

Just Jewellery, Apr-May 2007

Leading the pack

Innovation and strong customer focus are keys to the success that is Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri- The Original, writes **SAVIA RAJAGOPAL-SHAH**

When it comes being an institution, Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri-The Original is second to none in the Indian jewellery industry. It's no wonder that it has a much-exalted status when one realises that the company was established over a century ago. Offers Binaisha. S. Zaveri, daughter of Shrikant Zaveri, of TBZ-The Original, "I don't think you will be able to find many retailers in this country, who have survived for a hundred and forty two years! In fact, there's no other name that comes to mind." Starting out as 8' X 8' tin shed in Zaveri market in 1864, to a mammoth company that has several branches in Mumbai, apart from those in metros down South, this company has grown from strength to strength. But it's not merely 'time' that grants it, its hallowed status. Consistently the brand has delivered products and innovative designs that have impressed both the consumer and competitors alike. It has several firsts to its credit in an industry that is constantly in a rush to outdo the competition. "The word 'light-weight' jewellery was started by this company. The lifetime buyback guarantee scheme was conceptualised here before anyone else. Now, the whole market is following our innovative ideas that have been in place for years," points out R.K. Nagarkar, General Manager, TBZ-The Original.

While the brand's traditional legacy is in sync with its tagline that states "where trust is tradition," the company is now focusing on a younger, youthful clientele while still forging strong bonds with the old faithful. The notion that old is associated with drab or boring designs, finds no place under this roof as no stone is being left unturned in a bid to connect with the younger consumer. "Even though we have an old heritage, we are combining it with new image to get in touch with young consumers of today," exudes Zaveri confidently. The new designs in light-weight jewellery in both gold and diamonds, offer the customer a variety of options to choose from. And although contemporary jewellery may look like it's only targeted at the youth, Zaveri points out that even older consumers today prefer something lighter and casual for daily wear. It's this keen observation of market trends and ability to deliver the requirements of the modern customer that gives TBZ an edge over competitors.

Along with extensive research into various market forces, the brand spends a lot of time focussing on the consumer. That the brand is very strong on customer-focus is evident as consumer tastes and demands are constantly being reflected in research through various mediums such as surveys. The buying pattern, trends across various regions, and other consumer behaviour is closely monitored by a specialised group of merchandisers that travel all across the country, keeping a close eye on consumer choices. That feedback is communicated from the local showroom managers to the merchandising team, who in turn communicate the information the management as well as the design team. Apart from which, in a globalised economy, international trends are closely watched and observed on the internet, via magazines and other sources.

As a consummate brand that prides itself on providing a multitude of product lines catering to various consumers, staying ahead of the competition – both national and international -- is all-important. Competitors in the market decades ago consisted of merely fellow players seeking a slice in the market pie. But that notion no longer stands true and the average consumer makes choices across various product groups. That realisation has not escaped Zaveri's observations, as she says, "It's not only jewellery brands per se that would be considered competitors in today's world. Any luxury item -- be it watches, handbags, TV sets, holidays – is competition for us. When a family spends money, it's not an individual decision. Even children nowadays are so involved in buying decisions. So I think it's a very competitive market out there." But when it comes specifically on focusing on competition within the jewellery industry, the approach is two-pronged. At one level, there is local competition which includes going to the "grass-root" level which necessitates competing with local jewellers. These smaller local jewellers cannot be put on the same level as international brands, yet they are serious competition too. Here, factors like pricing and adapting to tastes of local consumers cannot be ignored. Whereas focussing on international competitors demands different dynamics. "I don't think a lot of brands have realised it as yet. They are either following a single track but you can't really afford to do that anymore. We are trying to maintain a quality standard that the local jeweller can't give; while still matching the standards of international players," points out Zaveri.

A strong emphasis on the highest quality is very evident and is part and parcel of the brand's legacy. Raw materials sourced are of the best quality, informs Nagarkar. Diamonds used in all products are from DTC Sight holders only whereas gold from TBZ has always been synonymous for its purity and high value. Gold and diamonds have separate teams of merchandisers that travel across the country and come up with innovative ideas after interacting with vendors and the factories that produce these goods. "It's a quarterly process. Our central team of merchandisers is constantly on the job," states Akash Jain, Assistant General Manager, TBZ – The Original. The design team consists of a centralised unit of ten designers, which travels, apart from designs being sent in from pre-selected vendors. Marked differences in tastes have been observed over the last few years as Jain points out, "People are definitely shifting towards diamonds. Earlier it was something that was sought after and associated with only the elite class. Now even youngsters have started purchasing diamonds for day to day wear. So the focus is certainly moved towards the diamonds." He also points out that customers are now seeking exclusive designs that are unique and different. The design team rises to the challenge by catering to this clientele with custom-made designs and patterns, through constant interaction between the sales force, the client itself and the in-house designers. When it comes to their regional stores, different parts of the country also demand special attention and the design team has to cater to those tastes accordingly. For example, as Zaveri elucidates, "The South market is more conservative. People in Mumbai are more experimental and want to try out new things. So, we cater to specific regions by creating products that match the local taste."

Apart from having a good quality product, marketing is a very important activity for the brand. A fact that is reiterated by Zaveri, as she says, "It is very important to constantly

be visible as customer memory is very short-term.” However, they have chosen to take the unconventional route of *not* appointing a brand ambassador, which is the norm today. Explaining the rationale behind this decision, Zaveri explains, “We feel our mainline advertising is doing the job for us. Secondly our consumers are more attached to our name and our products, rather than the celebrity tag. While it could be a way to get consumers to walk into the showroom but at the end of the day, if one does not have the product or service to back it up, the consumer will never return.” Instead of looking outwards for sales promotional tactics, the company relies on a strong work ethic among its work force. The sales team receives specialised training in all aspects of selling within the jewellery industry. “Right up from recruitment,” Jain states, “employees receive on-site training. Specialised trainers teach employees about specific aspects such as appropriate product knowledge, sales and importantly how to interact with the customers.”

In a bid to reach out to the consumer, regular exhibitions and fairs are on the cards, especially to tap into newer markets. Shop-in-shop kiosks within department stores are also not being ruled out completely, although at this point the company feels it is well-represented across the various parts of Mumbai, apart from venturing into cities down South. However, a guarded approach towards the shop-in-shop way, is warranted as the brand is very keen to replicate a unique shopping experience akin to those in the TBZ showrooms across the cities. Latching onto new marketing methods, there has been a mobile service launched recently that informs consumers of new offers, etc. that are available at the various showrooms across the nation. Also, quick to identify and capture a new mode of reaching their clientele, is the TBZ web-store available online that was set up close to a year ago. E-commerce is the new avenue, feels Zaveri. Elucidating the same, she says, “Earlier, it was thought that consumers want to touch and feel a product but at the rate at which e-commerce is growing, I don’t think that’s holds true now. You have to constantly be in touch with the changing mindset.”

When it comes to expansion, the company has seen tremendous growth over the last few years with a strong presence in many cities across the country. Even the split within the TBZ group has not really affected the company’s forays into newer ventures as Nagarkar states, “When the separation took place, every fragment was free to go on their own.” For the company, identifying a new region or location for a venture is something that is taken very seriously and researched thoroughly. Factors that affect a region being chosen as a new centre include “customer potential in relation to the market in totality,” explains Jain. Per capita income is one of the best indicators in this process of selection, adds Zaveri. While they are cautious to disclose details regarding future plans pertaining to store openings, they do affirm that there is a definite map in place, especially since they are on a high-growth track. Entering a new market is a challenge that TBZ is not afraid to face. The company prides itself on its heritage and century old track record. Offers Jain, “We are known as TBZ from Mumbai. Once that connection is established, people trust the brand. The designs also speak for themselves. As a new player in the market from a different region, you always have something new to offer as you come in with a different perspective. Somehow consumers pick up on that.” In the same vein, taking the brand across foreign shores is ruled out as of now as the organisation feels that having one of

the largest middle-income groups as an audience offers tremendous potential and they'd like to focus on fulfilling the various requirements of this category.

With a burgeoning middle class and rising per capita income, the average Indian is now more exposed to a variety of brands, from various pricing segments. Yet, TBZ is consistently proving to be a tough competitor in the market. The company now promotes itself as a contemporary, fresh, youthful brand that is based on the tradition of trust. The company name-tag 'The Original,' added recently emphasises the legacy of a company that has stood the tests of time and seen many a generation of consumers. Ask them what the secret to being ahead of the pack and Nagarkar answers, "Innovation. That's the key. We have to keep innovating and be ten steps ahead of the competition."

BOX

To be a success...

- Your consumer is king. Never underestimate your consumer.
- Deliver what you have promised and don't promise something you can't deliver.
- Don't overestimate your abilities and don't underplay your strengths.

BOX

Many firsts to its credit...

- The word 'light-weight' jewellery was started at TBZ.
- The lifetime buyback guarantee was invented here.
- The certified diamonds concept gained acceptance here.

Pull-out quotes:

"Even though we have an old heritage, we are combining it with new image to get in touch with young consumers of today"

"It is very important to constantly be visible as customer memory is very short-term"

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