



TWI Foods

TWI Foods is a manufacturer of high-quality specialty food items such as cake-rusks, cookies, cakes & frozen food items. It caters to the South Asian ethnic populations in Canada and worldwide.

Headquarters	40 Shaft Road, Toronto, Ontario, M9W 4M2
Year Established	1997
NAICS	311814 - Commercial bakeries and frozen bakery product manufacturing
Employees	250
Major Expansions	N/A
Exports	US, UK, Australia, Hong Kong, Dubai, Singapore, Germany
Parent Company	N/A
Other Locations	Manufacturing - Mississauga

Like many immigrants before him, Ali Kizilbash left everything behind when he immigrated to Canada. Unlike most others, what Kizilbash left behind in Pakistan was a role as president of a huge chemical distribution company he had founded and grown. He chose to start TWI Foods, his current specialty foods manufacturing firm, from scratch in Toronto.

When Kizilbash started in 1997, TWI Foods was a 1,200 square foot operation producing a small line of cake rusks and cookies. Now, they're featured in Canada's Food & Beverage Top 100 and producing in two facilities, an 185,000 sq ft one in Toronto and another 35000 sq ft one in Mississauga. Their 227 percent growth over the last five years earned them a spot on Canada's Profit 500 list. Rising exports to the United States, Australia, Europe, Singapore and Dubai also marked TWI for a 2013 & 2014 Export Ontario Canada award.

Cumin, pistachio or butterfly cookies, anyone? TWI Foods produces all these exotic treats and more, under their Crispy, Sunrize and Crispy St brands. You can also find cake rusks, naan, roti, tea toast, cakes, cookies, and other frozen and specialty desserts.

By specializing in South Asian baked goods, TWI Foods carved a niche in the otherwise intensely competitive industry. "We saw an unmet need, and made sure to take care of it," recalls Kizilbash. "We were virtually the first ones, so retailers appreciated and bought from us." TWI's brands can now be found in over 2,000 retail outlets in Canada, including giants like Walmart, Loblaws, Costco, Sobeys and Freshco.

With remarkable acuity, Kizilbash steered TWI Foods through the recession while attaining a 200 percent



increase in sales. The key, he confides, is ensuring that 50 to 60 percent of products are staple foods. Cash-strapped consumers are not going to stop buying bread – they might even substitute luxury food items with TWI’s reasonably priced cookies. Comfort food consumption spikes during recessions, as people seek inexpensive material indulgence. Because, as Kizilbash points out: “If you break up with your significant other, what’s the first thing you do? Drown your sorrows in a box of cookies!” Indeed.

TWI’s success has had many suggesting relocation to India. “Of course not!” exclaims Kizilbash. So far, with their ethnic focus, they’ve only touched one percent of the North American market. Imagine their growth if they could reach the other 99 percent.

And Kizilbash has a clear strategy. TWI is tweaking their product lines: keep the best of their ethnic foods, but add mainstream appeal. As consumers become more health-conscious, TWI is primed to capitalize on the trend with new product lines such as their low-fat, low-sugar Naan Thins. “Everybody loves to eat!” Kizilbash observes. And if “everybody” can include some portion of the 99 percent, as he is sure it will, he is more than happy to stay in Canada.

But why exchange a lucrative business in his native country for nothing but a bold dream in Canadian manufacturing? Kizilbash recounts how, after exploring other countries, he decided that Canada was one of the best places in the world to live. “It’s a great place in terms of what people have achieved,” he smiles. He explains that, in Canada, your success is not dependent on your background, family’s wealth or relationships with government officials. “It’s a land of opportunity and equality.”

Kizilbash also believes in the superiority of the Canadian workforce. The minimum education level of all TWI’s workers, even for positions with fewer required accreditations, is excellent compared to many other countries. For skilled positions, TWI can easily hire from surrounding institutions such as the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo and Humber College. TWI takes care of its people, fostering their potential for improvement and growth within the company. Small wonder that TWI Foods emerged as a finalist for Deloitte’s best-managed Canadian companies in 2014.

Intriguingly, Kizilbash affirms that labour costs are, in fact, lower in Canada, despite higher wages. He credits the Canadian belief in hard work. In other parts of the world, he says, he would need to hire twice as many people to do the same amount of work.

Another plus for manufacturing in Canada is the efficiency achieved through automation. TWI orders machines custom-designed for its specialty food manufacturing needs. In fact, TWI is so efficient that manufacturers in Asia sometimes call to ask for advice.

Kizilbash is also thankful for the support of the Canadian government. Over the last decade, time and again they’ve applied to and received funding from government research grants like SR&ED (Scientific Research and Experimental Development tax incentive program) and IRAP (Industrial Research Assistance Program).

TWI Foods is here in Canada to stay. They are the biggest in their niche market, and Kizilbash is confident that as long as they continue to manufacture good products, they will continue to grow. “Doubling our revenues in the next two years? For sure, no problem!” he exclaims. After all, there is still 99 percent of the market for TWI Foods to serve.