



## LISA SRAO

Chairman & managing director,  
I Brands Beverages, a spirits company

# Spirited show

**F**OR LISA Srao, spirits and liquor didn't happen by chance—she had some exposure to the industry in the UK, where she was born and brought up, as her father was already in the business of liquor distribution. But the idea for I Brands Beverages came to her only when she moved to India following her marriage in 2003.

“Products in the price-sensitive bracket were of very low quality at that point of time and good-quality products were extremely expensive. Since my father was in the business of liquor distribution, I noticed a huge gap in the market. The premium liquor segment in the ‘mass market’ was completely under-utilised and there were few players in that segment,” says Srao.

That is when she envisioned building a liquor business that provided the market with international quality of products that would also be value for money.

“I envisioned bringing my father's products to India, but with market research, understood that to be truly price-competitive, I needed to manufacture in India. Each state here is like a different country. With this thought in mind, I founded I Brands Beverages in 2008 and launched its India operations in 2010,” explains Srao, who has a bachelor's degree in managerial and administrative studies from Aston University in Birmingham with specialisation in international marketing and consumer behaviour.

The Bengaluru-based company currently sells four liquor brands in India: Three Royals Whisky, Granton Whisky, Rum 99 and Granton XO Brandy.

After recently entering Cambodia, Srao now plans to take I Brands Beverages to Vietnam, Laos and Thailand in the next fis-

**THE BENGALURU-BASED COMPANY CURRENTLY SELLS FOUR LIQUOR BRANDS IN INDIA. AFTER RECENTLY ENTERING CAMBODIA, IT NOW PLANS TO REACH VIETNAM, LAOS AND THAILAND IN THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR AS PART OF ITS EXPANSION STRATEGY**

cal year as part of its market expansion strategy.

With Delhi, Telangana and Karnataka, the company is also gearing up to enter three new states in India to expand its domestic footprint to 16 states. Currently, the company has presence in states such as Punjab, Haryana, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Puducherry and Andhra Pradesh.

However, things were not easy for this mother of two to launch a spirits company in India from scratch and managing to stay afloat in a male-dominated industry that is known for new entrants shutting shop within six months of launching operations.

“The liquor industry in India is incredibly difficult to enter, as it is a capital-intensive industry and dominated by few big players. We faced a lot of issues while setting up the company, as I didn't have the kind of funds to play with what is the norm of the industry. Also, being an unknown company, we had a hard time getting distributors to work with us,” she says, adding, “The industry is male-dominated and I felt like I was in unchartered waters for a long time. I had a hard time, as nobody would take me seriously. During meetings with distributors, they would address my manager

and talk only to him because he was a guy.”

However, Srao and her team worked through these challenges. She strategically planned to take a slow and steady approach, and spent two years in R&D before launching the first product—Granton Whisky. Within less than four years of its presence in India, the company won several awards, such as the ‘best start-up company’ at the Spiritz 2014 Awards, the IndSpirit 2014 Excellence in Packaging Award for Granton Whisky, and the ‘innovative start-up of the year’ at the Entrepreneur Awards 2014.

Srao, in her capacity as the chairman and managing director of I Brands, was also honoured with the ‘woman entrepreneur of the year’ award at IndSpirit 2015, a prestigious liquor industry award ceremony by Ambrosia India, as well as the ‘most promising entrepreneur’ at the Asia-Pacific Entrepreneurship Awards 2015.

Lisa is fully involved in all stages of I Brands Beverages. Be it strategising and development of all business functions, manufacturing, sales, branding, marketing, product design or packaging, Srao is totally hands-on.

But when not juggling between a high-powered job and her children, Srao enjoys painting, listening to music and travelling. She strongly partakes in charity work supporting causes for women and education for the girl child.

“Do not be restricted by outdated traditions or stereotypes. Pay attention to details in your business and know your strengths. I take on challenges and look to learn from them constantly. I have great motivational spirit and drive. Live your life with passion,” says Srao in a message to women entrepreneurs.