

“Evaly thrives to emerge akin to Amazon and Alibaba from Bangladesh”

Evaly chairman Shamima Nasrin tells the Daily Star that the company has successfully completed over 3.2 million unique order deliveries during its one-and-a-half-year of operation, and it is expected the numbers to only grow larger.

Evaly shook up the Bangladeshi e-commerce world when it emerged, seemingly out of nowhere, about two years ago. The online marketplace has come a long way since.

In this interview, the company chairman, Shamima Nasrin, talks about Evaly's journey to where it is now, its vision, and where it is headed, among a number of other related topics.



You prioritised Promotional Marketing a lot. Tell us about the thought process behind this promotion-heavy approach.

First, I would like to make a clarification that in my opinion, promotional marketing is one of the major core tasks for a business or organisation to progress. Continuous improvements in this segment has to reach optimum level of results. Gradually building it up as one of the core competency elements, we have garnered the results as expected.

The moment we (the founders) finalised the name of our new e-commerce platform back in the year 2018, we immediately started working on promotional activities. We already had OOH (Out of Home) brandings placed six months earlier to the official launch of Evaly. As OOH brandings are extremely location driven, we had an intelligent selection of advertisement spots which would bring the most significant impact to our strategic objective.

During this six months Evaly already had over 100 billboards and shop sign placements administered all over Bangladesh. Also, during this period, we explored different online and offline promotional activities to garner the attention of our future customers. The reason we stressed so much on promotion was to rapidly gain attention, market share and the trust of consumers once we started operating in the market.

The term 'Promotion' is the spark-plug in marketing mix. It refers to the activities and processes designed to change or reinforce behaviour and the ideas of the customers through communication. As you know, promotion has to be a gradual process and all the renowned companies do it through many different avenues and at all times, we are also exploring all new aspects of conventional and strategic promotional activities and so on.

Where does Evaly stand in the country's e-commerce landscape?

We should firstly be acquainted with the e-commerce industry abstracts in Bangladesh. The accumulated market share ensued from e-commerce activities can confidently be proposed as a large

one. All the credits in fostering the rapid growth of e-commerce industry is to the current Government of Bangladesh. Their major vision in the 'Charter of Change' was to reach a "Digital Bangladesh by the year 2021, revolutionising through Digital Technology Advancement. The Government in Bangladesh has focused on embracing advanced technology and cautious development to the ICT (Information & Communications Technology) sector aimed to establish a resourceful and technology dependent nation. Nationwide powerful Internet connectivity establishment, upgrading to high-speed 4G mobile bandwidth, technical advancement in telecommunications are some growth factors behind the e-commerce sector progression in Bangladesh.

Till date we have over 160 million Bangladeshis among whom near 100 million are Internet users with over 40 million are considered to own a smartphone, and all of these people can be considered as the target market of the e-commerce industry.

Even a nominal average monthly transaction by the nationwide Internet users, considering the amount of BDT 10,000, can generate a highly functioning market worth a million millions taka. A slice of 2 percent of the overall market can result into monthly 20 billion taka worth turnover nationally. As for Evaly, the monthly projected turnover is somewhere around 0.3 to 0.4 billion takas according to media reports. That bring us to owning 10 to 15 percent of the national e-commerce market share.

We currently have near 25,000 local organisations, conglomerates, multi-national companies and cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises (CMSME) who have chosen Evaly as their top preference for marketing and trading their goods and services. We are proud to serve over 4 million users registered just through the widespread Internet service and cellular GSM connectivity; who choose to place over 10,000 unique orders with thousands of product variation every day securing the item of their need.

Our continuous effort in developing the system resulted in exceeding \$240 million of gross merchandise volume in a short span of 18 months with over 3.2 million unique orders have been served to date. We are now working intensively towards achieving a unified vision of transforming Bangladesh to a progressive economy and contributing in the betterment of mankind.

Not limiting to specific boundaries, we created another segment dedicating towards the local basic commodity businesses with 2,500 registered business entities. We have 15,000 'Heroes' who as individuals are providing continuous uninterrupted delivery service besides our nationwide delivery partners.

Currently less than 2 percent of all retail trading take place online. But this is changing quickly. The upward trends indicate the drift is shifting toward e-commerce in a steady pace.

Recently, we got great response to our food delivery service venture "eFood", which we launched after the pandemic broke out. We currently hold the second place in the on-demand food delivery service industry. "eFood" is currently making delivery of 7,600 unique orders every day with an average order basket of 700 taka.

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What are the challenges in this sector?

From the day one till date, we are representing a developing industry where every moment is full of new challenges and responsibilities to take care of. We are awaiting to welcome the structured rules or laws for the e-commerce sector. Yes, e-commerce of Bangladesh is just a new born in the national context and taking care of it would lead to some miraculous results.

So, how much have you grown and how the pandemic is playing out in regards to the health of your business?

Globally, very recently, a drastic change has been observed in consumer behaviour which impacted as a fundamental shift in the business models adopted by e-commerce-based organisations worldwide; but in Bangladesh it remained the complete opposite. Yes, it definitely increased but considering the ration of conversion from conventional offline to shifting for online shopping was comparatively low.

As there were strict lockdown in countries abroad which restricted

customers to go out for shopping and e-commerce just arrived as a blessing to them, being the sole source of supply.

In our country it is a different synopsis. Highly appreciated were the immediate steps taken by the Government to mitigate the overall national crisis. Tax relief measures, reduction in ratio for banks, reduction of repo interest rates, and promotion of financial service and fast-track of economic stimulus measures were the major key decisions during the pandemic breakout which played their roles.

Keeping up with our innovative service integration, on March, we launched our one-of-a kind service of 'Evaly Express Shop'. The strong adaptability of Evaly with the shifting trends initiated such prompt planning and execution. This introduced the doorstep delivery service of essential commodities. Customers were and still are able to receive their ordered products starting from 1 to 36 hours. During the moment of crisis, Evaly wanted to utilise its resources for the greater interest of people by expanding the menu adding medicines from pharmacies, fresh vegetable, grocery, and fish and meat.

The Express segment grew rapidly and became top choice of customers due to the extended lockdown period. As mentioned earlier, we have close to 2,500 local basic commodity business entities connected to our platform. Highly reputed super-shops are also present at the Express segment of Evaly. We feel that the small and medium businesses are our backbone, as they are for the economy.

We believe in supporting local businesses. We happen to be one and we see value in treating everyone equally, as we do. We have big name brands as our partners and we have small and medium businesses as well.

Is it difficult to lead a tech company as a woman in 2020-Bangladesh?

I would say women are enjoying more freedom than any period in the past. Women are being successful in every sector. Today, Bangladesh is the second most gender equal country in Asia but the journey has not been smooth or easy for the women. From social taboos to conservative attitudes, they had to face a number of obstacles to arrive where they are today.

My heartfelt gratitude to our Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who considered women's empowerment as one of the "Special Initiatives" for the current Government; and in the year of 2011 PM Sheikh Hasina formulated and adopted the comprehensive and progressive "National Women Development Policy" too.

Personally, I've been very lucky to have my family's support. My husband, Mohammad Russell, who is the Founder Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer at Evaly, has always supported me. Honestly, I didn't face many challenges. But I understand that many women do.

What's ahead for Evaly?

First, I would like to share that I'm thankful for the group of 800 leading top talent with strong values, capability and a sense of ownership contributing tirelessly for Evaly. Strategy, organisation, system, talent and culture are key to the stable, quality growth of our business.

We already have acquired 10-15 percent of the e-commerce market share, where companies with years of experience are still far behind in the queue. The economic revolution that shaped China has Alibaba as one of the most crucial contributors of their economy.

We have managed to earn the trust of millions of customers who are generating orders worth millions of currencies. We are adopting new technologies every day and expanding the numbers of our diversified work force. Evaly thrives to emerge akin to Amazon and Alibaba from Bangladesh.

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