

An Appetite for Success

Sam Schachna joined Menora Foods seeking to modernise and make progressive changes to develop the business as a national leader in food marketing and distribution.

Images by Estelle Judah Photography

Sam Schachna, Managing Director of Menora Foods, had a diverse career prior to joining the business, and his achievements as a progressive business figure have been recognised. Sam was named a finalist for the Young Executive of the Year Award at *The CEO Magazine's* 2013 Executive Awards as well as a finalist for *The Financial Review BOSS Magazine* 2013 Young Executive of the Year awards. "My professional career began at KPMG, where I worked for more than six years," Sam says. "I led projects and provided strategic, regulatory, and financial advice to many blue-chip clients across the retail, mining, government, and IT sectors."

"I deliberately chose to leave the corporate world and join the family business. My father used to talk about Menora at the kitchen table, and I'd take it all in. I hear myself talking the same way at our own kitchen table. In my late twenties, I joined the company, seeking to modernise and make progressive changes that would make us leaders in food marketing

and distribution. Now, as managing director of Menora, I proudly lead a dedicated team of more than 300 people with full strategic, P&L sales, marketing, and operational responsibility across our business."

Menora Foods is one of Australia's leading national food marketing and distribution businesses. "Our business now markets more than 1,500 products, handles more than 2,000 TEU containers per annum, processes more than 2,500 invoices per week, and services more than 5,000 customers on a direct basis covering Australia from the north-west of the Kimberley to the south-east of Bega," Sam explains.

With a strong business background working for KPMG, Sam developed skills and experiences to help him take the reins of the family business. "My challenge on joining Menora was to take a family-run grocery distributorship to a new level.

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Upon his entry into the business, Sam was entrusted by the board with his ambitious business strategy to build the company by investing in its Menora power brands, Peckish and Wattle Valley; ensuring continued growth with its partners and investing in people and infrastructure. Menora has achieved record growth and industry recognition for its excellence. "The year 2013 was a record year for Menora Foods. We achieved double-digit sales growth in a challenging environment, succeeding against the tide of national retail trends, while welcoming more than 30 new employees. >



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“We could see the changing retail dynamics, so we partnered with the independent sector and we exported, creating a major point of difference and honouring our culture of supporting family businesses. Using restraint and diplomacy, we were able to retain close relationships with the majors, while growing our profile with the independent sector. Various industry awards verify that we have got the balance right. During my time at Menora, we have been nominated for Woolworths Deli Supplier of the Year and awarded Ritchies Deli Supplier of the Year for the fourth time in the past five years.”

Menora Foods is using technology as a vehicle for doing business more effectively and efficiently. “We have invested in technology across our supply chain to ensure we meet the needs of our customers. This begins with our paperless ordering system, which turns orders placed on wireless PDAs by our national sales force to our customers within 24 hours. This is supported by a demand planning process that uses a material requirements planning process for our national logistics network, which operates an in-house-developed warehouse management system.

“In 2011, we invested in a state-of-the-art head office facility in Noble Park, Victoria. The facility contains warehousing for dry, chilled, frozen, and confectionery products throughout its multi-temperature-zoned rooms. All picking for our extensive independent supermarket customers is done via a purpose-built, Dexion-designed conveyor system that runs through all temperature zones of the warehouse, finishing in the fridge to ensure that we remain cold-chain compliant. All cartons are individually scanned automatically at the final section of our conveyor system to ensure the pick accuracy meets with our customers’ expectations. Our picking locations vary from full pallet and shelving through to carton live storage racking, which is a gravity-fed shelf that delivers the next carton to the front when a carton is



picked. This entire system is not only extremely efficient but it has had significant safety benefits by separating forklifts from our picking team members.”

Sam believes communication is vital to any business and is a conduit to impart culture and loyalty through the company. “We have driven the development of a number of programs including the Menora Recognition Awards that recognise outstanding performers, the Menora Institute, which provides educational opportunities, complementing their on-the-job experience, the Menora honour boards that celebrate the years of service of our employees, and *The Menora Times*, our internal, newsletter that acts as an effective communication tool across the company.”

The Menora business has a strong culture, committed to growth and exceeding customers’ expectations. “As a leader of the business, I have a clear vision, I work hard, and I lead by example while maintaining a strong sense of family and culture.

“Menora has invested in the latest infrastructure, so we’re always first to market, delivering fresh product direct to store to maximise the sales window for our products.”



Another important element of family culture is Menora Foods’ commitment to various causes. “Foodbank is an ideal partner for Menora Foods. I know firsthand about the wastage in Australia’s distribution of food. I knew donating money was not our optimal contribution. We donated the equivalent of more than 250,000 meals to Foodbank in FY13.

“Scope is a national charity helping disabled Australians live empowered and fulfilling lives. Menora once had a spice-packing facility, employing ladies who were long-term, loyal employees. We partnered with Scope to transition our spice-packing facility, providing our equipment, and asking them to employ our people, achieving a perfect match for both.” >

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Sam is also the Australian board member for the Circle of Specialty Food Distributors (CEISA), a global food-marketing and distribution forum. “I see myself as both a voice for Australia and a voice for youth,” Sam explains. “Australia is poised to become the food bowl for Asia, so we must be an active participant in global food discussions, not a passive observer.” CEISA appoints only one member per country, assessing candidates by reputation in their respective market.”

With a proud history and some of the most respected brands under its belt, Menora Foods has continued growing and investing in people and infrastructure to show the company’s commitment to further improvement and expansion. “In terms of future growth, we will continue to invest in our people and infrastructure to ensure that we cement our position as a leader in the FMCC market. We’ll continue to invest in our Menora-owned power brands,

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Wattle Valley and Peckish, to confirm their position as innovators and market leaders in their respective categories.”

In December 2013, Menora Foods announced its naming rights sponsorship of The Women’s National Basketball League (WNBL), Australia’s premier national sporting competition. “We are extremely proud to be one of the first Australian companies to put significant support behind women’s sport. The WNBL partnership presents exciting opportunities for the growth of the Menora power brand, Wattle Valley, which will be incorporated into the league title, logo, team apparel, and marketing collateral.”

“In line with our company strategy, we aim to secure new brand partners and expand our business into new categories. In the past 12 months, we secured contracted distribution arrangements for some of

Australia’s most trusted brands, including Huon, Chobani, Griffith’s, French’s Mustard, Frank’s RedHot, and Saxby’s. This has in turn taken our business into new categories of seafood, yoghurt, coffee, and beverages.

“In 2012, we diversified our business into general merchandise. We partnered with Philips Lighting, the number-one lighting brand in the world, as our initial brand, and we are in the process of securing new brand partners in this space.

“We recognise a significant opportunity to export our innovative Menora brands to international markets. Our export strategy commenced with New Zealand, where Peckish and Wattle Valley have become market leaders. We are in discussions with export partners in the European Union, the United States, and South Africa, which will open exciting future growth opportunities for Menora.” •



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