

partnership in action

UKIBC Case Study

WALFORD WILKIE

Walford Wilkie are brand development experts based in London, advising clients in the UK, Europe, Asia and across the world. Walford Wilkie have been advising clients in India on the development of prestige and luxury for the last four years.



The move into the Indian market

We specialise in the marketing of prestige and premium brands, and based on work we had done for Boodles, a jeweller in the UK, were fortunate to be recommended by The Platinum Guild International to a potential client in India – a jeweller based in Bangalore. We quickly realised, although we had previously not heard of them, that they are one of the most exciting jewellers in the World.

Having successfully developed prestige brands in a number of markets, and have advised and developed brands for the World's top luxury companies – LVMH, Hermes and Richemont on various of their brands, we have a clear methodology that we employ and whilst India has its own unique characteristics there is no fundamental issue that is that different. Whether you live in a small village and aspire to having a gold thread in your sari, or you are an industrialist with far grander aspirations, Indian people share the hopes and dreams that we all cherish.

Market Potential – Research and Development

India has had a very close relationship to luxury over the centuries. Many of the major luxury brands that we know today built their businesses to a significant degree on the patronage of the Maharajah's. So the concept of luxury in India is very well and long established.

For our initial project we developed various creative concepts, as we would for any brand for any market, and undertook our own focus groups in top cities. We recruited the participants very carefully, and as a result in a relatively short time frame gained a deep understanding of the Indian relationship to jewellery.

We were also fortunate that we had a contact that was able to bring together the absolute top echelon of society in Bangalore, at a level that no research company could

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normally achieve. This was extremely helpful in understanding some of the significant social nuances of old money versus new, and family versus trade.

Company structure and approach, with a focus on India

Our business is in essence the adding of value to intellectual property. This requires very specific expertise, which we have built up over 20 years in London. It is not easy to train people in it, or to maintain control.

We have taken the decision to retain all the core functions of strategy, design, art direction and copy writing in London, where we have control, and a competitive point of difference. Technical development of websites, on the other hand, we now undertake in India where there is a wealth of expertise and we can deliver build quality at a lower cost.

The creative industries are very highly dependent on the thinking and understanding of what you are trying to achieve. There are many very good marketing people in India, but they are drawn to the largest spending clients that by their nature are mass market. That is where the opportunity for us lies with our expertise in luxury. Indeed we tried working with a couple of different subcontractors in India, but those experiences led us to understand that we can deliver the best results by having very tight focus out of London.

The Indian marketplace is one in which copying is not regarded as a negative and this has dramatically affected our thinking, in that we chose how we execute campaigns to give them the maximum possible insulation from imitators.

Cultural difference

There are, of course, massive cultural differences between the UK and India. Through our work we have begun to understand a little of the history and heritage of Hinduism in the S of India, which for our jewellery client shapes the Indian relationship with their jewellery. This has been a fascinating journey, and as we have begun to understand the depth and spiritual significance in their product. It has helped us to market there all the more effectively.

Essential Decisions

- To approach the Indian marketplace without compromise.
- To embrace the greatest respect for the sensitivities of India to Britain.
- To ensure total quality control.

Bad experiences?

So far, apart from coming up with concept of recreating a river and waterfall feature for an event in a hotel ballroom, we have not come too badly unstuck. On that occasion everything that could go wrong went wrong, the ultimate problem when the water holding tank sprang a leak, and soaked the very expensive carpet. Indeed the three worst decisions we took all related to that one project, but at the end of it our client's very generous comment was that it is better to try and do something wonderful, than not try at all.

In many ways that sums up the immense pleasure of working in India, where there is such amazing long term thinking and gentle determination to succeed, along with realistic expectations of what can be achieved in the short term. As we say here 'Rome wasn't built in a day'.

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Lessons learnt

Although English is very widely spoken, and often impeccably, it is not always that easy to fully understand what is being said. Our business involves very precise meaning and much implicit detail, and much is developed through detailed discussion. Unlike the UK where a nod of the head means yes and a shake means no, in India there are numerous head movements which on different occasions seem to mean either the same or indeed different things. Also the answer 'yes' can mean 'yes, I have understood what you are asking' rather than 'yes I can do what you are asking'.

There are for example very good printers in India. But when we print in the UK we choose the precise paper stock, and proof onto it to check ink absorption and many other details. In India the availability of paper stock is far more limited, and often a reasonable approximation is considered acceptable. But in our terms in relation to what we aiming for a reasonable approximation is probably a total disaster. Now that we have a greater understanding of this, life has become a lot easier in terms of achieving what we are trying to do.

Impact on UK business

On a practical level the time difference between the UK and India means that we must be highly disciplined about making contact and reacting to any immediate requirements first thing in the morning. It has taken a conscious effort to educate our team that if something is needed on Wednesday, that means Wednesday lunchtime, not close of play.

Future forward

We are very positive about our future in India. Despite the downturn, interest in prestige in India is growing apace, with both Western luxury brands entering, and Indian company aspiring to add value. We have something to offer which will help them become more successful.

Information provided by Mr Julian Walford, March 2009



Walford Wilkie Limited