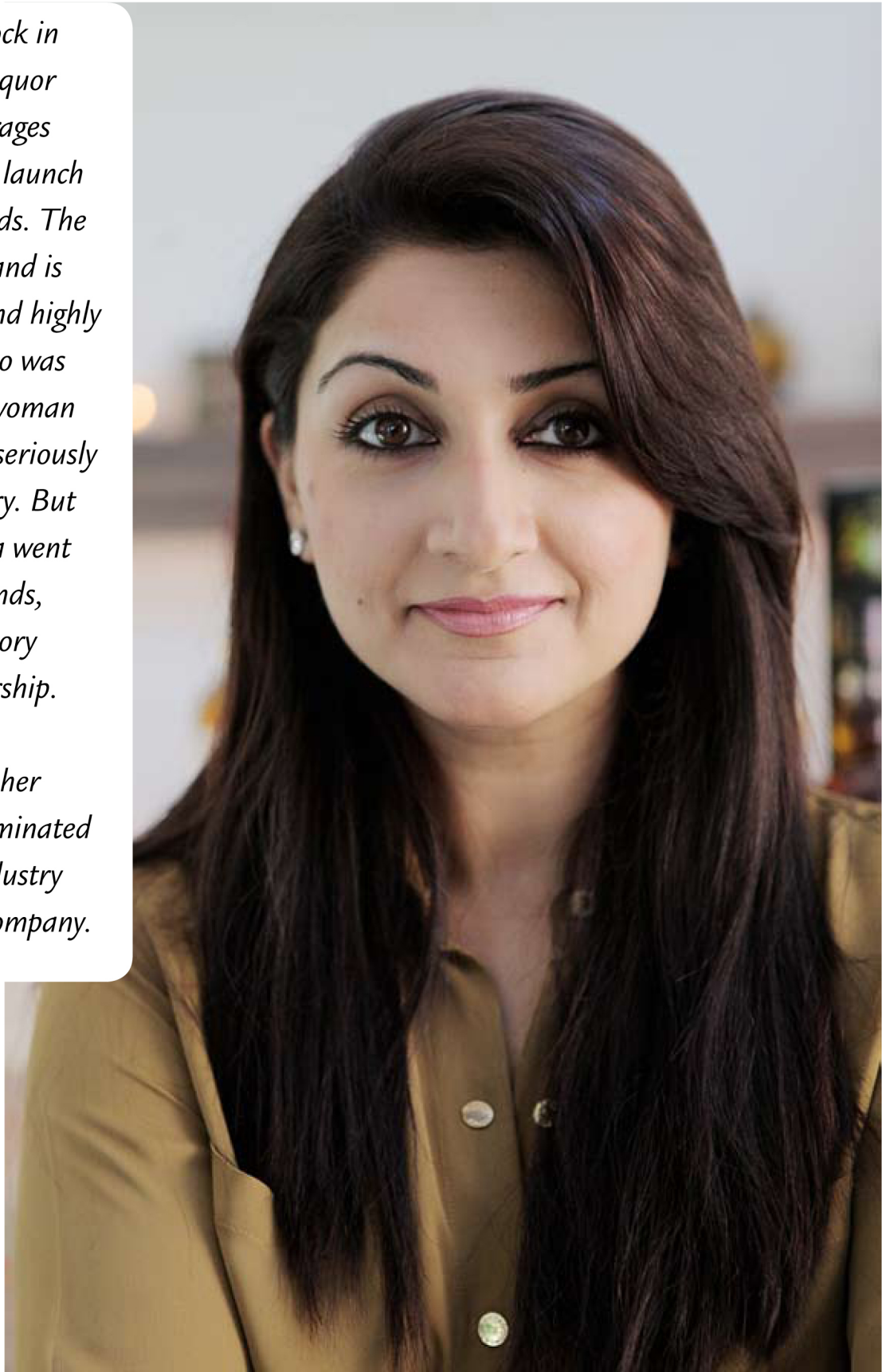


Father's Footsteps lead Daughter to I Brands

*The new kid on the block in the Indian and global liquor market, I Brands Beverages Ltd is credited with the launch of some successful brands. The company was founded and is headed by ambitious and highly motivated **Lisa Srao** who was once told that being a woman no one would take her seriously in India's liquor industry. But a more determined Lisa went ahead and set up I Brands, writing a new success story of woman entrepreneurship. **Shalini Kumar** recently interacted with Lisa on her journey in the male-dominated terrain of the liquor industry and her plans for the company.*



Sometimes you choose a calling and make a success of it, but the calling doesn't interest you for long, as it is not wired into your DNA. You leave the calling and go back to the profession you were naturally inclined to take up, going by your DNA coding. This is what had exactly happened with Lisa Srao, dynamic chairman and managing director, I Brands Beverages Ltd, a young, innovative manufacturer and distributor of international alcoholic beverages.

Lisa started with a career in business handling in satellite television and media companies. She served many big organisations such as Star TV, News Corporation, Twentieth Century Fox, Viacom (MTV) and Vivendi Universal. However being from a family with liquor business heritage, this career could not hold her for long. Actually, her father A Srao, now chief advisor for I Brands, has been in the liquor retail business in London for over three decades. He is credited with the creation and successful launch of Double Dutch beer in the UK market, which today is a best-seller.

Talking about her father's professional influence on her, Lisa says, "I grew up around his passion for the industry. His input has been incredibly useful to my development of I Brands Beverages, and I could ask for no better mentor."

So, to give expression to her liquor business heritage, Lisa established I Brands in 2008 in Bangalore. Now, married to Indian businessman Manoj Verma, Lisa operates from Bangalore and is actively involved in essential business aspects of her company, such as blending, packaging and product positioning. Only about four

years into business, I Brands holds six IMFL brands and has global brand rights of some leading beer and wine products.

Innovate, Innovate, Innovate

"To be the best in the industry, you must value your team and innovate, innovate, innovate." That's Lisa's management mantra. She explains, "It is our mission to create innovative, ground-breaking and cutting-edge products that are at par with international standards and that inspire and enthuse our consumers. I propagate a culture that is steeped in delivering higher than customer expectations with a great focus on the people involved in achieving the same."

I Brands has a team of blenders within India and Scotland to ensure that the flavours of its blends are the best in their segments, for the Asian

and European markets. To ensure that every product is of the utmost top quality, I Brands takes care to use only top grain spirit in India. The company is so confident of its solid platform in product development that it is ready to showcase its products in any



'Have a team that loves coming to work'

"The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do". Lisa Srao, the young and dynamic Chairman and Managing Director of I Brands, loves to live by this quote, which popularised Apple's 1997 Think Different campaign. With close to 20 years in the media and marketing world in the United Kingdom, Lisa brought to I Brands a rich experience in strategic and business planning, product launches, brand development and promotion.

Lisa is an alumnus of Aston University where she studied Managerial and Administrative Studies. A thorough and meticulous professional, Lisa gives high importance to team building for company's success. "I believe that there is no greater happiness than building a company with a team that loves coming to work, as we all absolutely enjoy what we do, and are motivated to making it a success," she says.



We are making beverages for modern India, beverages for the youth of the country, who very much relates with the idea of global citizen

international arena. According to Lisa, being a small company has helped I Brands to be dynamic in its approach. "We constantly adapt our approach and products to each market and its specific needs. My main objective is to keep the end consumer happy, be it through price point or look and feel. And, the success that we have enjoyed, despite minimal marketing budgets, has been phenomenal. This is also attributed to the fact that we have the industry's top sales team, as well as advisory board," reveals Lisa.

Lisa is all praise of her young and dynamic team. "We are constantly growing with their enthusiasm and inspiring ideas. We are making beverages for modern India, beverages for the youth of the country, who very much relates with the idea of global citizen, and hence the requirement for international standard quality products. Our young and dynamic team is key to engaging with this type of consumer, and ensuring that our products too fulfil the aspirations of the young Indian, who has crossed the legal drinking age," she says.

Under-utilized premium whisky market

Over the four years of its existence I Brands has launched three products in the market. These are: Three Royals, a luxury whisky; Granton, a premium whisky; and Rum 99, a Jamaican flavoured dark rum. What made I Brands to debut

in the Indian market with premium whisky products? Lisa explains, "When we analyzed the liquor industry in India, we found that 80 per cent of this market was tailored towards whisky. The cheaper whisky segments were flooded with many brands and producers. But we found few quality products in premium segments, which are under-utilized with very little competition. So, we felt we would do best if we placed our products in premium segments, as it was a platform that allowed us to bring international standard quality products to the Indian market."

Before hitting the market in 2010, I Brands spent two years studying the market. In Lisa's words, "It took us two intense years to research the market and come up with suitable

products for the Indian market. We had our international consultants fly down to help determine the correct blends for the market along with our local team. Our international design team also helped create the correct look and feel for the kind of product we wanted to launch in the Indian market."

Lisa feels their premium whisky products are unique and have an edge in the market. "We are very excited by the response we are getting for our whisky products in the market. The niche that we have chosen to position our products in has proved to be quite fruitful. I am not worried about fighting for shelf space, as we offer the very best in terms of quality of international standard, and are making these products available to the Indian market at affordable prices."

Regarding the uniqueness of I Brands products, Lisa believes these products stand out as a result of their



The Portfolio and the Market

In August 2010, I Brands piloted its products in Uttarakhand and Chandigarh. Today the company distributes in Haryana, Chandigarh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Pondicherry. By the end of the year, it will be present across 11 states. Managing Director Lisa Srao sees I Brands spanning the length and breadth of India in next four years. Internationally, I Brands has presence in UK and other European countries, Middle East and Asia.

The I Brands portfolio consists of a range of spirits, beer and wine. These brands include:

Three Royals whisky: A smooth luxury whisky, it is a blend of scotch, malts and select Indian grain spirits with an enhanced flavour to make it a premium blend. It has an embossed bottle with an old vintage label.

Granton whisky: The flagship brand of I Brands Beverages Ltd. It is a richly layered whisky blended from the finest Scotch, malts and select Indian grain spirits. The rich flavour of the blend comes from an age-old tradition of blending fine whiskies developed in UK. It has an embossed design and a holographic feel Monocarton.

Double Dutch beer: Developed 15 years ago, it has been in the UK market for over ten years now. It has the 'taste test' and has the 'mother brew' brewing status. Packaging has been of the highest standards. It is also available in 10 per cent alcohol content for DD Strong Beer.

Rum99: An authentic dark rum, one of the finest and smoothest on the palate. Its superior taste is an amalgamation of a smooth and mellow dark spirit and the rich Jamaican flavour. Rum 99 is especially eye-catching with a special embossed design bottle and a silver cap.

Nicholas brandy: A rare French to top a sleek, never-seen-before finest quality using imported French

Zabawa: A vodka, developed by pure mineral water and a triple cold charcoal and crystal sand to ensure the with a virtual no hangover guarantee. word meaning 'to party, amuse and



brandy, it has special Guala caps bottle design. The blend is of the grape spirit.

Russian technicians using filtration system through medical vodka delivers the best quality, Zabava is an ancient Russian entertain'.

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international standard look and feel and because they have been adapted to the tastes of the local palate. Giving an example, Lisa says, "If you consider Three Royals, the embossed bottle, canister packaging, and its impeccable design aesthetics all are the qualities of products of segments that are of far more premium positioning. Essentially, I Brands is working towards creating and bringing to the market value-for-money products." Lisa herself ensures that I Brands products sport

international look and feel so that "our brand is projected correctly at all times".

Looking at her company's growth so far, Lisa is satisfied, as she says, "Despite being a small company, we have in just four years launched three fabulous international standard products that are available across six states. It's a remarkable feat. We are rapidly expanding our points of sales daily, and actively seeking new partners and distributors to keep the growth curve running." 📌