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ASIA

The Cosmetic Industry Is Gradually Moving from Ingredient-Led Differentiation to Performance-Led and Technology-led Differentiation

14 August 2026 | Interviews | By Narayan Kulkarni|Narayan.kulkarni@mmactiv.com

Its proprietary Qzome niosomal technology is designed to enhance the stability, absorption and delivery of active ingredients

Dr Akhila K S, Managing Director, Akore Formulations Private Limited, Kochi

Founded in 2024, Akore Formulations is emerging as a science-driven player in India's dermocosmetics and advanced skincare space, combining pharmaceutical formulation expertise with nanotechnology. Its proprietary Qzome niosomal technology is designed to enhance the stability, absorption and delivery of active ingredients. Following its Platinum Award for Best Innovation at the International Cosmetic Expo & Conference in Chennai, in an interaction with NUFFOODS Spectrum India Dr Akhila K S, Managing Director, Akore Formulations Private Limited, Kochi discusses Akore's business model, market opportunity, competitive landscape, manufacturing capabilities, team expansion and growth ambitions. Edited excerpts;

Akore was incorporated in 2024. What market gap did you identify, and what is the core business model you are building around Akore today?

When we started Akore, we identified a significant gap between the sophistication of modern cosmetic actives and the technologies available to deliver them effectively into the skin.

Today we have peptides, antioxidants, botanical molecules and several highly potent actives, but having a powerful active alone does not guarantee performance. Its stability, compatibility with the formulation and ability to reach the intended layers of the skin are equally important.

That is the space in which we positioned Akore — not merely as a cosmetic ingredient company, but as a scientific dermal-delivery technology company.

The scientific foundation of Qzome came from my husband, Dr Sreeraj Gopi, who has worked extensively in advanced delivery systems. Qzome originates from his patented invention, and Akore was created to translate that underlying science specifically into topical, cosmetic and dermocosmetic applications.

Our model is predominantly B2B. We develop proprietary delivery technologies and delivery-enabled ingredients that cosmetic and dermocosmetic companies can incorporate into their own formulations.

Qzome is your flagship proprietary technology. What makes it different from existing niosomal, liposomal and other advanced delivery systems available in the market?

Qzome is based on niosomal vesicular delivery science and has been specifically engineered for topical applications.

Niosomes and liposomes are structurally similar vesicular systems. Liposomes are primarily constructed from phospholipids, whereas niosomes are generally formed using non-ionic surfactant-based bilayers.

One particularly interesting feature of niosomal systems is the flexibility available in designing their membrane composition. Depending on the surfactants, membrane components and processing conditions used, niosomal vesicles can be engineered to have considerable flexibility and elasticity. For dermal applications, these characteristics can be particularly useful because interaction with the complex lipid architecture of the skin is an important aspect of delivery.

But our differentiation is not simply that Qzome is a niosome.

Many vesicular systems can be produced in a laboratory. The real challenge is creating a system that is reproducible, stable, scalable, characterisable and compatible with commercial cosmetic formulations.

Qzome has therefore been developed as a complete delivery platform where we study particle characteristics, encapsulation, stability, skin interaction, penetration, formulation compatibility and manufacturing scalability.

You claim that Qzome can enhance skin absorption by up to 4.77-fold. What clinical or scientific evidence supports this claim, and which actives have shown the strongest results?

The up-to-4.77-fold enhancement comes from comparative experimental evaluation of specific Qzome formulations against corresponding conventional systems.

Scientifically, we are careful about how we communicate this result. We do not claim that every molecule incorporated into Qzome will automatically show 4.77-fold higher penetration. Skin penetration is dependent on the physicochemical properties of the active, vesicle composition, formulation, concentration and experimental conditions.

Our scientific programme therefore evaluates individual Qzome systems through physicochemical characterization and appropriate comparative skin-delivery or penetration models.

We are building this evidence across different categories of actives rather than extrapolating one successful result across the entire platform.

Our philosophy is simple: a delivery technology should ultimately be demonstrated by measurable science and comparative data, rather than by terminology alone.

What is the current commercial traction for Akore — how many customers or partnerships do you have, and which segments are showing the strongest demand?

Considering that Akore was incorporated only in 2024, we have been able to establish our commercial network relatively quickly.

In Europe, we have an exclusive distribution partnership with Pharmanature. In India, we work with Global Chemi, and we have also established partnerships in important Asian markets including South Korea and Japan.

At the same time, we are continuing direct technical discussions and product evaluations with cosmetic and dermocosmetic companies.

The strongest interest is coming from scientifically differentiated skin-care categories — particularly healthy ageing and longevity, pigmentation and brightening, barrier support, sensitive-skin applications, antioxidants, peptides and high-value

botanical actives.

For us, these partnerships are particularly important because Akore was conceived from the beginning as a technology company with an international outlook.

What is the size of the market opportunity you see for advanced cosmetic and dermocosmetic ingredients in India, and how much of Akore's growth will come from international markets?

We believe the opportunity extends beyond the conventional cosmetic-ingredient market.

The industry is gradually moving from ingredient-led differentiation to performance-led and technology-led differentiation. Brands increasingly want to know not only what active is present in a formulation, but whether it is stable, how it is delivered and whether its performance can be scientifically demonstrated.

India is becoming an increasingly important market for this transition. At the same time, we expect international markets to contribute significantly to Akore's long-term growth.

Our existing relationships in Europe, South Korea, Japan and other markets are part of that strategy.

Our ambition is to demonstrate that sophisticated dermal-delivery technologies and commercially relevant intellectual property can originate from India and compete internationally.

Who are your key competitors, both in India and globally, and what is Akore's strongest competitive advantage over them?

Globally, there are established companies working with liposomes, encapsulation technologies and other advanced cosmetic-delivery platforms. We see them as part of a growing scientific ecosystem rather than looking at the market purely through the lens of competition.

In India, there are comparatively fewer companies whose primary focus is the development and commercialisation of proprietary advanced vesicular technologies specifically for dermal applications.

Akore's advantage is the integration of original intellectual property, formulation science, characterisation, application development and in-house manufacturing.

Importantly, Qzome did not originate as a marketing concept. The underlying technology originated from the patented scientific work of Dr Sreeraj Gopi, and Akore is building a dedicated dermal-delivery business around that invention while continuing to generate additional intellectual property and application-specific innovations.

That combination of science + IP + manufacturing + commercialisation is what we believe differentiates Akore.

You have highlighted in-house manufacturing capabilities. What is your current manufacturing capacity, and what investments are planned to scale production over the next three to five years?

From the beginning, we wanted Qzome to move beyond laboratory-scale vesicle preparation.

We therefore established in-house processing capabilities including industrial sonication, high-pressure homogenisation, controlled blending and dedicated topical formulation processing.

Our infrastructure currently includes sonication capabilities extending to approximately 250-litre scale, together with high-pressure homogenisation and multiple blending and cream-processing systems.

Our next phase of expansion will focus on increasing capacity while simultaneously improving automation, process control, analytical characterisation and batch-to-batch reproducibility.

For an advanced delivery company, we believe manufacturing quality cannot be measured only in litres. Reproducibility of the vesicular system at commercial scale is equally important.

What is Akore's current employee strength, how is the team structured across R&D, manufacturing and commercial functions, and how much do you plan to expand the team?

Akore currently has a team of 13 scientists and technologists.

For a young company, we have deliberately kept the organisation highly science-intensive. The team works across formulation and delivery science, analytical characterisation, product and application development, manufacturing, quality and technology translation.

We intend to expand gradually as our commercial operations and international markets grow, but our priority is not simply increasing headcount.

We want to build a multidisciplinary team with deeper expertise in skin biology, vesicular delivery, formulation science, analytical characterisation and translational research.

Our objective is to remain a company where science is at the centre of the organisation.

Are you looking to raise external capital or enter strategic partnerships to accelerate R&D, manufacturing and international expansion?

At present, we are not looking for external investment.

Our immediate focus is on strengthening the technology, expanding our scientific evidence, increasing commercial adoption and developing our international distribution network.

We are, however, very open to strategic partnerships.

There is an important distinction between an investor and a strategic partner. Partnerships that can provide international market access, specialised scientific capabilities, clinical or biological validation, application development or complementary technologies are very interesting to us.

Our existing partnerships in Europe, India and Asian markets reflect this approach.

At this stage of Akore's journey, we believe building the right scientific and commercial ecosystem is more important than raising capital.

What are Akore's growth targets for the next three to five years in terms of revenue, customers, manufacturing capacity and international markets, and where do you want the company to be by 2030?

Our ambition for 2030 is not defined by revenue alone.

We want Akore to become a globally recognised dermal-delivery technology company originating from India, with multiple proprietary technology platforms, a strong international intellectual-property portfolio, substantial scientific validation and commercial presence across major cosmetic markets.

Qzome is our flagship platform today, but we see it as the beginning rather than the end of Akore's technology journey.

Over the next three to five years, we intend to significantly expand our international customer base, manufacturing capabilities, scientific publications, patents and technology portfolio.

There is also a personal dimension to this journey for me. The original invention behind Qzome came from my husband, Dr Sreeraj Gopi, through his patented work in advanced delivery science. At Akore, my responsibility is to take that scientific foundation forward — building the team, infrastructure, applications and international commercial ecosystem necessary to translate an invention into a sustainable technology business.

By 2030, I would like Akore to be recognised not simply as another cosmetic ingredient manufacturer, but as an Indian company contributing original science and intellectual property to the global field of dermal delivery.

That, for us, would be the real measure of success.