



HIGH SPIRITS & HIGH REWARDS

BY LISA SRAO

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I was born and raised in the UK and lived in Richmond, London. Before moving to India, I worked in the media industry in the UK, with top media companies such as Viacom, Vivendi Universal, News Corporation, etc. I moved to India following my marriage in 2003 and took some time off to raise my two lovely children. Then, I decided to set up a business of my own.

When I first started living here, I felt the distinct lack of international quality products, both in terms of accessibility and variety, in India's liquor industry. I noticed that products in the price sensitive bracket were of lower quality and good quality products were extremely expensive. I also noticed that the mass market premium segment of India's liquor industry was under-utilized. With the thought of bridging this gap with international quality products catering to the value segment, and flanked by my entrepreneurial spirit, I launched I Brands Beverages.

After extensive R&D over two years, I realized that I could not bring in products from abroad like I envisaged, but to be truly price competitive, I would have to manufacture in India itself. Tastes in India greatly vary from State to State and differ from that of people abroad. Thus it was important to create an Asia-specific brand at that price segment. We researched the blend, packaging and segment very carefully before our launch. We commenced India operations in August 2010 with the launch of Granton Whisky, our flagship product. Today, I Brands Beverages is one of the fastest growing liquor start-up companies in India. We have four fantastic products in our portfolio - a premium whisky brand, Three Royals, a deluxe

whisky brand, Granton Whisky, a Jamaican flavoured dark rum, Rum 99, and a French brandy named Granton XO Brandy.

Having entered a very male-dominated, monopolistic and cut-throat industry, I love the challenge of being the only woman to create a spirits business from scratch. The biggest challenge initially was funds, as the liquor industry is a financial intensive industry. Also, being an unknown company, we had a hard time getting distributors to work with us. Regulations in each State are also very different in terms of excise



duties, tastes, licenses required, etc., making this business incredibly challenging.

In this male-dominated industry, most thought it would be impossible for me to survive and told me that. During meetings with distributors, they would address my manager and talk to him just because he was a guy. But that's changing now. The industry is getting more organized and in a few years, it will shift to being FMCG and retail-driven.

As for us, we took a slow and steady approach, following a semi-urban village route in distribution, developing a solid base in the States that we are present in, before opening up in other States. We also perfected the blend of products along the way. Today, there is phenomenal response to I Brands' products, allowing the company to not only sustain itself in this incredibly tough and complex industry, up against some massive players, but also to double turnover in just three years, surpassing the million dollar mark. In our fourth year of operation we have opened up retail presence in over 5,000 outlets across eight States and have won our first paramilitary orders awards, which is an achievement. All this is testimony to the hard work and dedication that my team and I have put in.

Steve Jobs' mantra, 'The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do' has been my mantra too. Life is an adventure, be prepared to take risks.

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