



STRATEGIZING SALON SUCCESS

Enterprising entrepreneurs, Rahul and Vaijayanti Bhalchandra, paved the way for the You Look Good (YLG) chain of salons

Interview by | Ayesha Augustine

It has been only two years since the first **You Look Good Salon and Spa** (YLG) opened its doors to its clients and let them into a world of pampering beauty treats and trendy hairstyles. But today, the YLG chain has over 20 salons across the southern states of the country. This could not have been possible without the vision of the Bhalchandras (a husband-wife duo), who envisaged and executed the idea of setting up their own chain of salons, after having worked within the industry for nearly a decade.

StyleSpeak gets candid with **Rahul and Vaijayanti Bhalchandra** as they tell us about how they set up such a successful salon and

training academy model from scratch, and what's in store for the YLG chain of salons and spas in the near future.

Having finished your Masters in Business Administration, why and how did the idea of starting a salon emerge?

Rahul: Managing and setting up our own salon was not so much of a task, since I have been in the health, beauty and wellness retail business. In 2001, I headed India's first health and beauty retail chain operating across cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai and

Mumbai called Health & Glow. My first experiment with conceptualizing a salon was when I opened two salons within Health & Glow stores in partnership with Latha Mohan (Kanya), never imagining that one day I would be running a chain of salons. My second salon project was entrusted by Kishore Biyani with innovating Star & Sitara, a salon chain managed by the Future Group. So in a way YLG is my third innings, when it comes to salon management and set ups. The first YLG opened shop on January 9, 2009. Today we successfully manage and run 20 YLG salons and one YLG Home salon in Bangalore and Pune respectively.

How has the journey been so far for the company?

Rahul: It has been a lot of hard work, excitement as well as some serious challenges and mistakes made. It took us time to understand the business and build our model with learning from our first set of salons. Hopefully, now onwards we will make fewer mistakes.

Vaijayanti: I am passionate about beauty and love this business. As a part of the startup team, it has been demanding personally to create time for my family as well as the business. Hopefully, I will look back with satisfaction on what we have been able to create as a brand and my role as a mother.

What awards and accolades have been won by YLG salons?

Rahul: Our best reward is when we get great feedback from our customers.

“I believe that this is a business, which will witness explosive growth for organizations that can create a strong education system and invest in people and customers.”

- Rahul Bhalchandra, CEO, YLG Salons and Spas

What is the USP of your chain of salons?

Rahul: YLG is an all-women salon offering great service at great prices. Our customers feel they get value for their money. YLG offers unparalleled commitment to improving service levels through constant education and investments in the latest technology in India, and innovative services. The YLG membership model is the only one of its kind in the world, where a member pays a fixed annual fee for unlimited usage of a basket of services – almost like a year round unlimited buffet of services. This fantastic membership has been experienced by thousands of our loyal customers. It has changed the way our clients look at other salons and their offerings as opposed to us.

What goes into setting up a YLG salon?

Rahul: Once we finalise the location, completing the physical infrastructure takes us less than 35 days. Simultaneously, we recruit and train a team to run the salon. Our marketing plans start from the time of opening to ensure that new customers experience the salon in its entirety as quickly as possible.

How do you choose a location for your salon?

Rahul: The YLG model is essentially a neighbourhood salon, so we look for a catchment of about 2,500 households in and around a 2-km radius of middle and higher income vicinities.

Does every YLG have a signature look/feel architecturally?

Rahul: Yes! The YLG look is distinctive

Profile for a typical YLG salon

Area / Size: 1,200 sft – 2,000 sft
 Number of treatment rooms: 4-6
 Number of Therapists/ Stylists : 12-16
 The most popular treatment: YLG's L'Oreal Chromosteam Hair Spa
 Budget: Approx. Rs. 35-45 Lacs
 Contact details: Rahul 08043550034
 Name of the Architect & Interior Designer: Idiom Design, Bangalore



and a customer can identify a YLG as soon as she steps into any of our salons. Every YLG salon has been designed as a cheerful, welcoming and warm place discerning for an Indian woman, offering privacy to unwind from her daily chores and stress. Natural finish polished MDF, glass, and bright hues like yellows, pinks and greens are our trademarks. YLG uses these colours to effectively create a sense of cheer in our spaces.

What kind of clients do your salons service?

Vaijayanti: We cater to market segments from SEC A (elite) and B (middle class) of women and girls from age five onwards.

What brands do the YLG salons use and retail?

Vaijayanti: YLG uses L'Oréal Professionnel exclusively for hair colour and straightening and L'Oréal Professionnel/Matrix for hair spa treatments. For the signature facials and skin services, YLG uses a range of carefully-tested effective products like Lotus Herbals, Skin Miracle, a La Naturelle, O3+, etc.

Your views on the importance of education...

Vaijayanti: Education is the foundation of this industry. We invested in building one of India's finest beauty academies even before our first salon opened. Our commitment to education is evident in

Trivia (for Rahul)

- Favourite cuisine: Continental
- Favourite holiday destination: Goa
- Favourite stress buster: I try not to get stressed – music for the rare times when I do. It works well for me
- Most memorable moment: Becoming a father for the first time
- Personal style statement: Don't have any.
- Highest high: Getting Married
- Your favorite salon: YLG, Cunningham Road, Bangalore

the fact that YLG employs the highest ratio of trainers to stylists in India. On a personal level, I am an M.Tech from IIT Powai. I have personally trained in hairdressing and beauty therapy and have a few international certifications under my belt.

When did you start your academy and why?

Vaijayanti : ISHA (International Skin and Hair Academy) was built in Oct 2008, and teaches anyone who wishes to learn the art of hairdressing or beauty therapy. We believe the academy is a strategic component of the business and helps to constantly improve the standard of services. The students at ISHA are coached by professionals with the best facilities and will become the stylists and therapists of the future. Hence, the

academy has a vital role in creating a better trained manpower for the industry, and of course, for YLG as well.

What are the certifications given to students who pass out of the academy?

Vaijayanti: ISHA offers diploma courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy, as well as Advanced Diploma courses in Cosmetology. ISHA trains students to qualify in examinations conducted by City & Guilds, UK for hair and CIBTAC, UK for beauty.

What kind of marketing strategy does the group follow?

We believe the best marketing for us is through word of mouth of our customers. We also use many local area marketing initiatives as well as the Internet.

What are the most challenging aspects of your job?

Rahul: Building an alignment across the organization.

What elements in the job do you enjoy the most?

Rahul: Teaching newcomers, setting up new salons and thinking of how we can improvise on our services.

What inspires you in this business?

Vaijayanti: The smile on a customer's face when she steps out of a YLG.

Celebrity clients...

Vaijayanti : We do have a lot of celebrities at our salons, but we wouldn't want to disclose any of their names as we value our customers' privacy.

What are YLG's future plans? Are there going to be any YLG salons in Mumbai and Delhi? Any plans to franchise your brand?

Rahul: Our vision is to serve a million women every month. YLG aspires to be present across cities in India over the next few years. All YLG salons are owned and operated by the company since we want to be in a position to ensure consistently high levels across all our salons. We will proceed cautiously with franchising in the future.**SS**