

Chapter 9

The Shaping of History in a Corporate Setting: The Godrej Scenario

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Godrej Group (India)

Established in 1897, Godrej is one of India’s most trusted brands. Its founder, Ardeshir Godrej, a lawyer-turned-locksmith, was a persistent inventor and a strong visionary who could see the spark in the future. Ardeshir went on to make safes and security equipment of the highest order, and then stunned the world by creating toilet soap from vegetable oil. His inventions were the foundation of today’s Godrej empire. His brother Pirojsha Godrej carried Ardeshir's dream forward, leading Godrej towards becoming a vibrant, multi-business enterprise. It was during the chairmanship of Sohrab Godrej, the eldest son of Pirojsha, that the Godrej Group made conscious efforts towards conservation of the environment and wildlife. Among many international honours, he was decorated with the ‘Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon’ by HM the Emperor of Japan in 1996.

Today, with 7 major companies with interests in real estate, FMCG, industrial engineering, appliances, furniture, security and agri care – to name a few – Godrej’s turnover surpasses 3.3 billion dollars. Present in 60 countries, 25% of Godrej business is done overseas.



Image 1 – Building under construction that will house the Godrej Archives

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1 Introduction

Corporates are often seen to mimic the individual need for self actualisation through socially acceptable achievements, particularly through the processes through which they seek to establish their legacy. This paper explores such processes, taking as its case study the Godrej Archives located in Mumbai.

The institutionalization of information is quite a rare phenomenon in India. Though history takes on numerous cultural forms traditionally, the keeping and archiving of records is not as common as one wishes it to be. Business houses are no exception to this. Business records form the most valuable yet the most under-utilised sources of business history. The reason for their lack of availability is twofold: First, the indifference, on part of business houses, towards the upkeep of records and information; Second, records, if existent at all, are closely guarded and hence seldom available to researchers. This makes investigation of the evolution of business all the more difficult.

Over the last decade we have observed a steady growth in the general awareness of preservation and the use of business records and more and more companies are contemplating setting up archives. Undoubtedly, such archives will not only assist a company to sort, select and store historically important records but they can also play an important role in communicating to the outside world the contribution of the business house to the country, its society and people.

Business archives in India are still in a nascent stage of development. Establishing the value of an archives in the business environment is a major challenge for business archivists in India. My paper proposes to explore the Godrej experience.

When I started assessing the role of the Godrej Archives in its corporate setting, I wondered what would be the best way to determine the value of a budding business archive that is just five years old. Is value best described as an intrinsic quality? Or is it best described in monetized form? In beneficial outcomes? In meaningful relationships? How do we go about evaluating the archives? I propose to use these parameters to assess the role that this upcoming archives has been able to play or can play in a corporate setting.

This paper will investigate the value of the archives through its ‘inherent quality’, that is the quality of the records management services that have been established to gain the confidence of donor units. My paper will bring forth the challenges faced in building-up the records management programme and integrating the Godrej Archives with the fast paced business practices of today.

Taking value to be ‘the worth in usefulness or importance to the possessor’, I will deliberate upon how useful the Archives is for the company’s day to day business as a tool to serve management, including publicity, advertisement, and brand management. I will also present the various initiatives taken and innovative thinking that we have applied to increase the Archive’s worth, its utility and its visibility in the business environment.

The paper will also assess the value of the Archives through the tangible and intangible benefits that it has so far accrued in return for services provided. Such value can be determined by the meaningful relationships it has built with the customer/end user.

2 Godrej Archives: The Beginning

The idea of setting up an archives was first mooted in 1995 – when preparations began for the ‘1997 centenary celebration’ of the Godrej Group. The late Shri Sohrab Godrej, in a note to the Centenary Committee dated 19th December 1995, envisioned an archives as a heritage centre offering invaluable archival material for reference and research. He spelt out the objectives of archives as follows:

1. To help people understand the company’s ethos and growth;
2. To appreciate the quality of the men who shaped these;
3. To trace the company’s values and commitments from the founder’s vision to present-day technological advances.¹

The Godrej Archives was thus entrusted with the task of creating resources for understanding the business and its evolution over time through the efforts and experience of generations of the Godrej family and generations of workers.

When the search began for old records in the form of documents, products, advertisements etc, an archives committee was set up. In March 1996, through a newspaper advertisement, an appeal was made to the general public to donate any old Godrej products, advertisements or any documents referring to Godrej’s past. This got an overwhelming response. Mr. Pesi Muncherji, an ex-employee of the organisation dedicated himself to the

¹ Centenary Year (1997) Archives File, 1995-1996, File No. OFF/ARCH1, Godrej Archives.

task of collecting and listing old documents and photographs. Based on these documents, *Godrej – A Hundred Years 1897-1997* (2 Vols.) authored by Mr. B K Karanjia, was published.

The need was then felt to appoint an archivist to sort, arrange and catalogue the material that could then be housed in the Godrej Archives. However, it was only in February 2006 that a professional archivist was appointed to systematize the process of archiving Godrej corporate history. *The Godrej Archives* is now envisioned “***to be an institute preserving Godrej history – an institute of life-long learning to create awareness about business history and archives.***”

In consonance with Sohrabji Godrej’s dream, the mission statement outlined the following tasks for the Archives:

- To collect, document, preserve, interpret and communicate to people the history of Godrej.
- To create resources reflecting not only on the history of Godrej as a business enterprise but also on the position of Godrej in a national/international perspective.
- To make these resources on Godrej’s past available to researchers, students, the business world and people in general
- To promote awareness about business history and archives.

Thus started the journey towards creating a corporate memory of the Godrej Group... The word ‘archives’ itself was an unfamiliar term for the Indian business world. One had to face questions like ‘Why an archive?’ or ‘Why do we need to delve into the past when business has to look forward?’ Even though management conceived the concept, it had to percolate both vertically as well as horizontally within the Group. It certainly wasn’t a cakewalk for the Archives.

Once in 2006, when we had a visitor, the security personnel at the industrial complex where we are located seemed completely oblivious of our presence and called not only to ascertain our location but also asked rather naively, “What do you manufacture?” I explained to him that we collect ‘old’ records and ‘old’ products related to our company. His immediate reaction was: “Oh! You are a scrap yard?” Bewildered by his reaction, I could only say, “Please send the gentleman to the archives.” This was an indication of the Herculean task ahead of us.

Four years later, in the year 2010, we received an email from a senior manager that underlined the changed scenario:

“I have begun to realise the worth of the Archives dept. by your recent communications. Keep it up and continue to enlighten us on our glorious past. I am sure it will motivate us to continue some of our rich traditions which we seem to have lost partially over time. Obviously, there is a lot to learn from the past...”

(Mr. B K Rajkumar on December 9, 2010)

This, in fact, was a response to a small online exhibition that the Godrej Archives had put up delving into the cricketing past of the company. Through documents and photographs, the presentation showcased how sports activities helped bring together managers and workers on the same platform and create a bond among employees. Mr. Rajkumar found this very inspiring for today’s managers and also suggested reviving “such a practice which is conspicuous by its absence these days”.

The email assured us that the Godrej Archives was able to strike a ‘history’ cord with management by the end of five years of existence. It was a reaffirmation of the value of the Archives as a ‘guide to the future’, something that is slowly becoming entrenched in Godrej’s corporate culture. We achieved it through a simple process of ‘communication’ and by focusing their minds more on why we do than what we do.

Our experience, in fact, has shown that the realization or affirmation of the value of business archives is a two way process, where both management and the Archives have to work on finding common ground to communicate with each other. Each party brings important contributions to the relationship and together they create enhanced value. In order to make the business community realise the worth of archives as a vital facet of corporate life, ‘archivists need to become more “proactive”, more oriented toward “adding value” within the corporation they serve’.² How have we achieved this at Godrej?

3 Building the Intrinsic Value of the Archives

Firmly institutionalised archives are a pre-requisite for gaining the confidence of the donors of records, in this case the various business units among the Godrej Group. The first task therefore was to build up the necessary infrastructure, build up the collection, establish work processes, simplify procedures, and study the organisational structure for formalisation of record groups. We soon realised that the whole exercise of building up the collection would be futile if the Archives remained an esoteric group within the organization. Hence, it was deemed necessary to forge a relationship with the organization by integrating the Archives with the organizational structure.

² McDowall, Duncan. ““Wonderful Things”: History, Business, and Archives Look to the Future.” *The American Archivist*. Society of American Archivists, 56.2 (Spring 1993).

Here I would like to state that appropriate reporting relationships are absolutely critical for the internal working of the archives to achieve the independence, objectivity, and organizational stature necessary to fulfil its obligations. At Godrej, the archive is an independent unit within the Corporate Human Resources Department of Godrej & Boyce Mfg. Co. Ltd., the parent company of Godrej Group. Incorporation of the Archives as a part of the organisation provided the necessary mechanism to collect records from different business units and departments therein. It also provided the necessary infrastructure for day to day administration.

The archivist reports to the Executive Director of the company for administrative interface and support, and reports to the archives council³ for strategic direction and accountability. At the same time she is independent in terms of taking decisions pertaining to archival processes and procedures. This strengthens the sustainability of the Archives. This initial positioning of the Archives within the organisation ensures not only access to information but also facilitates communication at all levels with management.

3.1 Reinforcing the Value of Archives in the Business Community

The challenge was to reinforce not only the Archives' historical value but also its business value to the company. Records-keeping is a low priority for business people. Moreover, the introduction of technology, changes in organization structures, and changes in policies have affected the proper upkeep of records of yesteryears.

A decision was therefore taken to put in place an archive policy providing a framework for record keeping practices, processes and systems that will protect records as assets. It was believed that the existence of such a policy will not only promote a record-keeping culture but will also create a climate that will ensure the ongoing integrity and accessibility of records, in turn guaranteeing the continued contribution of records to the Archives. The policy was also to define the nature and scope of the collection as the question of what should be collected is extremely important. Otherwise the Archives might end up accumulating records that are out of its scope and, in turn, put enormous strain on human resources, space and also the budget.

While doing the exercise, we started with a functional analysis of the company where we studied the organizational structure and activities of the Godrej Group. At the same time,

³ The Archives Council is an advisory board that includes representatives from the Godrej family, Human Resources Department, Construction Division, Personnel and Administration Division and Corporate Communications Team.



Images 2 and 3 – Interior of the Godrej Group Archives

a historical analysis was undertaken to help understand the milestone achievements of the company. This helped in streamlining our searches of records first by concentrating on the location of records pertaining to milestones. Our findings complicated the task rather than simplifying it, however, as the Godrej Group consists of 10 separate companies plus overseas establishments. On top of that, we had to cover more than a hundred years of history.

Considering such a vast expanse of companies and their activities, it was decided to begin with the parent company, Godrej & Boyce Mfg. Co. Ltd. Again, within Godrej & Boyce Mfg. Co there were different business units such as Locks, Security Equipment, Interio, Tool Room, Prima, Appliances, Material Handling Equipments (MHE), Precision Engineering Systems, Precision Components Systems, Process Equipment, Electrical & Electronics, Storage Solutions, Personnel & Administration and Retailing.

To understand the nature and scope of records within each of these business units, a preliminary survey of the material available was conducted. As a first step, enquiry forms were sent to all business heads to enquire about the kind of records their business units might have in form of documents, old products, catalogues, any other significant records. These

primary inquiries revealed the vast genre of records that we had to tackle.

It was therefore decided to concentrate on one division at a time and design a programme for transfer of non-current records of that division to the Archives and that would serve as a template for the other divisions. 'Precision Components and Systems' (PCS) Division, the youngest among all the divisions, was chosen for the survey assuming that most records would be available for this division.

Through this survey an attempt was made to assess the documentation system at PCS. Considering this exercise as a mock-up, we hoped to get an idea of the documentation process followed in the various divisions of Godrej and point out the strengths and lacunae of the existing systems. The findings were to be used further to help design a process for transferring historically important records to the Archives.

The Archives team started interacting with officials not only to understand the business activities but also to identify sources of records of archival value. This close interaction helped build mutual trust and, as a result, access was also given to records of a confidential nature. On the other hand, a closer interaction with the department heads and the business heads helped to make them realise the worth of records as a vital corporate asset. In addition, the business also realised the practical benefits of having an archive to ensure efficient storage and swift retrieval of records. As a result, more than 700 files dealing with manufacturing processes and technologies involved in the aerospace industry, covering the period from the late 1970s till the present date, have been transferred to the Archives. This helped in breaking the myth that for records to be historical they need to be 40-50 years old. The Archives, thus, also has to assume the role of a records' room, storing even current and semi-current records to avoid the risk of losing out on important records. In such instances, policy guidelines regarding confidential records are applied to such records and they are kept closed till the time prescribed by the business. Records such as MOMs of General Manufacturing Council meetings, where all the business heads meet every Friday, are immediately sent online to the archivist. The value of the archives to the company can be articulated by the fact that the company is now confident enough to share sensitive records with the Archives.

4 When the Value of an Archives Reaches Beyond...

The intrinsic value of records is not enough to make claims to the inevitability of an archives to a business. "Business archivists who aspire to maintain the corporate memory and business historians who want to make a living interpreting it have a common interest in

articulating the use to which the corporate archives can be put in the ongoing life and operations of the firm.”⁴ The archivist can never relax. It is essential to ensure the sustainability of the archives otherwise it may be reduced to an attic room in the offices of the business organisation. Hence it is important for the archivist to breathe life into otherwise inanimate records. To achieve this several promotional tools were employed by the Godrej Archives.

4.1 Keeping in Touch

To begin with, it was felt important to sensitise employees about archiving the past and hence a series of presentations were made to all business units and their business heads from the year 2007. The Archives team also visits branches to spread the word about the Archives. The object of these presentations was to communicate to employees how history can be used as a vital resource for supporting current corporate activities and how archives can be put to use for business management. Such presentations not only helped the Archives to communicate its activities but also helped expand the collection as employees from the audience come forward to gift the archives items they possessed related to Godrej history.

4.2 Staying Visible

It is also very important for the archives to stay visible as managers tend to overlook the past as they are too focussed on ensuring a better future for the business. Hence, the Godrej Archives developed various communication channels to remain ‘visible’. Some of them are discussed below:

4.2.1 Online Visibility

In this information age, no archives can afford to stay ‘off line’. Websites and company intranets definitely give archives a technical interface to connect and stay in touch with people as well as communicate effectively. Right in the first year of its existence, a website on the Godrej intranet site was launched to educate Godrej employees about the Archives. In September 2007, the Godrej Archives launched its website www.archives.godrej.com under the domain of the Godrej Group website.

Features such as an interactive timeline and the ‘Document of the Month’ communicate the history of Godrej and draw a large audience. To keep employees informed

⁴ Smith, George David. “From Dusting off the Cobwebs: Turning the Business Archives into a Managerial Tool.” *American Archivist*. Society of American Archivists, 45.3 (Summer 1982): 288.

about recent developments within the company, the 'Milestones' link was added to the intranet site. Here, separate tabs are assigned to different business units and information about their current achievements is uploaded biannually. Another feature, called 'From the vaults', aims to showcase the interesting collections received by the Archives and also unfold the stories behind our collection. The website is updated regularly to keep interest alive.

Nevertheless the website, howsoever visible, does not ensure the participation of employees. For this, the Archives has to make a constant effort to amplify involvement. Some of the initiatives introduced by the Archives using the website that helped us to make an instant connection with employees were 'Be an Archivist' and 'Contribution Drive'. 'Contribution Drive' was launched twice in the year 2010 to make an appeal to employees to contribute material related to the history of Godrej. 'Be an Archivist' was to seek their help in identifying photographs in our collection. 'Be an Archivist' got an enthusiastic response among employees and it helped the Archives to identify their the collections. However, our observations at the Godrej Archives spell out the need for personalised follow-ups with employees to ensure the success of such initiatives.

Besides these regular features, the Archives occasionally uploads stories from the past. For example, on International Women's Day on 8th March 2011, the story of the first female employee of the Delhi branch was posted on a bulletin board. It received a spontaneous response from employees who shared stories about the earliest female employees of their respective branches. Besides direct responses, these regular tidbits from the past sometimes work as reminders to employees about old records in their respective businesses and we were contacted by 3 business units about old records lying with them.

4.2.2 Visibility Through the In-house Magazine

The in-house magazine is another invaluable tool and an effective way by which the Archives communicates with Godrej employees all over India. The articles use archival materials to tell 'their' story. The articles explore historical aspects of the theme decided for each issue of the magazine such as manufacturing, selling, design, visionary leadership etc.

4.3 Making Records Visible Through Periodic Exhibitions: 'Where can we see these historical records? Are they displayed somewhere?'

For the first 4 years the Archives focused on building the collection and websites, in-house magazines and presentations were the only means that were used to reach-out to the business community. Soon it became evident, especially through the feedback that we

received at each interactive session with new recruits, that everyone wanted to see the original documents, advertisements and products that were used in presentations on the Godrej Story. It was in the year 2010 that the Archives decided to exhibit records for employees on the occasion of the celebration of 113 years of Godrej. The purpose was threefold:

1. To introduce employees to and assist familiarization with the Archives/archival collection;
2. Not to narrate the chronological history of the Godrej Group, but to draw visitor attention to important documents reflecting the history of the company and held by the Archives;
3. To organize an exhibition that can serve as a mock-up exhibition to assess visitor response and behaviour towards the Archives and its collection as well as emotions towards the Company.

Considering the space constraints of the Archives, a minuscule exhibition titled 'Celebrating 113 Years: A Commemorative Exhibition' was planned. Arranged in our conference room, it displayed the first patent of 1909 received for the springless lock, a handwritten note by Ardeshir Godrej on how to make safes, MOA from 1932, a 1955 special newspaper supplement on Godrej marking the company's launch of the first Indian-made typewriter and other documents.

A small note was sent to all business heads and all employees inviting them to the exhibition and notifying them that we had started manufacturing locks on 7th May 1897. The note instantly triggered interest as 7th May had never been celebrated as an anniversary before then. The relatively small attempt was hence magnified.

A bookmark with pictures of the old Lalbaug factory sent with the note was an instant hit and persuaded the Chairman of the company to come down to visit the exhibition. In spite of the deliberate limited publicity and a lack of awareness of the activities of the Archives, the turnout for the exhibition was moderately good and surprisingly out of 150 visitors a large number of visitors belonged to the 25 to 35 age group. We also realised that no strategy works better than the 'push' strategy to market history within the organisation and a constant blitzkrieg of reminders and personalized mails were sent. This helped, to a great extent, in pulling crowds to our exhibition.

I would like to share here an interesting incident to show how an exhibition can help managers to think about the use of heritage. A senior manager (marketing) from Interio visited the Archives and was particularly interested in a special supplement on Godrej brought out in the year 1955. The supplement had advertisements of a wide range of our

products. One particular advertisement that interested him was of hospital furniture. He was surprised to find that we had been in the business of hospital furniture in 1955. He shared his astonishment with me and I told him that we had been in the business for a while but then we discontinued the business. I showed him the hospital furniture catalogues held by the Archives. Since Godrej was reentering the hospital furniture arena, he wondered how these old advertisements could help in establishing the credibility of the company.

The incident definitely helped the Archives to appreciate how exhibitions could provide an opportunity to demonstrate the commercial value of records and in addition there was an increase in the interest of employees in the Archives. Exhibitions that followed enabled the Archives to gain a wider acceptance within the organisation.

4.4 “Sensitising Community”: Annual Lecture Series

One cannot ignore the relationship between business archives and the development of business history, the disciplinary implication of the archives. Hence within a few months of starting operations, the Godrej Archives started an annual lecture series to encourage further research in business history and to introduce new areas of research, such as the history of technology and manufacturing, to academicians and businessmen.

This lecture series has attracted distinguished historians, such as Prof. Douglas Haynes, Prof. Dwijendra Tripathi, Dr. Amiya Bagchi, Prof. Ross Bassett and Prof. Ritu Birla to name a few. The encouraging response has helped the Archives to reach out to a larger audience and build a network with academicians, historians, journalists and people from the business world.

All such initiatives continuously help the Archives to build bridges with internal as well as external business communities and the academic world. The Archives has, over the past five years, flourished in an environment of confidence. However, the value of the Archives should not be restricted to a ‘nice to have’ feature. More emphasis is needed on the business value of records instead of just the nostalgic value. With this in mind, archives should also try to encourage businesses to realise the utility of archives in day to day business.

4.5 Making the Past Public

Business archives are expected to play a role of information provider within the organisation. However, willingness on the part of business houses to open their records for scholarly consultation is also very crucial for the sustainability of their archives. It also helps

archives establish a connection with academia, which provides archives an opportunity to explore interdisciplinary approaches to the study of business history.

Records at the Godrej Archives are accessible to bona fide research scholars. Since 2006, many foreign as well as Indian scholars, academicians and people from the media interested in Godrej history have consulted the Godrej Archives. Prof. Douglas Haynes from Dartmouth College, USA, used our soap advertisement collection as a major source for his book-length project: 'Consumption and Capitalism in Western India: The Purchase and Use of Everyday Things in the Bombay Presidency, 1880-1940'. Prof. David Arnold of Warwick University consulted the records related to Godrej typewriters – the product that he was researching for his upcoming book on everyday technology. Prof. Ross Bassett from North Carolina University, USA, had a unique request for his project to develop a database of Indians who had studied at MIT. He was particularly keen on information about Dr. K. R. Hathi, a Sloane fellow at MIT, who had served Godrej for many years. Fortunately, the Godrej Archives had recorded the reminiscences of Dr. Hathi before his death. Among others, a researcher named Janhavi Nandan from Paris was particularly interested in tracing the genesis of Indian interiors and the role of Godrej in influencing patterns. Among others who seek consultation are journalists from leading newspapers as well as authors scripting book on Parsee families.

5 Archives: An Organisational Intelligence

History can, in some very obvious ways, become a kind of vital resource for supporting current corporate activities. In order to be future-proof, archives must ensure that the company recognises its history as a unique corporate asset and recognises the role that archives play as a centre for knowledge and information. The information contained in business records can be appropriately used for supporting promotional activities organised by corporate communications, employee engagement, writing brand and product histories, innovative ideas for business development, display and publicity, presentations, legal evidence etc. However, the business world is oblivious to the importance of archives as a useful resource in facilitating business decisions. Here I will cull out some incidences showing the various ways in which users have exploited the Godrej Archives.

5.1 Recording the Present

While preserving the past the Godrej Archives has also developed the mechanism whereby even the present is being documented. Every month, information covering their

achievements of the month is gathered from each Business Unit. The milestones are thus prepared for each and every division so that information about the Company's activities can be made available for each financial year. Internally, corporate communications, businesses and employees often use this information as well as images for internal project presentations or for websites. Information like a biography of the founder; company profiles; advertisements; logo development; speeches; and images of owners, products, and industrial townships are much sought after. A query from an employee about the founder for developing a leadership module or information about different models of refrigerators for a R & D presentation are a few examples. The Archives' help is often sought for planning anniversary celebrations as these occasions call for looking back at history. Many times, business records can also be useful as legal evidence. General queries that we have received so far in this context have been about patents and trademarks, land related queries, the year of incorporation, etc.

Apart from this, the Archives' help is sought in documenting the closures as well as investitures of new plants. The Godrej Archives was requested to document the closure of a typewriter manufacturing plant in Shirwal near Pune in the year 2009. Godrej was the last manufacturer in the world to stop manufacturing typewriters. It was indeed a significant occasion that needed to be recorded. The Godrej Archives Team not only did a photo documentation of the plant but also recorded the reminiscences of those associated with the plant for 20-25 years. Manufacturing records such as technical drawings right from the late 1950s along with sales reports, export data etc. were then sent to the Archives.

The same year, a request came to retrieve documents from a plant in Malaysia soon after their closure. Documents like production certificates; pioneer certificates; manufacturing licenses issued from time to time for different products such as furniture, safes, etc; relevant correspondence; board resolutions; presentations/critiques discussing the closure of the manufacturing plant; employee lists; and lists of export customers of Godrej Malaysia as of 31/03/2009 were sent to the Godrej Archives. Apart from these, files related to construction were also received.

However, archiving is not always about closures. The Archives Team was asked to document the recent relocation of a Godrej Interio chair manufacturing plant to Bhagwanpur (Uttaranchal, India). It was felt necessary to record the event as and when it happened instead of waiting for 10 years so as to avoid the risk of poor memory and poor record keeping. The documentation started with an oral history interview of Mr. Zurwan Marolia (Head – Projects, Godrej Interio) who was associated with the project right from its planning stage. This

interaction also helped us to gain perspective about the thought process behind the setting up of the Bhagwanpur Plant. Presentations done during the planning stage of the project were shared with the Archives. As current records cannot be parted with, scans of documents like the MOU and land related documents were sent to us as the business was confident that they will be safe with the Archives.

Any innovation or introduction of new technology is nothing but the coming together of old and new knowledge systems. Realising this, Godrej Locks approached the Archives with a unique request. They are planning to set up a locks museum that will also be a learning centre for their R & D team. Their locks collection includes as many as 1500 locks and their R & D team often turn to these locks as an inspiration for innovation. The variety of locks kept in their R & D room needed to be sorted and documented. The work was taken up by the Archives in the year 2010 and the conceptualisation of the museum started the following year.

It is a positive gesture on part of the company as it shows a commitment towards preserving records for posterity – in a way the right step in preserving its own history and heritage.

5.2 “Catch them Young”: Using the Archives as a Human Resources Tool

“Increasingly, people move from business to business, taking their valuable skills with them but losing the sense of continuity and tradition, as well as the informal knowledge about the business that they work in, which holds companies together... corporate archives in particular can be extremely helpful in instilling this ingrained understanding of what a business is, where it has come from and where it is going.”⁵

The Godrej Corporate Human Resource Department was quick to recognise the usefulness of an archives in orienting new recruits to the company’s history and successes as well as its values and principles. A session on the Archives became an integral part of the induction and ‘Know Your Company’ programmes for new recruits from the year 2007. The objective of such sessions is to give new recruits a sense of continuity and an understanding of the legacy that they are required to carry forward as well as informal knowledge about the business they will soon be part of. These sessions have no doubt helped the Archives to create an initial curiosity about the company’s past and the role of the Archives in preserving organisational intelligence.

⁵ Smith, George David, and Steadman, Laurence E. “Present Value of Corporate History.” *Harvard Business Review*. 59.6 (1981): 164-173.

Besides the history of the company, during these sessions the Archives team discusses with new recruits the value of historical records and how, by restoring and reflecting on history, they will be in a better position to re-imagine the future.

5.3 Storage of the Experiences of Former Employees

The experiences of former employees can also come in handy as they constitute a formidable knowledgebase from which future-managers can draw inspiration or learn. The history of any organization is incomplete without those individuals who have significantly contributed to the success of the organization, those who have actually initiated the thought processes. Business has always impacted the lives of its staff, customers and shareholders as well as the communities in which it operates. Therefore, the Godrej Archives is also creating new resources for the history of ‘Godrej’ in the form of oral history interviews of individuals associated with the company for decades. These interviews record biographical information about the interviewee, their years with Godrej, details of their work, inter-personal relations within the company, their relationship with the Godrej family and so on. The Godrej Archives record how the lives of interviewees have been affected and changed. These interviews help the Archives understand how the company has evolved over a period of time as witnessed by the interviewee. Such oral memoirs also help researchers to fill in facts that might have gone unrecorded in the files. These interviewees also share with us any records that they may have.

5.4 “Selling the Corporate Image”: Historical Branding

Some examples where the Archives was used for historical branding:

The Corporate Showroom situated on the ground floor of Plant 11 on the Godrej Campus uses historical timelines of all product ranges in displays and thus demonstrates a confluence of the past and the present in a very subtle way. The showroom can be seen by customers and visitors during normal business hours.

In the year 2010 at the prestigious Kala Ghoda Art Festival in the city of Mumbai, Godrej Interio decided to celebrate the undying Spirit of Mumbai by creating an artistic replica of “The Gateway of India” using Godrej Interio Furniture. The replica brought together two of the most poignant symbols of Mumbai’s undying heritage – The Gateway of India, and the Godrej Almirah. Renowned designer Krsna Mehta created a 25-foot high artistic installation of the iconic “Gateway of India” using 40 Godrej Interio Storwels and other Godrej Interio products. “After all that Bombay has gone through in the past year, the

idea for us to make something which depicted the heritage and spirit of Mumbai came very naturally; and to combine Mumbai's most iconic structure "The Gateway of India" and the "Godrej Interio Storwel" which has been a part of each and every Mumbai home was the perfect way to go about it" said Krsna Mehta at the event. Given it was such a prestigious event, the Godrej Interio Team sought the Archives' help in bringing together pieces of the storwel history. Old catalogues and advertisements were enamelled on the storwels along with its story.

Two years prior to this, at the launch of our new brand identity in the year 2008, a walkway was created using images and advertisements from the past to demonstrate that in going forward to build a brighter future, we believe that "the history of Godrej" is one of our prime strengths and a real differentiator.

This idea of 'history as our prime strength and a real differentiator' can also be seen in the Godrej future office prototype 'S P A C E'. The aim of the prototype was to create a young and brighter working culture. The words 'young and brighter' are not normally associated with history. We were a bit puzzled and asked Darshan Gandhi, a young architect working on the project, what made her come to the Archives. She explained, "We want to keep this reference (history) alive so that in any work we do in the present or future we always stick to the roots in anything we offer or practice. Hence we want as many people to experience our DNA when they visit our working spaces and we want to create more touch points like these so that this precious material does not just become a document but can really be used to flaunt what we are today and what we want to be tomorrow."

It is on this note that I would like to end my article as it aptly explains that history is as important to a company as DNA for a living being.

6 Conclusion

The establishment of the Godrej Archives demonstrated that the positioning of an archives within the organisation and a well-established records management programme are pre-requisites for gaining the confidence of the donor, which in this case is the organisation, and thereby establishing the value of the archives. Our experiences with the Godrej Archives also made us realise that the success of the relationship between an archives and the business relies on the ability of both business and archives to move beyond the established boundaries of their relationship. On one hand, the archivist needs to actively engage with the various functions of the business, rather than waiting patiently to be sought out, and on the other hand,

the business has to learn to make creative use of the archives in protecting their products and/or business.

At the same time, an archives should go beyond its conventional service role to the organisation. The archives should attempt to forge a relationship with the community outside the organisation as the history of the company is also a narration of a story of business in India and therefore it is considered to be national corporate heritage. At the Godrej Archives, we are exploring this potential value of the archives by enhancing relationships with the business world as well as intelligentsia.