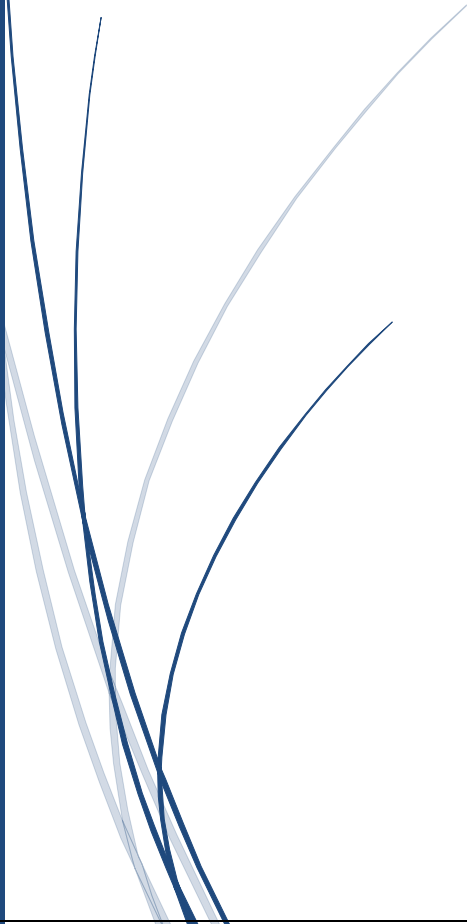


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Report on Tindipotha

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When we approached Mr Saeed Manju for an interview, we couldn't resist tasting a few dishes. So we ate some, then we ate some more and then some more! This is exactly what this place turns you into - a 'Glutton'! That's where it derives its name from, 'Tindipotha' a Kannada word which directly translates to a glutton.

Mr Saeed Manju an area vice president for COSTCO (in USA) a fortune 500 company, quit his job and returned to India with the intentions of setting up a resort. However when he was approached by his nephew, a commerce student who wanted to apply his academic knowledge to start a business and was leaning towards food industry, Mr Manju a hobbyist chef became quickly interested. However they were clueless as to what to venture into. Having experienced food trucks during his 30 year stay in America, Mr Manju wanted to bring the food truck concept to the conservative 'IDLI VADA' fancying community of Mysore. Hence the idea of 'TINDIPOTHA' was conceived.

TEETHING PAINS:

Mr Manju studied the market and found that there were no food trucks in the entire of Karnataka, which was a good sign. The problem with starting something that is so unique to a place is sourcing materials, and that is the first mover disadvantage says Mr Manju.

The idea of food truck was there but they didn't know what to cook. Hailing from a Muslim family the most obvious solution was 'Biryani', but Mr Manju was determined to tread off the beaten path and told his nephew 'Bacche, Biryani to sab banate hain, how does it make us different?' (Son, most of the restaurants in the city sell biryani, how does that make us different?) After much deliberation they decided on 'Indo-American' cuisine. American cuisine made from Indian Ingredients! It was a big risk to thread on this path he says, as in Mysore, the people prefer comfort food like idly, vada and not nachos, burgers etc, from food trucks.

Certain pricing issues had to be dealt with, he says that, even though they were able to sell their items, they were never able to make a lot of profit, substantial investments in inventory and underselling of their goods led to losses, it was only after a lot of introspection, he realised that, he needs to follow the JIT model in inventory and change his pricing strategy.

He also decided to shift to a different area, with the above decisions he was able to recover 25% of his investments with 8-9 months and he hopes to breakeven in 2-3 years.

Mr Manju is very candid about advertising, he says there is much to do in that area, though he relies highly on word of mouth advertising, he wants to start advertising on websites and local daily's such as Mysore Mitra and Star of Mysore.

The Truck

As there is no food truck culture, there are no readymade food trucks available and custom fabricators knew little about food trucks as they had never seen one. This was the first bump on the road for the 'Tindipotha' team. After much research which entailed listing out the appliances which they needed on board and measuring them and then measuring the available bed space on different trucks, they finally zeroed in on a used truck. The entire process took 3 months.

The process of redesign and fabrication was not a smooth ride either, after countless re-iterations from minor design changes to scrapping of parts, the truck was finally ready at a cost Rs. 13,00,000 (From self-funds-as he had worked in USA for a reputable company). At this point they had already overshot their budget by Rs. 3,00,000.

The truck has a full-fledged kitchen ranging from a gas burner stove, a grill, a deep fryer and a refrigerator. The truck supports a staff of 6, who perform multiple tasks from order taking, preparation to clean up.



Sourcing materials

“In the food industry you’ve to play with the ingredients that you have, otherwise you’ll soon run out of supply, you’ve to use your imagination” says Mr Manju when asked about how he gets his ingredients for the items on the menu. How do you play around with the ingredients when the supply of even the basic ones is un-even? To find the suppliers for most basic things such as bread and cheese it took them 3 months. Even today they source their materials from different suppliers, they have 5 different suppliers for bread and 3 different suppliers for cheese.

The Inventory is never stocked up. Mr Manju believes that stocking up the inventory precipitates a feeling of abundance which leads to wastage, so the inventory stored is never more than 3 days.

The Menu

S.No	Item	V/NV	Price
<i>Vegetarian</i>			
1	Mysore Melt	V	₹ 50.00
2	Yummy Roti Lapat	V	₹ 50.00
3	Nachos	V	₹ 70.00
4	Tacos	V	₹ 100.00
5	Apple Dream	V	₹ 50.00
6	Soft Drinks	V	₹ 12.00
<i>Non Vegetarian</i>			
7	Chicken Melt	NV	₹ 55.00
8	Chicken Popcorn	NV	₹ 65.00
9	Roll-Eto	NV	₹ 65.00
10	Yummy Roti Lapat	NV	₹ 70.00
11	Turpi Chicken	NV	₹ 65.00
12	'Real' Grill Chicken Burger	NV	₹ 65.00
13	Gilly Chicken	NV	₹ 80.00
14	Nachos	NV	₹ 90.00
15	Super Nachos	NV	₹ 120.00
16	Tacos	NV	₹ 140.00
17	Pizza	NV	₹ 80.00



Operations

We wondered how they manage to serve all their customers with so many constraints, unlike fast food outlets or restaurants where space is not a big constraint, these guys do a brilliant job feeding everyone who comes there.

At any point of time about 2-3 employees inside the van work simultaneously. It is surprising that they do not follow any sophisticated scheduling system, but rather a crude method of taking down and fulfilling orders. When an order is made, the work gets segregated, one guy works on the heating the patty, the other guy keeps the bread, sauces and vegetables ready and if it is a parcel, another will be ready with the wrapper to wrap the burger or nachos up. Such precision in their tasks, with each of them aware of their exact duties, the daily flow of operations are very smooth.

Also they maintain very low or almost zero inventory levels, he follows the principle of JIT inventory, order for the day. Mr Manju says by observing the customer and understanding what he wants helped him reach almost zero levels of inventory.



Human resource planning:

There is no clear job segregation, everybody contributes to everything. Depending on whoever is free dons on different roles of Order taker, Cook and Clean up guy.

The truck has 4 employees all of whom are college students, out of which two are family members. A person working in the truck on an average makes about Rs.250 a day.

There are 4 employees who are involved in prepping activities such as cutting vegetables, marinating the meats, making sauces during the day, so that the food is ready to be cooked and dished out in the evening.

Apart from all these the family members also help out in tasks such as supervising the employees, running errands and purchasing groceries.

Competitor analysis:

Due to paucity of quantitative data our market analysis relies mainly on qualitative data available to us.

Segmentation:

The segment that Tindipotha has carved out for itself is based on the following criteria;

- Demographic segmentation: Tindipotha follows segmentation as that of any other fast food restaurant i.e. Kids, Families and students, with heavy reliance on the latter.
- Psychographic segmentation: Convenience, lifestyle and novelty.

Interview with one of his customers

We were fortunate enough to interact with one of his customers. Below is an excerpt from the interview

Team Vikranthi: What do feel about this place?

Customer: Service here is perfect, they treat you like a friend and family, they put an effort. You go to Big chicken and other places, they make you wait and don't even bother, but here, you ask for something, they put an effort to give him what I want.

Team Vikranthi: What about the food cuisine?

Customer: I like the food because it amazing and it is not spicy. I have to eat here

Team Vikranthi: Do you think this place offers value for money? (Point to be noted- This was asked on purpose to see how the customer reacts)

Customer: I believe I get back every single penny I spend. I feel he must charge more but he does not. I really do get it! I really do! I have invited 20 of my friends to this place and everyone who tried eating here, just loved the food and wanted more.

The emphasis he lays on service and quality of food being served endorses what Mr Manju believes in, treat your customers well and they will do the same.

Family Business:

A Man should never neglect family for business- Walt Disney.

It is bliss when family and business can be combined together. When the family faces the challenges of running a business together, it becomes stronger and then there is an added advantage of trust in the family.

According to Mr Manju, family has played a very vital role in the journey so far. He got the idea of setting up the food truck from his Restaurateur brother, who runs successful restaurants in USA and the inspiration behind the step were his nephews who wanted to apply their classroom knowledge in real life (Both the nephews are BBA graduates).