



How will the new government affect brand growth in India?

I do believe the new government is very consumer friendly. If you are consumer friendly, you need to offer the consumer a wide choice that is both global and local. There can be no local jingoism here that will make the government look partisan. The world is totally and really flat in brand terms today. This is a 'choice' generation. You need to leave that choice to the consumer and not centralise it to laws that bind and restrict.

What is the future for brands in India? Do you think India can expand to a brand obsessed economy any time soon?

India is already a brand-obsessed economy at the top end. The middle-class is getting there fast. The only class that is outside its ambit is the rural class that still believes in the real and the solid. Even this will change. Sadly for some, and blissfully for the others. Depends, whether you are a consumer or a marketer.

Do you think that the age has come for high-end brands to make themselves available to the masses?

Yes, I do believe everyone in society has the same need, want, desire and aspiration. All of us have the same body parts and largely the same mind. What's more, all of us in the same society are exposed to the same common media. Brands need to get inclusive rather than remain insular and exclusive because then they get into a niche of their own making. Therefore, my mantra to brands is: Get inclusive, or get excluded.

Esquire and the Soho headphones, have turned out to be our top sellers and the fact that both are personal and portable products have started an, 'I want one too', viral trend," says Sahil Sani, the Service Partner for Harman Lifestyle Division Products in India.

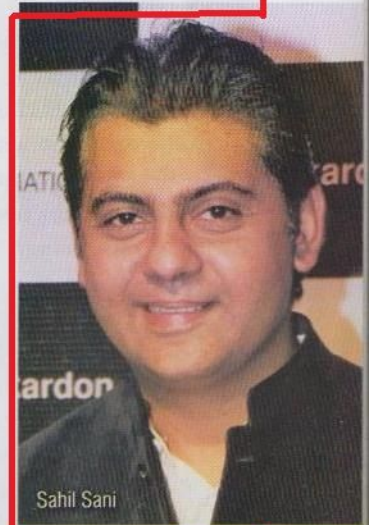
But, behind establishing a luxury brand is a lot of persistence, coupled with a unique luxury experience present before, during and after the purchase. Since it is luxury, your guard cannot be let down because image matters. And, if all of the above work, then Sahil hopes that Harman/Kardon will become the go-to brand in the luxury audio space. And, according to him and his clientele, Harman/Kardon can be well on their way to success.

Talking about international brands, we got in touch with Lisa Srao, the only woman in India to lead a company in a male



dominated Alco-Bev industry. She is the Chairman and MD of I Brands Beverages Ltd, a brand which has the experience of successfully launching international brands in India."I Brands Beverages was set up in August 2010 and in just a span of four years, the company managed to successfully launch a luxury whisky—Three Royals, and a premium whisky—Granton, a Jamaican flavoured dark rum—Rum 99, as well as a rare French brandy Granton XO Brandy in India," is how she introduces us to her company. Here, innovation has been the key. The blending and packaging of the products has been done keeping the Asian tastes and palates in mind.

Preference matters, and being a small company, I Brands has the luxury of being dynamic by constantly adapting their approach and products to each market and its specific needs. "My main objective was to keep the end consumer happy, be it through price point or look and feel—we graduated from a mono-carton to an award winning canister packaging for Granton Whisky, our flagship product. We constantly test our products before and after the launch, as we are ever evolving, working towards creating the perfect product



Sahil Sani

of the best quality possible," she says, adding that that their USP is their ability to offer products of international quality at affordable prices.

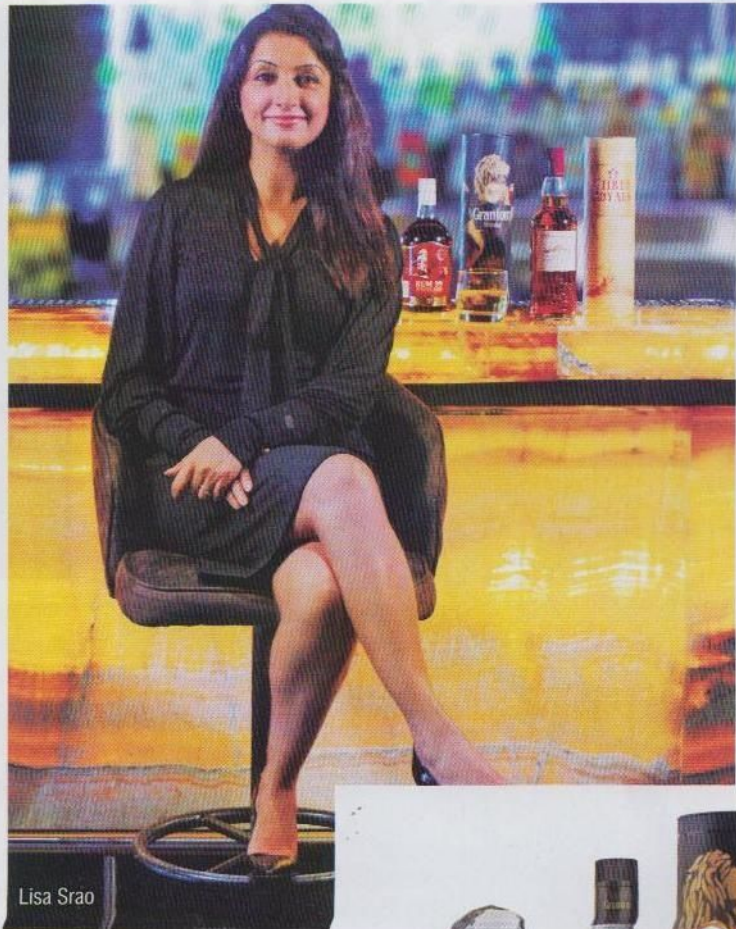
Brand visibility helped as they took the semi-urban route in gaining market share. So, while there was growth on the one hand, they had their own sales force on every level constantly in touch with the tastes and feedback of the end customer on the other. Of course, that they are dealing with whisky helps too as that comprises 80 per cent of the liquor business in India. "But, also being a young and innovative company, we can adapt to consumer feedback and further develop the product. For example, for Granton Whisky, after hearing customer



know clearly that when you buy a Porsche, it must be because you enjoy the feel of that engine purring under your hands than about your friends feeling you are worth it, because those friends are not worth the time of day if that is their *raison de etre*.

What is the current trend in luxury products?

Subliminal branding through informal and formal soiree's are not in the face, and using people like myself to introduce society to brands only brings to people and patrons a comfort sans pressure and push that direct marketing brings. It is the way of the west, yes, where I have spent many years, and therefore I am comfortable with the brands and being the conduit to the country. Apart from this, a person who celebrates the brand through champagne cocktails, brunches, lunches, must also be aware of subtle nuances of merchandising and trends. Brands adopt the strategy of subliminal marketing and strategy because it does not put off the consumer as it is being introduced to them. With a soft non-intrusive celebration and no overt sale, the high-end consumer learns about the brand and is then free to go and get the handbag, scarf, whisky, liquor, shoes and cigars later. Moreover, the product reaches the target audiences in intimate gatherings where the luxury product becomes the cynosure of the evening or morning. There is a complete re-alignment between what a brand promises and what it delivers, whether it's in terms of product, advertising and marketing support—for example in the initial phases of a luxury brand, it needs to give people the confidence of who sports/ uses it, which is why a celebrity needs to endorse it so that it supports the general public perception. Even more important is the soft ambassador/ host / consultant who conveys to the peers that it is luxury that they are wearing.



Lisa Srao

feedback, we changed the packaging from a mono-carton to the award winning canister in a short while and also changed the blend so that it adopted to the target audience," she adds.

Her secret in growing her brand is a deep understanding of the consumer palate, developing a superior product and a widely spread network of distributors and partners across the country. A solid base and foundation in the current states, with slow and steady steps to move into metro cities in the future makes absolute business logic. And, if everything works, I Brands Beverages will be among India's top five liquor companies in India, according to Lisa. She adds, "We would also like to make a dent in the international market as the products we make are of international quality, and can be ranked across the world."

However, the game is slightly different when a brand loved across the world makes inroads in India. Gelato Italiano (GI) is a big name in the

