



The new-look Safal outlet in Pitampura, New Delhi. *Renuka Puri*

How a small outlet may recharge Delhi's iconic grocery retail chain

Safal lessons from Pitampura: new look, approach

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TWO YEARS ago, Mother Dairy's Safal outlet in Pitampura — part of the largest retail chain of fresh fruits and vegetables in the Delhi-NCR region — was shut down. The reason: poor sales. "There were many issues with the outlet. People preferred to buy groceries from the neighbourhood vendor," says BN Mehra, 75, a resident who has been visiting this store in west Delhi since it was set up in 1988.

It was also the time when the face of organised retail in the country was changing. "We were the neighbourhood store which provided items of daily use. But brands such as Big Bazaar and Reliance Fresh made grocery shopping an experience. So six months ago, we decided to revamp the brand and focus on our poorest performer, the Pitampura outlet," says Vinod Kumar, unit head of Safal's headquarters in Mangolpuri.

After studying the market — and drafting a consultant, DY Works — the company launched its first "new and improved" store in Pitampura on November 10, as a model outlet that could possibly be replicated.

The changes are stark. Based on their theme of "fresh and earthy", Safal, a sub-brand of Mother Dairy, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Dairy Development Board, has remodelled the entire store. The bottle green-and-red background colours have been replaced

with olive green and brown. The shop has been divided into four sections — seasonal products, fresh vegetables, exotic vegetables and essentials. A new point of sales machine conveys details of supplies to the headquarters. The stock is replenished twice a day and their new slogan, 'Safe, Real, Natural' is painted in bold letters on the wall.

"Consumers want fruits and vegetables that are natural. Since its inception in 1987-88, Safal has been following these principles — we never use ripening agents or polishing oils — but without advertising it. But given the competition and demand, we felt



A Safal outlet near India Gate.

the need to tell customers about it. The '100 per cent' natural stamp on the store is to inform customers about quality," says Kumar.

The shop looks different, too — soft lighting, wooden encasings, a new black-board for prices, foldable racks, newly tiled white walls and new uniforms for staff. "We have been in the business for 30 years and have nearly 400 outlets. When we launched, there was a 'wow' factor, but the sheen withered. This model store is an attempt to re-energise the brand and win over our customers again," says B Jagdish Rao, business head of Safal.

Today, there is a steady stream of customers at the Pitampura store and the staff, who some residents complained were not very helpful, are seen guiding buyers. They also have home delivery services. "Earlier, our sales at the

outlet were around 250 kg a day, now it is over 650 kg," says Rao.

So how will this model be replicated? "We will study this for the next three months. We have identified 20 more outlets, but remodelling stores requires over Rs 10 lakh. We will also have to shut down the shops to carry out the renovation. Then, new staff has to be hired and trained. It will all need some time," says Rao.

The early response has been encouraging. "It is nice to see such fresh produce in the shop. Earlier, this wasn't the case," says Vimlesh Vashist, 67, another local resident.

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