

## AWARD WINNER'S PROFILE

# The sweet smell of success

Pharmacy Business  
Health & Beauty Retailer  
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*Jay Rayani acquired a pharmacy in a town alien to him, revamped it and ended up winning two awards for his efforts. He shares his route up the success ladder with Faras Ghani and how he converted Riverside Pharmacy into a health and beauty hub...*



Jay Rayani and his Riverside Pharmacy

A career in medicine, engineering or law used to be the preferred choice for Asians, but for Jay Rayani, it was a peer-instilled dislike for becoming a doctor combined with a love for science and interacting with people that drove him to take up pharmacy as a profession.

He was 14 when work experience at an Uxbridge pharmacy sparked an interest in the retail side of the healthcare business. Following his studies, he worked at Boots while climbing up the ranks, spent time with a primary care trust and acted as a locum. However, when the chance to acquire a pharmacy came up – albeit in Rickmansworth, a town alien to him and one he had not visited before – Rayani grabbed it with both hands, revamped the place and ended up winning awards for his efforts.

His Riverside Pharmacy won him the Pharmacy Business Health & Beauty Retailer of the Year in 2008 and comes just two years after winning the Pharmacy Business Young Pharmacist gong.

'I like interacting with people, and a pharmacy always has that buzz about it. So I decided to venture in that direction rather than becoming an optician where it's quiet or a dentist where you're fiddling inside a person's mouth all day,' Rayani said. 'That's what led me to the work experience decision all those years ago. When the opportunity came up to buy this pharmacy, I decided to take it up straight away.'

Not being a local, it was a difficult decision. But Rayani was determined and set about carrying out some first-hand market research of Rickmansworth. He took a walk around the high street, looking at the range and type of products on offer.

'We knew the footfall, we knew the demand in town and we knew we couldn't possibly incorporate all that demand and make the pharmacy look like a shabby little shop. People needed fragrances and high-end cosmetic products.

'Rickmansworth is an affluent area and we found out that there were several customers who went to Watford [a nearby town] to shop for these products since there wasn't much on offer on the high street there.

'We had to plan something new. The existing business had an established reputation as well as a loyal customer base. But the old style of the shop wouldn't have gelled with the beauty products I planned to introduce. So we had to revamp it completely.'

It was not an easy task. Instant changes were not what he had in mind, even though he was clear about what he wanted. When Rayani took over the business, the shop had nothad are fit for the last 20 years. So he let the shop continue as it was to gauge the business, see what type of customers came in and act accordingly.

'The shop was redesigned by myself. I implemented the continental style as we seldom witness pharmacies with a long counter. Since we were busy with healthcare, we decided

to go ahead with that.

'We did change a lot of things so as to accommodate beauty products, skincare and other essentials. We didn't want customers to think this as just a beauty shop.

'We added a baby section and tried new window displays which drew in customers. Adding a '99p gondola end' did wonders as we stocked that up with new products. Although of not much profit, the products tempted the

### Fact file

Name: Jay Rayani

Age: 28

Years in the industry: Almost six

Pharmacy: Riverside Pharmacy, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire

Staff: 10

Prescriptions: 8,000 per month

Services offered: Blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, weight management, hearing aid consultation and personalised service, tried hypnotherapy and planning in-house allergy testing





Happy faces – Jay Rayani is flanked by his staff at Riverside Pharmacy

customers into the shop that followed with them buying other things as well.'

Brimming with new ideas was one thing but Rayani was keen to retain the familiar faces walking across the shop's aisles, both in the form of customers and staff.

'We gave the pharmacy a new name to generate extra interest. At the same time, regular customers would see no change in the service offered. There was also a log of loyalty attached to the shop – the previous owner was based here for 20 years – and we wanted to keep that as it is.'

The staff present when Rayani took over the business is still employed by Riverside, but things are better organised and laid-out now than previously, according to Rayani.

'All staff have their own sections to look after. I've also given them a bit of a creative license to come up with ideas to improve sales. I'm open to new ideas, so the staff can look at a range and we can have a chat about what's worth trying.'

'It has become a relaxed atmosphere, it's not a military atmosphere but they know when it's work time.'

As part of the new business model, Rayani has laid emphasis on staff training; employees have undertaken NPA training and now there is an NVQ-qualified technician in the pharmacy. Rayani also makes it a point for visiting company representatives to provide the necessary product training on new and upcoming products whenever they are in-store so that the regular staff not only acquire product knowledge, but also impart credible advice to customers.

Despite a heavy workload that comprises the clinical as well as the administrative side of the business, Rayani is managing just fine largely due to his established vision of where he wants to take the business complemented aptly by his prioritising and delegating qualities.

'It's [the workload] not that bad,' he said. 'The simplest solution is to prioritise everything and delegate accordingly. A lot of clinical stuff, such as blood pressure testing, I assign to my staff. I then do the follow-up chat with the customer and the delegating of tasks'

take a huge burden off my shoulders.. It's the same with administrative tasks, they are divided among the staff. We also have an accountant that takes care of all the numbers so I don't need to worry about that on a daily or a monthly basis.'

One drawback of the business is that Riverside Pharmacy has failed to conquer the local GP market. However, according to Rayani, that is the case with all pharmacies in the area.

'No pharmacy in Rickmansworth has a great relationship with the doctors. There are five independent contractors in the area, we get together and visit the surgery as a unit in order to put our views across to them.'

'We have meetings every few months, discuss issues, take an appointment and visit the doctor. We do have a daily surgery collection service but we don't have daily chats with the doctors. The important thing is they know who we are and what services we offer so the recommendations are always there. Having a loyalty to customers - which we do our best to hold on to - also goes a long way in having a steady flow of business.'

Running a successful business means listening to customers and encouraging feedback, and the box of chocolates and Christmas cards received by the pharmacy are proof of Rayani's affinity with his customers. The dual awards sitting behind the pharmacy counter also reaffirm customers' faith in Riverside Pharmacy.

'Although I was quite shocked at winning the second award, I must admit that it has helped establish a rapport with my customers,' Rayani said.

In his opinion, in a regular pharmacy, 80 per cent of the sales come from behind the counter while 20 per cent are from shop floor sales. At Riverside Pharmacy, that ratio is 50:50, complementing the time and effort Rayani has put into all aspects of the business. And with the plans that he has for the future, expansion cannot be ruled out.

'I would love to expand this pharmacy as we have enough products and plans.'

There is a small hitch, however.

'The guy next door doesn't want to sell.'



## Jay's top tips

**Be proactive** – Get involved with customers and staff; take decisions regarding the business. Stay on top of the market trends, especially with beauty products. You need to know what is happening outside your pharmacy doors, what is being launched and what the consumers are asking for.

**Go the extra mile** – Independents can't always compete with the big companies, so you need to offer something extra - exceptional customer service to the locals is a great way to increase sales.

**Re-merchandise constantly** – Offer seasonal varieties as well as what is being advertised.

**Plan ahead** – Know what you want to achieve and be flexible for any opportunity that presents itself. Also, have a backup plan in case things take a bad turn.

**Plan personal life accordingly** – Being a pharmacist can take a toll on your private life. Ensure you delegate time accordingly.