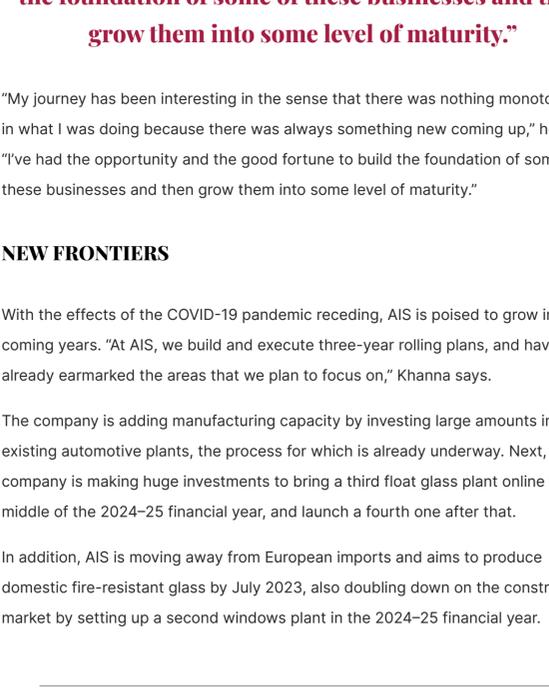
From manning the ‘line of control’ to leading the consumer glass business of a glass manufacturing behemoth, COO Consumer Glass & Architectural Institutional Business and CMO Asahi India Glass Vikram Khanna is used to shouldering crucial projects.

Vikram Khanna has always had the ambition to do everything in his power to succeed, including in his current role as the COO of Consumer Glass and Architectural Institutional Business and CMO of Asahi India Glass (AIS).

“We wanted to be globally competitive in auto glass manufacturing, and to do that, we needed to be globally competitive in sourcing and purchasing,” he tells *The CEO Magazine*.

To achieve this, Khanna initially worked to prioritize setting up supply chain networks for auto glass manufacturing in different countries, later taking over the aftermarket to develop distribution and last-mile retail for cashless repair.

He then oversaw the IT implementation before shifting his attention to the high-performance building glass segment.



“I’ve had the opportunity and the good fortune to build the foundation of some of these businesses and then grow them into some level of maturity.”

“My journey has been interesting in the sense that there was nothing monotonous in what I was doing because there was always something new coming up,” he says.

“I’ve had the opportunity and the good fortune to build the foundation of some of these businesses and then grow them into some level of maturity.”

NEW FRONTIERS

With the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic receding, AIS is poised to grow in the coming years. “At AIS, we build and execute three-year rolling plans, and have already earmarked the areas that we plan to focus on,” Khanna says.

The company is adding manufacturing capacity by investing large amounts in existing automotive plants, the process for which is already underway. Next, the company is making huge investments to bring a third float glass plant online by the middle of the 2024–25 financial year, and launch a fourth one after that.

In addition, AIS is moving away from European imports and aims to produce domestic fire-resistant glass by July 2023, also doubling down on the construction market by setting up a second windows plant in the 2024–25 financial year.

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All of these maneuvers point toward one key goal – an integrated one-stop-shop experience for the customer.

“We’re looking at integration. One of the key pillars of our strategy is that we are an integrated player across the value chain,” he explains. “We do float glass, automotive and architectural processing, and then we do distribution and retail as well.”

But exciting goals can often lose their steam when met with ground reality. Despite the strong conviction for advancement, Khanna concedes that there are still challenges to be mitigated.

“I would say the big challenges today are margin contraction and pressure on free cash flows due to volatility in demand, the raw material and energy markets as well as heightened interest rates,” he says. “The other key challenge is the ‘fight for talent’, which I think is creating challenged for many within the industry.”



“We want to contribute to building regulatory standards for energy conservation in line with the objectives of the Government of India.”

But in the long run, Khanna is focused on something he perceives as more of an opportunity than a challenge. As a glass manufacturer for construction sites, AIS is responsible for driving regulations in the industry and improving overall energy consumption, and it’s Khanna’s job to align the product strategies to make the business profitable.

“We want to partner with industry players, including academia, government regulators and quasi-government bodies, to shape standards for the future, for the benefit of the industry and for the nation as a whole,” he explains.

“We want to contribute to building regulatory standards for energy conservation in line with the objectives of the Government of India.”

THE ‘GLOCAL’ VIEW

As he strives to not only grow AIS, but also impact the industry, Khanna falls back on the company’s trusted network of suppliers that has been forged over long-term goals. AIS is a tier-one partner of original equipment manufacturers and it has invested in its relationship with the tier-two base.

“To impact the industry, you need to have a ‘glocal’ view – bringing the global aspects of best technology practices, and spreading them among the local players who are managing that last mile,” he says. “It could be a technician, it could be a fitting guy, it could be the guy who’s taking the measurements and doing the survey.”

These decades-long partnerships have helped AIS tremendously, especially when a demand-supply mismatch rocks the industry.

Khanna gives the example of the “highly unique” product Sentry PVB, which is in short supply due to a change in ownership. But since AIS has a long-term relationship with Kuraray, the new owner of Sentry PVB, it can avoid the scarcity.



“You need to have a ‘glocal’ view – bringing the global aspects of best technology practices, and spreading them among the local players who are managing that last mile.”

These kinds of partnerships also impact pricing and cutting-edge innovation, which helps the company’s cost of goods and gross margins. Across AIS, there are around 50 suppliers and partners who hold the key to the company’s success, including KPMG, PwC, Deloitte, Avalon, Tata Chemicals, Kuraray Asia Pacific, Asahimas Flat Glass, Prominence Windows Systems and Boruka Extrusions.

These suppliers and partners operate across Windshield Experts, AIS Automotive, raw material procurement and IT outsourcing. In addition, the float glass business has 15 key partners for packaging and transportation.

On an average day, Khanna shepherds a lot of departments within AIS, but he insists that, despite that, he doesn’t feel too thinly stretched.

“I spent eight years in the army, and three years were on the line of control. Before that in the academy. They put you under levels of stress that harden you to cope with whatever stress comes your way later,” he says.