

The Sacha Story

(This week, the Chamber is proud to reproduce the biography of the first winner in the “Internationally Known...T&T Owned” category of the Champions of Business ceremony, held on October 17, 2014 at the Hyatt Regency)

Sacha Cosmetics Ltd is the brain-child of one man’s magnificent obsession with serving an ancient and universal human longing to look beautiful.

Founded by Satyakama “Kama” Maharaj some 35 years ago, the locally-owned, locally-manufactured range of premium cosmetics has been a beauty boon to women of all skin tones. With its selection of highly-pigmented products, *Sacha* serves a growing niche of what its tagline terms “*women with exotic skin*” – a demographic notoriously overlooked by large cosmetics manufacturers.

Sacha’s product quality, and the embracing of modern communications technologies, enabled its rapid expansion into foreign markets. Its exclusive and strategic partnership with the California-based April Love Makeup Academy and official cosmetics sponsorships of the Miss Universe, Miss Bahamas, Miss Jamaica, Miss Panama and Miss USA pageants have made *Sacha* internationally known. Next year, 50% of the company’s projected sales are expected to come from exports.

Kama picked up his passion for making women look beautiful while helping his mother, Madame Maharaj, a legendary hairdresser who would also gladly provide makeup services. It struck him, however, that the end result made the women look artificial. Convinced that the brands of the time, with their uncalibrated colours and oily finishes, were wrong for the Trinbagonian women’s tropical skin tones and types, Kama became preoccupied with developing a line of cosmetics to rectify this gap in the market.

Settling-in as a Mathematics teacher, with an Economics degree, Kama’s mother pushed him to buy a small cosmetics business that became available. With this entry into the business world of cosmetics, he was ordering semi-finished product from a New York manufacturer and completing the work in Trinidad. *Sacha’s* early operation was so small, it could fit in his garage and, still leave room for playing cricket.

A footnote to the *Sacha* story is Kama’s relationship with Frank Angelo, founder of the MAC Cosmetics brand. Angelo got his beginnings by taking a few pieces of *Sacha’s* New York stock. The relationship ended when Angelo began ordering worryingly high quantities under *Sacha’s* credit. Though the product formulae belonged to him, Kama signed them over to Angelo and moved his entire manufacturing operation to Trinidad.

Several years later, Angelo's products would emerge under the globally-distributed MAC Cosmetics brand.

In the late 1990s, *Sacha* became a global e-commerce pioneer with the launch of SachaCosmetics.com which attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors, selling products to international customers for over sixteen years. It has introduced a social media department at its Freeport headquarters to deepen the relationship with its customers via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

The result is the kind of challenges most entrepreneurs would love to have. When *Sacha's* Buttercup Setting Powder made it onto the YouTube makeup guru circuit, an entire year's worth of stock flew off the shelves in one month, forcing the company to temporarily halt online sales. For some new customers, the silky powder, so finely-milled as to eliminate the ashy cast left behind by other products, has become what makeup bloggers refer to as an HG ("Holy Grail") product.

With sales having long surpassed its competition in Trinidad and Tobago, *Sacha* is now in 27 foreign markets and counting. In Cuba, its largest export market, *Sacha* is the only foreign brand stocked at the retail chain TRD Caribe's 2,179 outlets. Next up is Panama, October 2014.

Under Shivam Maharaj, Kama's son, *Sacha* continues to innovate. It is the world's first make-up company with halaal certification, opening the way to the Islamic market where products with alcohol and animal fat can be a barrier. In addition, as part of a major foray into make-up education, it has become National Training Agency-certified and is awaiting Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) approval.

Sacha Cosmetics Ltd, in its social responsibilities, engages environmental waste disposal practices, looking after disadvantaged children from Central Trinidad and working with Wendy Fitzwilliam's Hibiscus Foundation, supporting the care of children with HIV. *Sacha* follows the teachings of Maya Angelou: "*When you get, give; when you learn, teach.*"

It was with great honour that the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce presented the award in the category of Internationally Known...T&T Owned to **Sacha Cosmetics Limited**.

