

Abhishek Modi Works Off His Own Manual. And That's Exactly Why Rockford Works.



Abhishek Modi

Walk into a liquor store today and you'll spot it: the distinctive label, the sleek bottle, the growing shelf space. Rockford has carved its own path in the premium whisky segment. Behind it is Abhishek Modi, Executive Director of Modi Illva India Pvt. Ltd., a third-gen entrepreneur with a sharp instinct for what works, what sells, and what sticks. He has got degrees in chemical engineering and business, sure, but what drives him is an eye for detail and a taste for building things that last.

Modi Illva is a 50:50 joint venture between the Umesh Modi Group—whose businesses span pharmaceuticals like Betadine, cosmetics like Revlon, and large-scale distilleries—and Italy's Illva Saronno, the makers of global staples like Disaronno and Tia Maria, with a presence in over 160 countries. Together, they've built a spirits company that continues to expand its footprint across India, with flagship labels Rockford Reserve and Rockford Classic at the forefront.

The company has recently announced an ₹100 crore investment in a dedicated malt distillery at its

Modinagar facility, scheduled to go live by December 2025; a move that will support its ambition to produce premium single malts and scale up existing production.

In this conversation with Ambrosia, Modi shares insights on scaling distribution, why Tier 2 cities are key to their strategy, what shapes consumer loyalty in premium segments, and how the company is building for long-term relevance in a competitive alco-bev market.

Modi Illva's growth in the premium spirits segment has caught the industry's attention. What factors do you believe are driving this momentum today?

Several elements have contributed to this momentum, both within the company and in the broader market. A key reason is the change in buyer behaviour; particularly among younger, aspirational drinkers, towards quality and authenticity. At Modi Illva, we've responded by creating products that match these evolving tastes. Consistency remains central to our production philosophy. We've also developed a strong brand narrative rooted in our heritage while incorporating innovation. This blend has helped us connect with audiences, even in areas where brand loyalty is hard to earn. Our long-term investment in regional markets and ongoing relationships with customers has played a crucial role in maintaining this trajectory.

What's your roadmap for the House of Rockford over the next few years? Can we expect new variants or entries into different whisky sub-segments?

Innovation continues to shape our direction at the House of Rockford. We're not only working on new expressions but also rethinking how premium whisky can evolve for Indian palates. The coming years will bring considered portfolio additions and renewed trust-building. While Rockford Reserve and Rockford Classic are already well-established, we are examining avenues in craft, blended segments, and age-specific offerings. Collaborations with select distilleries are also being explored for limited releases that appeal to both existing patrons and first-time buyers. All future launches will uphold the standards Rockford is known for.

You've built a premium whisky portfolio that resonates with a discerning audience. Which markets or cities are you focussing on currently and why do these matter in your expansion strategy?

Tastes across the country are becoming more sophisticated, and whisky is increasingly tied to individual identity. While major metros such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru remain integral, there's substantial growth in locations like Jaipur, Indore, and Lucknow. These cities are seeing a rise in purchasing power and interest in elevated options. Our attention on Tier 1 and select Tier 2 hubs stems from the pace at which these regions are transforming. Early engagement helps us decode local nuances and develop meaningful connections with new audiences.

Distribution often makes or breaks a brand in the alco-bev space. What is your current approach to building a strong, scalable distribution network and how are you aligning it with consumer demand?

Ensuring availability across the right retail formats, pricing tiers, and channels is essential. We've already secured placement in 80% of relevant

outlets nationwide. Our framework is structured to be both agile and robust, enabling us to respond to demand patterns swiftly. We rely on trusted partnerships across distribution and retail, built over time. As we continue expanding, our supply chain is being reinforced to maintain visibility without compromising on the aspirational nature of our labels. The system is designed to progress alongside the audiences we serve.

Is there a conscious push towards investing in marketing to strengthen brand recall, especially in newer or emerging markets? How do you measure that impact?

Our campaigns prioritise building real-world resonance rather than chasing volume alone. In newer geographies, we've increased our digital presence and local outreach—particularly in Tier

2 and 3 areas—where authenticity and regional relevance shape perception. We measure success through repeat sales, brand stickiness, and customer feedback loops. Meaningful interaction outweighs visibility metrics, and our approach reflects that principle.

We've seen an increased interest in Indian single malts, both locally and globally. Is that a category you're actively exploring or building towards?

The traction around Indian single malts is undeniable, and we're observing the space closely. Rockford has firmly established its place among premium blends, and we continue to track shifts in craft spirit preferences. Introducing a single malt would require a label that mirrors the quality benchmarks we uphold. For now, we're expanding our existing portfolio while evaluating future entry points with care.



Production scalability becomes critical when a brand starts accelerating. Are there any backend developments or facility expansions in the pipeline to support your growth goals?

Yes, we are actively upgrading infrastructure to support upcoming requirements. This includes capacity enhancement, improved distillation technology, and streamlined logistics. Environmental responsibility is built into these upgrades. We've also fortified our quality assurance systems to deliver consistency, whether the batch size is small or scaled up. These steps are essential as we look to meet rising domestic demand and enter additional global territories.

From a consumer trends perspective, what shifts are you observing in India's premium alco-bev consumption and how is Modi Illva adapting to meet those expectations?

There's a marked movement among younger drinkers toward experiences tied to cultural connection, storytelling, and identity. At Modi Illva, we've responded with offerings such as Singhasan, a 100% Indian whisky designed for those seeking local relevance. The goal is to create products that reflect this mindset, while maintaining brand integrity and delivering a richer journey for the buyer.

Sustainability is no longer optional. Are there efforts underway at Modi Illva to make production, packaging, or sourcing more environment-conscious?

Yes, ecological responsibility remains a key area of action. We've taken steps to reduce our carbon footprint during distillation, introduced recyclable packaging solutions, and engaged with suppliers aligned to our sustainability goals. These initiatives are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment with industry benchmarks. As operations scale, these commitments will remain embedded in our practices.

With AI and digital tools reshaping every sector, do you see them influencing the alco-



bev industry? If yes, how are you integrating tech into operations or consumer engagement?

Digital tools and artificial intelligence are helping brands operate with sharper insight and responsiveness. We use these to assess buying patterns, optimise supply logistics, and fine-tune campaign strategies. Real-time input enables us to test new formats and strengthen distribution agility. Whether through customisation, product planning, or service, tech is infused into our everyday decision-making.

You belong to a legacy known for building bold, category-defining ventures. What's your approach to balancing tradition with modern disruption in your current role?

I work to retain the values that have shaped our foundation, while introducing newer methods suited to today's context. We combine legacy knowledge with contemporary tools. This mix allows us to evolve while holding on to the consistency and ethics that define us. Progress doesn't require replacing the past; it calls for building on it thoughtfully.

India's position in the global alco-bev map is evolving fast. Are you seeing opportunities to export Indian premium spirits? Is that part of Modi Illva's next phase?

Absolutely. India is gaining attention globally for spirits with character and

quality. We believe our brands have the depth to connect with international audiences. Regions like Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Middle East are receptive to well-crafted Indian whisky. We're actively assessing overseas entry points and see this as a natural extension of our domestic progress.

Looking ahead, what are the biggest milestones or breakthroughs you're hoping to achieve, either as a business or personally as a leader?

Our target as an organisation is to become India's third-largest alco-bev player. I would like to shape a label that delivers clarity, originality, and high standards. Rockford has established itself among premium blends, but the journey ahead involves stronger global recognition. This next chapter is an opportunity to contribute to India's presence in the world of whisky. 🍷

Rapid Fire

Blended whisky or single malt: what's your go-to?
Blended whisky.

One Indian city where you would love to launch an exclusive limited edition?
Keeping state policy in mind...maybe Goa or Gurugram.

Big branding campaign or silent disruptor, what's more your style?
Definitely silent disruptor. I believe in the product to speak for itself.

Your favourite bar anywhere in the world?
The Connaught in London.

If you weren't building spirits, what would you be doing?
Building a disruptive retail brand in grocery business.

What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you?
I am quite an open book. What you see is what you get!

- Pritisha Borthakur