

## UKIBC Case Study

# BENOY ARCHITECTS

Since entering the India market three years ago, UK-based architectural firm Benoy has successfully secured 32 projects across retail, mixed-use and urban regeneration sectors.

In 2008 Benoy received the prestigious Queen's Award for International Trade and in 2007 won UKTI's New Market Entrant of the Year into India Award. Here Benoy founder and CEO, Graham Cartledge, gives advice on market entry in creative industries.



Salford Quays development in the UK

### By what means did Benoy first enter the market?

Before we began working in India, two of Benoy's well recognised projects in the UK were the Bluewater shopping mall, and the reconstruction of the city centre of Birmingham, known as the Bullring. Those two projects catapulted my business. We could have settled back then on UK business, but that's not in my nature and I felt we had further to go. Our first move was into China. We won a major pitch in HK expanded to China. It was obvious that there was another emerging market, which was India. Key to the Indian market is a full appreciation of what it's about. You need to do some serious research about who the right players are for you and what are the vehicles for meeting them. Because we have a skill brand in urban retail regeneration projects, we were able to lecture at conferences. In an emerging nation there is a great need from new players to learn the game that you're playing in. Audience members became clients. The British High Commission New Delhi then invited us to join a Ministerial delegation. It left a couple of weeks after I got back to England, but I thought it was too good an opportunity not to grasp. It gave me two ways of entering India; one was through the delegation, the other was to re-engage with some of the business contacts I'd already made on the previous lecturing circuit. On that visit we built some relationships with key people in Government and Trade. We also secured a large contract for a shopping mall in Mumbai with the Pantaloon group.

# partnership in action

## How do you market locally – do you have India offices?

Our process is to identify new business opportunities and select who from our team is best to visit and demonstrate our skills. We mix with international delegations. We connect at public affairs level. We have a network of marketing people. We do have offices through fellow Indian architects. We offer them the ability to link in with our brand. People have to fully understand the brand and be trained within the group. We do the high-end concept in London. The local partner will put other pieces in place, and while we utilise our brand sparingly, that works well. We want well-trained internationalists with diverse abilities.

## What are the opportunities for small businesses interested in India in your sector?

India is open for business in the creative sector. But it's insulting to believe that India will take anything because it's western or London-based. They will only take it if there is a real value to their own endeavour - to do world-class projects.

## What dangers do you think there can be for businesses in your sector keen to enter the market?

If people are so desperate to do business, and it's happened to colleagues of mine in India, that they've drawn up the project in the belief that the fees were there, it remarkably may not be. So we've had to apply disciplines, also in other countries. We establish the fees that we will need and ask for maybe 20 or 25% up front. New companies are being created in emerging markets that perhaps have no background in engaging with businesses like ours. They can bring you down if you don't put the right disciplines in place.

## How useful do you think contracts are?

It outlines the delivery expectations. Once you're resorting to the contract to get payment you're in trouble. You have to be ahead of the game to make sure the other half keep the deal. We don't give away our design patent on a project until we begin getting paid. We sell on the strength of previous work.

## How versatile does your brand need to be taking into account cultural differences?

We are very clear in our own thinking that we trade as international architects, but we think locally. We find it disrespectful and not within our culture to go into India and sell something we have just designed in England. There are different climatic conditions, different cultural issues, and we work very hard to understand them.

## What should architects seek to achieve long-term in India?

Often emerging markets want some of the west in their designs. That can be a good thing. But on the other hand, many parts of China want to rip down historic buildings and put up what they've seen in the movies. It will be very disappointing for them in the future to think that they have ripped out the heart of their cities. I think one of the key messages that we try to put forward is the need for a cultural soul in our work, and the need for a sustainable community. Our projects are not just buildings for buildings sake, cities for cities sake. They are places that people want to live in and engage with over centuries.

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