

## **Fudge with Fortune**

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### **Introduction:**

Cooper's, a small shop still run in a conventional way, selling chocolate fudge and other sweet products is an attraction for many people visiting the small town and hill station Lonavala between Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra, India.

What make this small store buzzing and have loyal customers are the unique fudge and its several varieties that are sold at Cooper's. The chocolate walnut fudge continues to be the most popular and hot selling product there. This small store with no branches or expansion has continued to be patronized by its loyal customers and remains the best fudge store in Lonavala since several decades.

### **Beginning:**

'Cooper's', the fudge store was established 75 years back by Mr. Noshir Cooper who shifted from Mumbai to Lonavala and is the pioneer to sell fudges in Lonavala, which is now available in many chikki shops (Maganlal Chikkiwala's franchisees). Mr. Noshir started with a small business, which grew by leaps and bounds. Yet, the size of store remained unchanged and continued to be a small store. In fact, sometimes it is called as 'a hole-in-the-wall' shop or a 'tiny' shop and is situated close to the Lonavala station, a situational advantage that Cooper's enjoys.

Cooper's is a small shop that is low on ambience with very few staff but a large share of loyal customers. It is a spot of great attraction in Lonavala and is so renowned that even travellers' enroute to Pune or beyond take the detour to unfailingly stop and shop at Cooper's.

Mr. Noshir has popularized the fudge enormously that there is a great demand for fudge in all other shops that sell chikkis and other sweets. Over the years, the only thing that has grown at Cooper's is its share of customers. It is no surprise to see a long queue of customers in the store lining up with boxes of the Cooper's walnut fudge in their hands.

Today, the business is run by the third generation Ms. Rashan Irani, grandniece of Mr. Noshir Cooper. What is commendable is that a family run business and three generations down has been able to sustain itself so well, maintain the quality of the products and continues to enjoy the loyalty of its customers.

Cooper's follows a routine practice since years with respect to its working hours. The shop opens at 10 in the morning and closes for lunch break from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and opens again in the late afternoon at 3 p.m. and remains open till 6 in the evening.

### **Strategic Advantage:**

In spite of fudges being sold in several shops, Cooper's exhausts its stock by the end of the day. This is in spite of their prices being more than the other stores. In fact, the shop shuts as soon as their stock gets over and this indicates the demand for Cooper's fudge. Every morning, you can enjoy the hot fudge at Coopers.

Cooper's also has the 'Place' based strategic advantage because of its proximity to Lonavala station. People struggle to find parking spaces for their cars as they halt to buy packets of fudge. Over the years, it is observed that customers are not deterred by the small size of the store and its busy location but patiently wait for their turn to buy from Cooper's due to small size of the store and the busy area where they are located.

The secret recipe of Coopers is one of the most sustainable strategic advantages. The family run business has maintained the taste of its product over the decades which remain unmatched in Lonavala. It is much more than mere cocoa powder, drinking chocolate, milk, sugar and crushed walnut that makes its taste unique.

The sale of Cooper's fresh products and its timely and immediate closing on the exhaustion of its stock has been the constant feature at Cooper's. It also shows the commitment of the owner in maintaining quality and loyalty.

Coopers sell a wide range of varieties of fudges like Chocolate Almond, Chocolate Plain, Kaju Kesar and Kopra Pink. But, the Chocolate Walnut has the major share of sales and is in the price range of Rs. 600- per kg. Coopers also sells Chikkis in the range of Rs. 600 - Rs. 700 per kg. This is a way for cross-selling and up-selling. Maintaining limited stock in order to maintain the quality is the principle which Cooper's follow.

Another advantage Cooper's enjoy is that in spite of increasing competition, they have remained unaffected due to their conventional policy of focusing only on quality.

Although Coopers does not follow any customer loyalty programs, their repeat customers are tourists and travelers to Pune and beyond mostly from Mumbai. As such, they are not affected by any fluctuations; their maximum business is in the monsoon season which makes Lonavala a busy destination on weekends, holidays, and during vacations.

In spite of no innovations, no websites, no expansion strategy and no changes over the years, Coopers still remains ahead of others and is a great learning experience.

#### **Analysis:**

A small retailer with a sustainable competitive advantage is what makes Cooper's a good example of 'Good to Great'. In spite of the growth of other retailers in Lonavala and the mushrooming up of many other sweet and chikki stores like Maganlal Chikkiwalas that is famous across the length and breadth of the hill station and its adjoining areas, the image and reputation of Cooper's remains untouched and unmatched.

Recent developments and progress in the small town of Lonavala that is observed by its new landscape of malls like Lonavala Square, Triose Plaza to name a few and with spots like Cream Centre, KFC, McDonald and others, it can be rightfully observed that none of the above mentioned places draw a huge crowd as is seen at Cooper's strategic location.

The quality focused Cooper's rightfully dons the fudge crown in Lonavala. Although many retailers have added varieties of product, Cooper's has maintained its products and passed on the successful business to the third generation.

Cooper's success story proves that it is not the size of store but the size of loyal customers that makes the difference. A small store of 180 sq.ft. has volumes of business.

Consistency is another reason analyzed that contributes to the success story of Cooper's. Over three generations, Coopers have maintained consistency in quality, services and ambience which has helped customers to retain the impression of the store.

Price escalations has not affected Coopers in two ways – one, they need not increase their production to compensate the price and two; they have maintained the same quality over the years.

Conventional attitude of family run business has turned into a boon. This has helped them earn both a prestigious name as well as goodwill.

Cooper's also has no other branch and it never forgets to mention that customers should avoid stores that are an imitation of Cooper's. Further, they have been able to successfully maintain their customer base.

#### **Strategy to grow and sustain:**

Focusing on existing business by increasing their working hours rather than increasing the stores has been the strategy adopted by Cooper's and we now see the shop remaining open for more number of hours than earlier.

Unique merchandise is the core strategy which Cooper's follows. What you find at Coopers, you don't find at any other chikki or fudge shop at Lonavala. Cooper's doesn't want to compromise on anything that comes as a hindrance in the maintenance of the store.

Low cost, low wage bill of around 10 people working, limited service and fixed price is also one of the reasons for Coopers to sustain.

An increase in the number of people visiting Lonavala and commuters to Pune and beyond will enable Cooper's growth and it is certain that the customers are likely to get repeated once they have tasted the Cooper's fudge.

The fudge market developed by Mr.Noshir Cooper is now available in many shops in Lonavala adding to the geographic indication of Lonavala Chikkies and now Lonvala Fudge too. It is fudge with the fortune' for Coopers in particular and Lonvala Chikkis shop in general.