

Twenty years on

This year, ASI completes 20 years in the MENA leisure industry. **InterGame** caught up with its CEO, Prakash Vivekanand, to discuss the company's journey over the last 20 years and his plans for the future



Prakash Vivekanand, CEO, ASI

WHEN it comes to the MENA region, one company name that always crops up is Amusement Services International, one of the region's foremost service providers for the FEC business. It is led by Prakash Vivekanand, whose years of experience enable him to understand every facet of the leisure business and its operations.

InterGame: Since ASI's inception in 1999, the company has expanded annually. This year, as ASI celebrates its 20th anniversary, what thoughts and emotions come to mind?

Vivekanand: "This has been a brilliant journey for us thus far. We started with an aim of becoming a quality distributor that will add value for both operators and manufacturers. We believe we have achieved that. Through this journey, we have built lasting and wonderful relationships with operators and manufacturers around the world. Looking back, we feel very proud of our achievements in the industry."

From a small unit of three employees to now becoming one of the leading distributors of amusement products in the MENA region, as the CEO, how has the journey been for both you and ASI?

"We started as an equipment distribution company with two product lines, Sega and Bay Tek. Our initial team comprised multi-taskers who could do everything from selling products

to logistics and accounts. We were hands on and put in a lot of hard work - 12/7. The MENA was on the cusp of developing into a prominent FEC market. We chose our product lines wisely and ensured that we complemented rather than competed with our own line-up of products. Our principals encouraged our efforts and our success helped us gain new product lines.

"Our commitment to providing the best service levels won us customers. Soon we were equipping the best operations across the region with a product line-up that took care of all their requirements. Besides Sega and Bay Tek, who we still represent, we added many other brands from Coastal Amusements, Bob's Space Racers, LAI, Triotech, Elaut, Cogan Rides, Sting International, Falgas, BANDAI NAMCO, Intercard, Benchmark Games, VRsenal, Jennison Entertainment and Billares SAM.

"Today, the ASI family comprises 55 wonderful individuals who are integral to our success. More than 50 per cent of the team has been with the group for 10 or more years. This team has been the real star of our success story. They have shared my vision to deliver excellence to our customers and I am indeed proud to be leading them."

What do you see as ASI's biggest accomplishment since its inception?

"Our knowledge of the business and our ability to understand the needs of a customer, their

market, their location and cater to them has contributed to our success. Over 80 per cent of the operations to which we have offered our products and services, continue to thrive and earn revenue. To be able to contribute to their continued success is possibly one of our most notable accomplishments. There have been many others.

"ASI enjoys a repeat business ratio of over 98 per cent. This is a big statistic for us. If we did not deliver what we promised, our customers would not be coming back to us. When we first started, we benchmarked ourselves against a leading distribution company in the west. Today, our business model has emerged as a benchmark for others to emulate. There are many who follow what we do from our business model to our support services - brochures, websites, social posts and even exhibition stand designs. We are humbled and flattered by their following. They do so because we are good at what we do. This inspires us to set our standards higher and create new benchmarks."

How have the three divisions of ASI Machine Sales, ASI Design Solutions and ASI Support Solutions evolved over the years and how does one entity help the other?

"They all go hand in hand. We think a project needs to be well designed, have great equipment and be well operated to succeed. Hence we added design and operation wings to support our clients from project planning, layout, interior fit-out, equipment, pre-opening and assisting them with their ongoing operations. These three divisions sit under the same roof in Dubai and are involved in a project from the concept stage itself. We have today executed over 80 projects all across the Middle East, Africa, east Europe and the Indian sub-continent."

You are one of the founding members of MENALAC, bringing together leisure and entertainment industry professionals under one roof to create this not-for-profit trade organisation. How did this come about?

"The industry in the region has given me all the recognition I have. I always wanted to contribute to its development. A few like-minded professionals in the MENA amusement industry met on a flight back from IAAPA in Orlando and discussed the need to come together as



The ASI team at DEAL

an industry and support the growth of our business in the MENA region, as well as liaise with the authorities as an industry. We were all determined to make this happen. In the ensuing days, we received overwhelming support from many of the leading players in the region and MENALAC became a reality.

“Today, MENALAC is a recognised and registered trade body that genuinely adds value to the MENA industry with educational and safety initiatives that are tailored to suit the MENA region. I am so lucky to be involved with it and to be able to contribute to our wonderful industry.”

How is the market shaping today? Will the Middle Eastern boom continue?

“Our strategy was always to be present in many markets. This helps to keep our business stable as we balance the slowdown in certain markets with growth in others. The GCC market is going through a period of stabilisation. This will continue to be our core market. These markets have a young population base that enjoys their FECs. Many countries in the Middle East will offer substantial opportunities as the geopolitical situation settles. I am very upbeat about this region.”

What are you showcasing at DEAL 2019? How upbeat are you with your product line-up?

“Very excited. This will possibly be our best line-up of products in the last five years. From dedicated VR arcade cabinets to VR mazes, arcade, redemption, novelty and carnival attractions, we will have 100 units spread across our 7,500sq.ft pavilion. Beat Saber VR, House of the Dead: Scarlet Dawn, Connect 4 Hoops, Super Bikes 3, ATV Slam, Hang Time from BSR, Virtual Rabbids, Assassin’s Creed VR, Pixel Chase, Flintstones Quarry Quest, The Big Rocket Ride, Super Kixx Pro, a new feature to the Cosmic XL - we have so many. It will take our customers a good three to four hours to play the entire product range on the ASI Pavilion. We thank all our manufacturing partners for this exciting line-up.”

Is VR here to stay? What’s your take? Will these take over traditional arcade games?

“VR is a great add-on to any FEC. It will help us



Carinos in Iran

attract the millennials and generation Z players who are always on the lookout for something novel. However, I don’t think VR will replace traditional games within the FEC. VR is still evolving and there are many challenges to overcome in adapting a VR game for FECs/LBEs.

“Not all VR game manufacturers understand the needs of an FEC/LBE. We work closely with game developers as well as companies such as HTC Vive to enable them to understand the specific needs of operators. The HMD, the cables, the need for an operator, limited capacity (in some cases) and, most importantly, the attractiveness of the game cabinet to draw a player are all challenges to overcome.

“Virtual Rabbids: The Big Ride from LAI is a game that ticks most of the boxes and is therefore extremely successful in every FEC. We think the Beat Saber VR from VRsenal will be very big too, as it addresses all the needs of the operator and the player. Operators will need to select their VR gear and the supplier carefully. If not, they could often end up with a technical nightmare. As newer forms of HMDs and mixed reality options come into the market, we will see a total disruption in the way people play their games. This is a very exciting period.”

On a personal note, who has inspired you to have the work ethic that you do?

“Wow. So many, I can’t really name one. I continually seek inspiration and I have been extremely lucky enough to cross paths with

many such wonderful people and exchange information. Many of these initial acquaintances are now close friends as well as customers or associates. We are a family now. They have shaped my work ethics and the core competencies at ASI. My learning has never stopped. I keep absorbing information from all around and apply the same to grow our business and our industry in my own way.”

What is the best piece of leadership advice you have received?

“Probably the one that I received from my dad; stay grounded and value your relationships across all spheres. These qualities are critical for your success.”



ASI staff at the IAAPI show in Mumbai, India, last month. Mark Lense from Bay Tek (left) with Rosanne Fernandes and Tawqeer Qureshi from ASI



A Tridom FEC concept for India