

## Partnerships

### Henry Amar and Rob Amar

**As an importer and distributor of fine foods, RH Amar sells some of the UK's most well-known products. The non-executive chairman and his managing director son discuss the family business**

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**Henry Amar** My father started the family business in 1945. In the 1950s, I would work in the office during my holidays, and I joined the company as soon as I left university in 1960. I spent a brief spell abroad working for a supplier to learn the supply end of the business, so I knew quite a lot when I joined.

**Rob Amar** We're an importer and distributor of fine foods so we sell some of the UK's best-loved grocery products [including Del Monte, Schwartz and Ella's Kitchen]. I also worked here often during school holidays and breaks from university so I'd been in and around the business from a very early age. I studied languages at university and I wanted to do my own thing for a while, so I worked for an internet research company for a few years. In 2001, I decided to join the family business, because it's something that had always interested me and I wanted to take the company into third generation.

**Henry Amar** When I joined the business it employed eight people, including my father and myself, so it was very small. I became sales director in 1966 and in the 1970s my father had two fairly long periods of illness where I had effectively to run the business. My father died in January 1983 and at that point I became managing director.

**Rob Amar** I initially joined as part of the marketing team as product marketing manager. I spent seven years doing that and then I joined the board in 2008, taking on the title of managing director in 2010.

**Henry Amar** I'm now non-executive chairman, so Rob is running the business. I think we've got the balance about right. I'm still close enough to the business to

understand what's happening – I read the managers' reports at the end of the week and I will send Rob an email with my thoughts on those, and he sends me an email with a summary of the week. And we always have a short chat on a Monday morning so we're on the same page. I feel that having been in business together has actually deepened the relationship with my son as we've got that very important thing in our lives that we share.

**Rob Amar** We've always got on pretty well and that was before I joined. We see each other nearly every day. On the days we don't see each other we talk on the phone, so that's a pretty good relationship, and we

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certainly agree on where the business is heading. We do have differences of opinion, which I think is a good thing for a business like ours, but no major disagreements.

**Henry Amar** If I look back at the business I joined with today's eyes, it was incredibly primitive. All through my father's time we didn't have a warehouse, we used third-party warehouses and we weren't computerised. When I took over in 1983 we computerised straight away and came out of outside warehousing.

**Rob Amar** As a business, we've had to evolve,

so last year we put in a new IT system, which was a major investment. Everyone is on laptops and smartphones now. We don't introduce technology for technology's sake, so, in fact, our warehouse is fairly manual in operation, but it works. We've enjoyed consistent growth every year for probably at least 30 years. We're all about stable, sustainable growth. Last year, we had a £54m turnover and we're always looking to expand, so for the next year or two my plan is to build a platform for future growth.

**Henry Amar** I'm in an interesting position because I'm the middle generation, and I think each generation has had a different opportunity. My father started the business in the period of acute food shortage after the war and he got off to a very good start. Then, as food became more accessible, he began to struggle. But his achievement was cementing the business – the day I took it over we didn't owe a penny to anyone and we never have since. It was an incredible platform for me to have. I then had years in which I could expand the business, get new customers and new suppliers. Rob has different skills to me – he was trained as an analyst and he's cleverer than I am. He now has the opportunity on the platform of two previous generations to achieve what he's just described and we already have the signs that it's working.

**Rob Amar** Looking further ahead, I have an ambition to take the company into fourth generation, but my daughter is only two-and-a-half – it's a little way off but certainly in the back of my mind.

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Like father, like son: Henry Amar handed over the reins of the family firm to his son, Rob