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Shweta Singh | The CEO Magazine

For decades, the packaged drinking water industry operated on a relatively straightforward premise. Consumers sought safe and reliable drinking water, businesses focused on availability and distribution, and brands competed largely on scale, reach, and visibility. Water was considered an essential product, but rarely a strategic one.

Today, however, the industry is undergoing a subtle yet significant transformation. Growing health awareness, heightened attention to hygiene, increasing purchasing power, and evolving consumer expectations are reshaping how people engage with water. At the same time, businesses are seeking more personalised ways to connect with customers, strengthen brand recall, and create differentiated experiences. These shifts are expanding opportunities beyond conventional packaged drinking water and opening new possibilities across customisation, premiumisation, specialised water categories, and innovative distribution models.

According to industry estimates, India's packaged drinking water industry, currently valued at approximately ₹50,000 crore, is expected to grow at nearly 12 per cent CAGR and could approach ₹2.5 lakh crore by 2034. The numbers reflect the scale of this opportunity, and such growth is creating space for companies willing to rethink traditional approaches and build solutions around emerging market needs.

Among those companies is Oceana Positive. Founded in 2013 with a single client and an order of just 20 bottles, the Hyderabad-headquartered organisation has evolved into one of India's leading private-label water brands. Today, it serves more than 600 brands, operates across multiple water categories, delivers approximately 45,000 bottles per day at one single location, and is pursuing an ambitious vision to replicate the similar success all over by building India's first Water Super Market® through a distribution-led model. At the helm of this journey is **Satish Naidu Karna**, *Managing Director & CEO*, whose experience spanning nearly 25 years has helped shape the company's evolution from a niche customised water provider into a business seeking to redefine how water is marketed, distributed, and experienced.

Seeing Opportunity Where Others Saw a Commodity

Every successful business begins with an observation. For Satish Naidu Karna and Oceana Positive, that observation emerged from a segment that many industry participants overlooked.

During and after the COVID-19 period, the company witnessed a significant shift in consumer behaviour. Increased awareness around health, hygiene, and water quality was influencing purchasing decisions, while businesses were becoming increasingly interested in customised solutions that could support branding and customer engagement. Yet despite growing demand, the market lacked professionally managed players capable of delivering consistent quality, innovation, and reliability at scale.

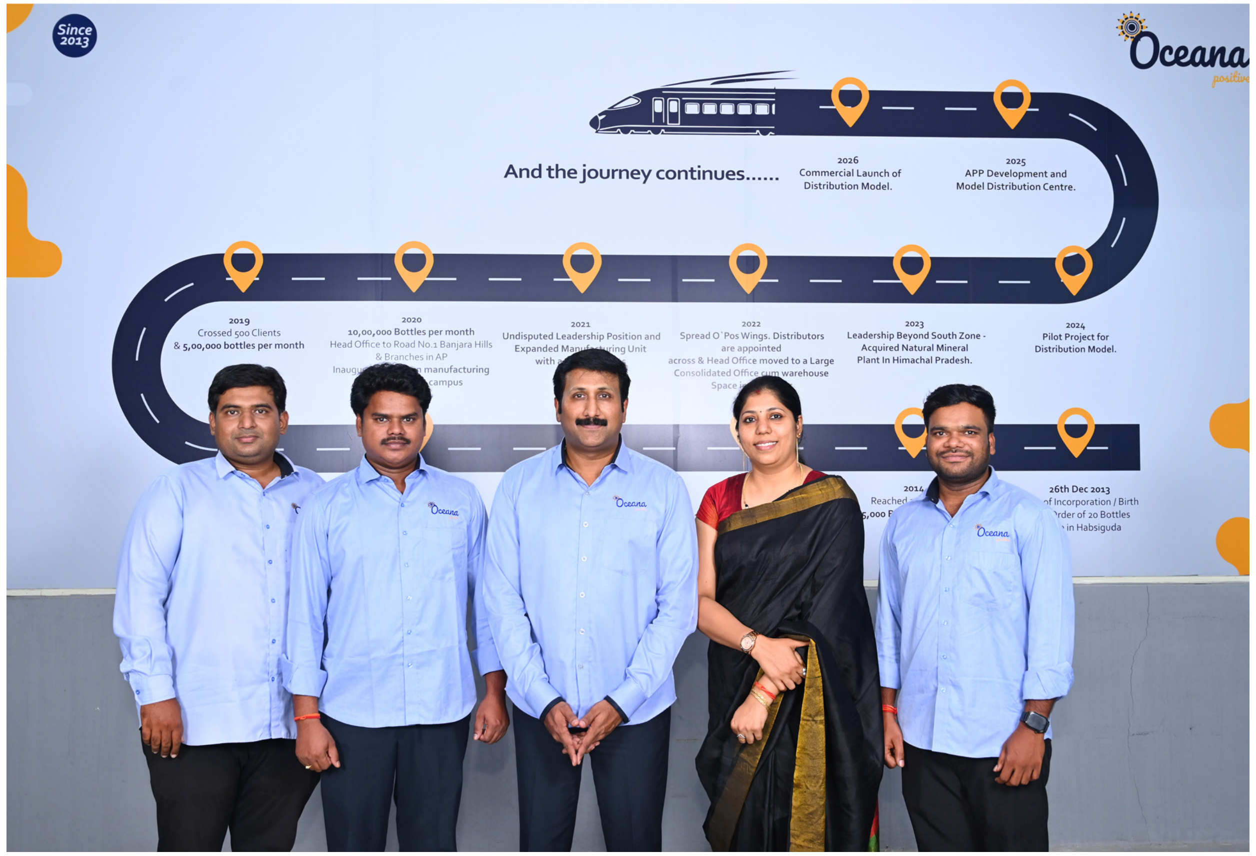
The customised and private-label water segment remained largely fragmented, populated by numerous small operators offering limited customisation options, inconsistent quality standards, and basic packaging solutions. Customers seeking premium branded water often struggled to find partners who could provide both flexibility and professionalism.

"We identified a unique opportunity in the customised and private labelling segment. While consumers were increasingly looking for personalised water solutions, the market lacked professionally managed players who could deliver MNC-level quality, consistency, and innovation," says Mr. Naidu. The gap became the foundation upon which Oceana Positive built its business. Rather than competing directly with conventional packaged water brands, the company focused on creating a differentiated ecosystem around customisation, quality, technology, and customer experience.

From 20 Bottles to 600+ Brands

The company's growth story illustrates how a niche opportunity can evolve into a scalable business when supported by long-term vision and operational discipline.

Oceana Positive's journey began modestly in 2013 with a single customer and an order of just 20 bottles. Over the years, the company steadily expanded its customer base, serving hospitality businesses, retail establishments, educational institutions, corporate offices, and direct consumers. Each stage of growth validated the demand for customised and private-label water solutions. Its journey map highlights this progression clearly. From serving 25 clients in



its early years, the company expanded to 50 clients, then 100, eventually crossing the 500-client milestone while continuing to increase production volumes and operational capabilities. What began as a small venture gradually evolved into a recognised player within the customised water segment. As demand grew, Oceana Positive invested in strengthening its infrastructure. Today, the company utilises collaborative state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities for packaged drinking water and alkaline water in South India, alongside an exclusive natural mineral water facility in Himachal Pradesh. The latter holds particular significance, as it is among a limited number of natural mineral water facilities operating in India.

These investments were not simply about increasing production capacity. They reflected the company's belief that long-term success in a fragmented industry would depend on consistency, quality, and operational reliability.

Investors Confidence

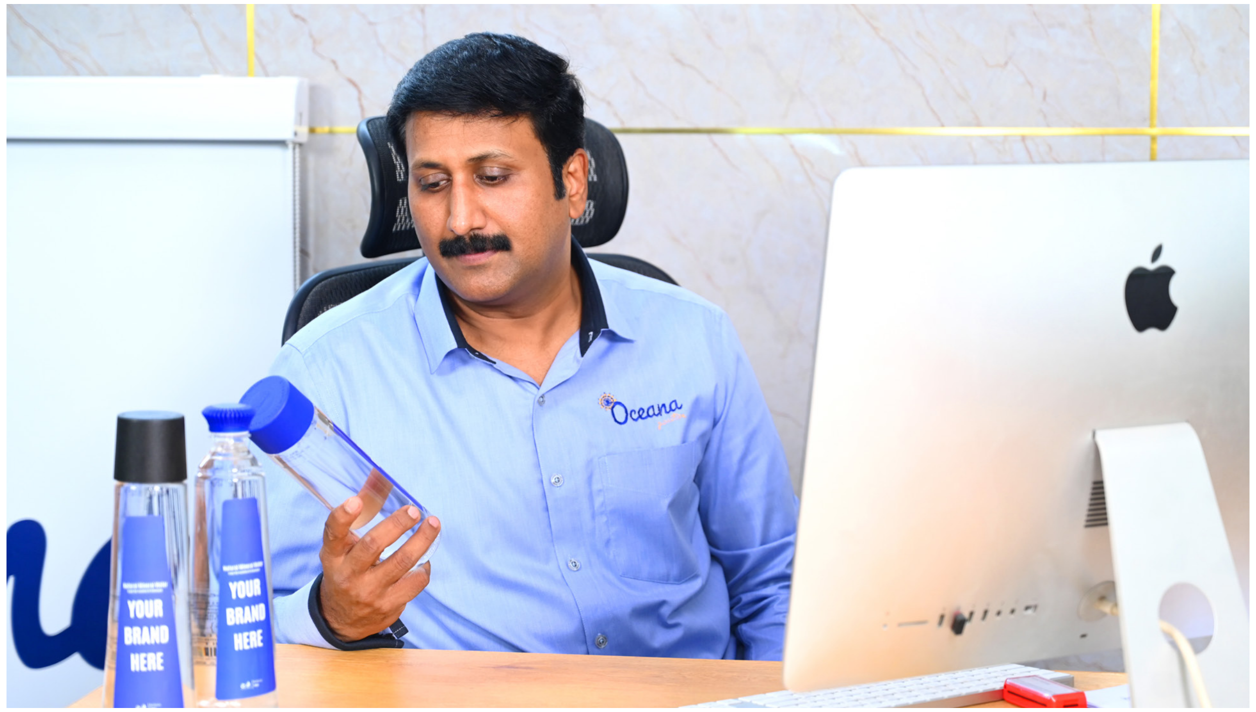
Why am I backing this venture? Because every bottle is more than a logo; it's a lifeline. By blending thoughtful branding with life's most essential resource, we aren't just launching a product, we are delivering health, hydration, and genuine care directly into people's hands. **- Saibaba Talluri, Early Stage Investor & Advisor**

Customer Speak

As a doctor, quality is non-negotiable for me. Oceana Positive delivered premium customised water bottles that perfectly showcased our brand while meeting the highest quality standards since 2019 to us. Their professionalism, product quality, and service are outstanding. It's absolutely worth paying a little more for the value they deliver. **- Dr. Balaji Gupta, Balaji's Best Dental, Hyderabad**

Beyond Bottled Water: Creating Brand Value

One of the most distinctive aspects of Oceana Positive's business model is its focus on helping customers transform water into a branding and engagement tool. Traditionally, packaged water has been viewed as a utility purchase. Oceana Positive approached it differently. The company recognised that customised bottles could serve as an extension of a brand's identity, particularly in environments such as hotels, corporate events, educational institutions, retail spaces,



and promotional campaigns. To support this vision, it introduced customised water solutions featuring personalised branding, QR codes, variable data printing, and multiple design options.

According to the company, these solutions provide customers with stronger brand recall, increased visibility across consumer touchpoints, and an economical way to reinforce their presence in the market. Unlike conventional promotional materials, customised water bottles continue interacting with consumers long after they have been distributed, creating additional opportunities for engagement.

The company also became one of the first players in its segment to make variable data printing a standard offering and developed a custom-built application ecosystem to support customer requirements more efficiently. These innovations helped establish Oceana Positive as a technology-enabled player within an industry that had historically been driven by operational execution rather than digital innovation.

Reinventing the Business After COVID

The pandemic period presented significant challenges for businesses across industries, and Oceana Positive was no exception. The company faced reduced viability of bulk label orders, closures across hospitality establishments, increased receivables pressure, operational stress within manufacturing facilities, and delays in planned expansion activities. These challenges forced the organisation to reassess its priorities and operating model.

Rather than viewing the disruption purely as a setback, Oceana Positive used the period as an opportunity to reinvent itself. The company focused on serving smaller establishments, invested heavily in advanced printing technologies, introduced variable data printing, optimised manufacturing operations, expanded its product portfolio, and adopted strategic co-packing models. These initiatives helped strengthen the organisation's capabilities while opening new avenues for growth. More importantly, the experience encouraged the company to think beyond individual products and explore how an integrated ecosystem could better serve customers and distribution partners alike. The result was India's First Water Super Market® concept.

Building India's First Water Super Market®

If Oceana Positive's early years were about identifying a market gap, its next phase is focused on building a category. Drawing from years of experience across customised water, packaging, branding, and manufacturing, the company developed what it describes as India's First Water Super Market® concept. The initiative is designed to offer customers a comprehensive range of water solutions, packaging formats, and branding options through a single ecosystem.

The concept reflects changing market requirements. Customers today are looking for more than one type of water solution. Some seek alkaline water. Some prefer natural mineral water. Others prefer functional water. Different businesses require different packaging formats and branding capabilities. The ability to offer multiple choices within one platform creates greater convenience while addressing a broader range of customer needs. Through the Water Super Market® model, customers can access categories including packaged drinking water, alkaline water, natural mineral water, functional waters, sports water, kids water, mineral-enriched variants, specialty blended waters, and carbonated flavoured waters. Packaging options include plastic, biodegradable alternatives, glass bottles, and Tetra Pack solutions. The initiative represents one of the company's most ambitious attempts to differentiate itself within the industry.

Scaling Through Distribution

For Oceana Positive, creating the Water Super Market® concept was only the first step. The larger challenge lay in making it accessible across markets. This led the company to focus heavily on building a distribution-led growth model.

According to Mr. Naidu, the organisation's vision extends beyond product sales. The company aims to make personal branding affordable and accessible by creating small clusters consistently through its distribution network while equipping distributors with the resources, products, and systems required to succeed. A key objective is to create profitable and sustainable business opportunities for distribution partners while expanding access to a wider portfolio of water solutions.

The model has already recorded encouraging success across Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka. Building on this momentum, Oceana Positive is now working towards expanding the concept across India over the coming months. This distribution focus is also central to the company's future growth strategy. Alongside product innovation and customer experience, strengthening distributor capabilities remains one of its primary priorities.

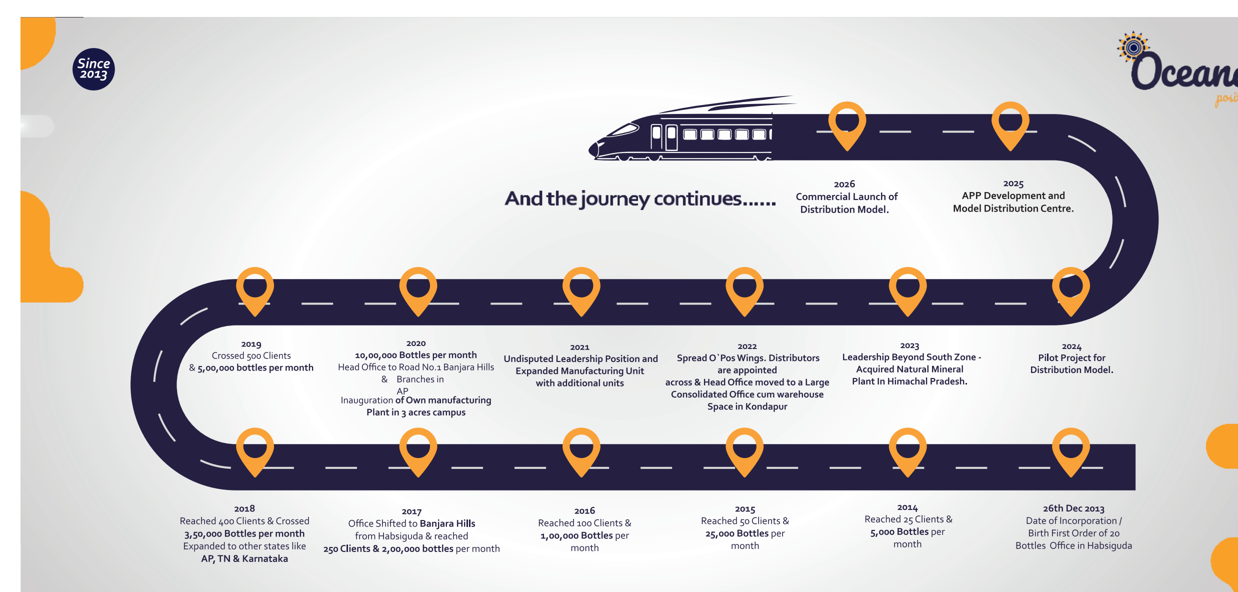
Technology, Talent and Operational Excellence

As the company continues to grow, technology transformation and people-centric growth remain critical components of its strategy, which have been effectively driven and championed by **Mrs. Priya Naidu, Director – Transformation,** whose vision, leadership, and relentless efforts have played an invaluable role in shaping the organisation's journey.

Oceana Positive actively tracks emerging technologies and market trends while investing in initiatives designed to improve efficiency and customer experience. Its technology-enabled ecosystem includes custom-built mobile applications, online designing tools, WhatsApp API integration, automated reporting systems, and digital marketing-driven expansion initiatives.

At the same time, the company places significant emphasis on people and culture. Several employees have remained associated with Oceana Positive for more than a decade, reflecting a workplace environment built on trust, mutual respect, and long-term growth opportunities. Reward and recognition programmes, employee development initiatives, and a strong focus on belonging have helped create a culture that supports both performance and retention.

Mr. Naidu's leadership philosophy is rooted in empowerment, trust, and accountability.



"I believe leaders should empower teams to think independently and take ownership," he says. *"My decision-making framework revolves around three simple questions: Do we have the right facts and material information? What is the larger picture? What are we trying to solve, improve, or create?"*

Growth, Sustainability and the Road Ahead

Among the company's major milestones is its progression from a revenue base of approximately ₹3 crore during the COVID-19 period to being valued at more than INR 200 Cr in 2026. For Oceana Positive, the achievement represents validation of its long-term strategy and growth potential.

Looking ahead, the company plans to expand its distribution network across India, strengthen technology-led customer experiences, scale the Water Super Market® concept into Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets, and continue innovating across products and packaging solutions, which is, being strategically led by **Mr. Yatheendra Ram – Head Distribution,** whose leadership, and commitment have been instrumental in driving the organisation towards its next phase of expansion Sustainability also remains an important consideration. While acknowledging the practical challenges associated with replacing plastic entirely, Oceana Positive advocates a plastic-positive approach. The organisation aims to recycle more bottles than it sells, reflecting its commitment to creating a more responsible and environmentally conscious ecosystem. The vision is to build the world's largest white-label water company, expand India's First Water Super Market® into every city across the country, and collaborate with like-minded partners who share that ambition.

Three lessons continue to guide him through this journey: never hesitate to walk an uncharted path, focus on building strong processes, and empower people so effectively that the organisation continues to move forward even in your absence. These principles also shape the advice he offers aspiring entrepreneurs entering the industry. According to Mr. Naidu, success in the water business demands thorough research, patience, operational excellence, and a long-term perspective. "Success cannot be built on low quality or shortcuts. Quality, consistency, and trust are the foundation of sustainable growth," he concludes.

From a single order of 20 bottles to a business serving hundreds of brands, Oceana Positive's story reflects more than growth. It reflects the evolution of a company that identified an overlooked opportunity, professionalised a fragmented segment, and is now working to build a scalable ecosystem around one of the world's most essential products. As India's packaged water industry enters its next phase of expansion, Oceana Positive is positioning itself not only to participate in that growth but also to help shape how the category evolves in the years ahead.