

# Kumar Rajagopalan: Multi-faceted asset of Indian retailers



**There are many beautiful places in this country where, if infrastructure is improved and retail entertainment zones set up, could become thriving tourism hubs.**

Interview of Kumar Rajagopalan, CEO,  
Retailers Association of India

By Swati Dhake, Editor, a&sINDIA

**Q Please tell us a little about yourself. And how you entered into the Retail industry?**

**A.** I entered retail in 1993...that too by chance, not by design. Before that I was a practising Chartered Accountant. I came across a newspaper advertisement by Shoppers' Stop for a Finance Head. I went there to pitch in for their business and to find out why would a retail store need a finance head. After several rounds of interview, they made me an offer, which I accepted. When the Bengaluru store was opened, I started handling operations along with finance. After that I became a full-fledged retailer handling functions such as buying & merchandising, HR, operations. Whenever there was an initiative that needed setting up and sorting out, I was brought in. For instance, when Crossword opened, I was the COO.

**Q. Currently, what are the main focus areas of operation of Retailers Association of India?**

I have been with the Retailers Association of India (RAI) since the last 10 years. RAI primarily works in three areas, which are our pillars: Advocacy, Learning & Development Initiatives and Industry Creation activities. In advocacy, we work with the state and central governments on policy matters. For instance, we have drafted a formal policy for retail in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. We are in final stages of doing the same in eight more states.

Through these policies we strive to improve the ease of doing business for retail. For instance, in most states women are not allowed to work beyond 8.30 pm. In retail, that is the time when peak sales occur. There are about 22% women working in modern retail with 30% working in malls. But that workforce is not available after 8.30 pm. Maharashtra is the first state to allow women to work up to 11pm. It makes a big difference. There are many areas that we work on such as waste management, sustainability, labour laws and licensing among others.

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Under learning and development, we take up initiatives that help improve the skills and quality of the workforce (Just RAI members employ about 20 lakh employees in the country). We work with the National Skill Development Council (NSDC) through RASCI. We work with colleges to offer courses in retail such as BBA in Retail with IGNOU, under which we have trained more than 5000 so far.

Under Industry creation, we organise conferences and meets that bring together various stakeholders of the industry for exchange of ideas and knowledge sharing aimed at increasing the industry bench marks.

**Q. How do you visualise the evolution of Retail sector in India?**

A. We have to think about what is happening to consumers. Retail is about consumption; till the time there are consumers, retail will exist. People often worry about e-commerce and automation in retail but these are here to stay. The fact is that consumer's are becoming more and more demanding. Their ability to understand what is happening across the world has dramatically increased, thanks to the internet. One thing is imminent-The technologies that consumers can understand, retailers need to understand them faster. They should use them to connect better with the consumers.

Those who are able understand consumers, their needs and buying capabilities are able to utilise this information to give them the right product, at the right time and place.

Companies like Amazon study shopping behaviour and are successful when it comes to convenience. However, it does not mean that the people will only buy online. Even now, more than 80% of the consumers are buying offline. One thing is certain, technology is being adopted to create efficiency, immediacy and

experience. The entire payment structure is changing. In fact, we are waiting for the time when most of the retailers would let customers come into their stores and buy with only their faces or thumb prints.

**Q. Can India aim to be the next tourism destination for shopping?**

A. I think the governments will take about two years to get this idea. Till now most of the governments and states across have been happy to just promote manufacturing. Even the PM has talked about 'Make in India'. Nobody is talking about 'Consumer in India'. Without consumption making has no significance. Hopefully Made in India products become Consume in India because it will really increase the GDP. Outsiders can come and consume in India and tourism will really thrive. Today there is a dichotomy in the way things are. There are many beautiful places in this country. However, the infrastructure is so sad, one is not able to shop and have a good time. Having retail and entertainment zones in India at every tourism spot will be a big attraction for people. Why do Dubai, Singapore, Malayasia attract people? They are perfect for tourists. No Tourism Minister has ever shown willingness to work on this with us and make things happen. There has been talk about smart cities and taking care of citizens' needs. However, what happens beyond hospitals and schools? You will need to have shopping too. People do not go and stay anywhere unless there are shops and amenities. This important need is not being given enough importance as yet. I would love to see the day when people flock to Goa not just for its beaches but because it is the best shopping and entertainment destination in the world.

**Q. How critical is the link between Security and Retail experience?**

A. Security has always been a critical part of retail. It starts with the fact that hordes of customers come

into the retail, whether it is online or offline. Therefore security needs to be tackled at every level. Identity and authenticity of the consumers is important as is their security along with security of products. Retail is strongly connected with security. Every single company that has security solutions should approach retailers and showcase what they have to help make shopping wonderful, more secure and convenient. [aas](#)



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**Kumar Rajagopalan**  
CEO  
Retailers Association of India