

India's Most Trusted CEO 2019: Rakesh Khanna, MD and CEO, Orient Electric Limited

We at **Orient Electric**, are using technology led innovation to create the differentiation that the new age consumers expect.

Designation: MD & CEO

Company Name: [Orient Electric Limited](#)



The Differentiators that set your business apart.

In this new world of informed and empowered consumers, it is extremely important that we understand their distinct needs and meet them with befitting solutions. We at Orient Electric, are using technology led innovation to create the differentiation that the new age consumers expect.

We have an innovative bouquet of offerings based on consumer insights across our businesses which include fans, home appliances, lighting and switchgear. Take for example our aerodynamically designed Aero Series fans that focus on three defining aspects, i.e. reduction of sound, increase in air delivery and elegant aesthetics. We have lately launched India's first IoT-enabled and voice-controlled fan **"Aerostim"** under this range which has a completely different design and finish compared to any other fan in the market. Also, as a time when air coolers are still considered a commodity, we have created differentiators by introducing IoT-enabled air coolers and modular outdoor air coolers. We are also the first Indian brand to receive BEE 5-star rating for LED bulbs. We have recently introduced the **"EyeLuv series LED Lights"** with Flicker Control Technology to address the problem of invisible flicker in normal LED lights which seriously impacts human health. We have also been instrumental in spurring consumption in LED batteries. We are the first in the Switchgear segment to introduce MCBS enabled with the revolutionary SDB (Snap Disc Bi-Metal) technology in India, thus uniquely positioning our switchgears on Safety promise. We have also launched modular switches featuring the revolutionary 3&B technology with Triple layer safety.

With a marketing footprint across India and in more than 40 countries, Orient Electric has earned the trust of millions of customers by providing cutting-edge lifestyle products. Orient Electric has a well-organised distribution network driven by over **4000 dealers, 1.20.000 retail outlets** and a strong service network covering more than 450 cities.

2) What is the big idea of the business that is impacting human lives?

While empathy and consumer insights are the bedrocks for any new development at Orient, we are equally conscious about our responsibilities as a Corporate and about our duty towards the humankind. Many of the new age developments that have happened in recent past is a testimony to it, whether the noiseless fans, low power consuming Inverter fans or the EyeLuv range of LED light with Flicker control technology, all these developments signal our intent to provide products and solutions which are good for our consumers and also for the environment. These developments are not driven by any statute, benchmarks or standards, for example we were the first in launching BEE 3 star LED bulbs when it was not mandatory and we did it again last year when we were again the first brand to launch the BEE 5 star rated LED bulbs.

3) It's often said that leaders these days must operate in an environment of extreme volatility. Do you agree? How does that affect the way you lead?

We are all living in a VUCA world, a world where Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity are given factors within which enterprises need to adapt, evolve, maneuver and prosper. If you do not, you perish. It's that simple. I believe that a brand's ability to continuously listen and engage with consumers helps it to become and remain sustainable and meaningful. We at Orient have been investing heavily over the years to map the societal and behavioral changes and predict the emerging trends that will shape the future. The digital and technical invasion has drastically changed how consumers think, research, buy and act. To remain ahead of the curve, one needs to continuously innovate and provide smarter solutions. At Orient, we see this ongoing change as an opportunity to up our game. As a trusted brand, our endeavor is not just to adapt but to unravel and surface the latent consumer needs and meet them with apt solutions which makes life simpler and experiences better.

4) A satisfied customer is the best business strategy of all. What has been your core strategies of retaining customers?

We are committed to meet and exceed the need and expectations of our customers while making them happy. Be it our products, their features, packaging, the way we showcase and sell them, or our after-sales service, we continuously map all the touch points to figure out various ways which could help us in delivering happiness to our customers.

Consumer's expectation about product reliability and aesthetics has increased manifold and therefore, we are routinely introducing pioneering manufacturing processes and technologies thus setting new industry benchmarks in terms of functionalities, reliability and aesthetics. We are investing in building our R&D capabilities that will help us in the long run in local differentiation and competitive advantage. We work closely with researchers, products designers and institutions like BEE, EESL etc. to bring in energy efficient, sustainable and yet cost-effective solutions for the society.

Since last 3 years we have started Online Reputation Management system, wherein through a tool we listen to what our consumers are talking about. We listen to their expressions, complaints, ideas and act upon them. We are mapping our online brand sentiments and we have robust digital and social strategy to breed engagement amongst our customers. I am happy to state that our brand sentiment rating percentage remains in between 90 to 98% all through the year, which itself is a proof of the connect and response mechanism the brand has been able to establish with its customers.

5) 3 Business Strategies of yours that were winners?

One critical decision I made after joining Orient Electric was to define the company's Vision, Mission and Values, which unite all the stakeholders by a common sense of purpose. It is a guiding philosophy and is helping us to shape the company for the future.

As a market-responsive company, I chose to position the brand around innovation, both in terms of products as well as processes. I strongly believe that the most effective way of creating a distinctive recall in a commoditized sector is through the design and

development of differentiated products. We have stayed well ahead of the industry

curve in the consumer electrical space by launching digitized products, the most recent being the voice-assisted and IoT-driven fans and air coolers. And we are not just delivering products that address functional needs but enhancing the overall consumer experience as well.

Another important area for me is building our knowledge capital. I believe that the

most competitive company is one that possesses a passionate workplace marked by extensive knowledge sharing. Over the years, we have strengthened our leadership with selective recruitment; we have engaged top-notch professionals to head our product innovation, finance and other critical functions. We complemented this recruitment with

a number of hires across functions, increasing our future-readiness.

6) Your strategies to ensure that you stay in touch with employees and customers in line with the company's goals?

Following a Transformational and Participative leadership style, I believe in leading through vision while creating a high-performance workplace culture wherein employees gain self-confidence, express ideas and opinions freely, and collaborate with all stakeholders to develop operative solutions to drive organization goals. I do an interactive Facebook Live session with all employees, we have many meeting forums, online social networking platforms, employee training and recognition programs which is helping us to increase workplace engagement. As we have our Board meeting every quarter, similarly, post that I also do an **"Online Townhall"** which helps to share the perspectives, business developments thus promoting better alignment. As a part of quarterly Online Townhall session, I take up questions in anonymity and try to address the gaps, or the challenges employees face.

While our average employee age has come down to 37 years, we have now taken up aggressive targets to bring more diversity in our workforce and all this is leading to increasing employee engagement rate. Last year we shifted to our new office which is a complete open office, nobody including myself has a room or a cabin, and I must say this has changed the working culture for good. It was brought greater accessibility, openness, fairness and is helping in fostering collaboration.

We have today established ourselves as a premium lifestyle brand through distinctive marketing campaigns and the launch of demo-and-display Zones pan-India to enhance the customer experience. We are engaged in several business-reinforcing initiatives, one of them being educating customers about advanced and upgraded product features. We are training our retail partners to migrate from "box-selling" to "customer experience & engagement".

We have consistently improved brand's online reputation through information spread, content promotion and prompt redressal of consumer grievances through the seamless effort of Online Reputation Management team and after-sales service team.

7) What is the best business advice you've ever heard? How do you create trust with the employees and the overall management?

Mahatma Gandhi once said, *"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."* I think this saying stands true in every sphere of life. At Orient, *"Trust"* is one out of five core values that we live and believe in.

When I say Trust as a value that we have built into our culture, it refers to its 4 important ethos: 1. We foster a culture of belief and trust. 2. We are open and transparent in sharing relevant information to all stakeholders. 3. We are an open organization which values everyone's point of view regardless of one's position in the hierarchy. 4. We provide enough freedom and space for people to deliver on their commitments.

I personally believe that trust and belief are the cornerstone of success for any organization and any deficit there amongst any of the stakeholders will drive us away from the core purpose and goals that we have set for ourselves as an organization.

8) What has surprised you about being an entrepreneur?

As I mentioned earlier, we are living in a VUCA world and we will have surprises all through our lives. As an entrepreneur and a leader of my team, it is my responsibility to ensure that surprises do not become shocks. Therefore, one needs to assess alternative realities and challenges, understand consequences of action and appreciate the interdependence of variables and be always ready for surprises.

9) What strategies do you use in terms of planning your personal career progression?

Leadership and learning go hand in hand. With the business landscape is changing so fast, I keep on learning to equip myself with what's new and relevant to my growth as a leader, which I also participate in formal training programs on regular basis. I believe in "learning by doing" which I have been religiously following since the first day of my job.

10) Your Favourite Book, Automobile, Cuisine and Quote of all time? How do you maintain work-personal life balance?

It is difficult to state one book as my favourite. Every book brings a new perspective and adds to my knowledge. However, there is one book that I have read more than once, and that book is **BHAGWAD GITA**.

While I don't have any fancy cars, I do love to eat healthy and stay fit.

My favourite quote comes from **Bhagwad Gita - "Karmanya wadhika raste Ha Faleshu Kadachanan"**. This has been one of the most important guiding principles in my life.

There is no particular way or a formula I have for creating a work-personal life balance, but what I believe, and which I think is very basic and something which I try to follow is, early to bed and early to rise. I think mind and body both need rest and a proper sleep helps you to tide over all the stress and to stay physically and emotionally fit.