

Print Coverage Report

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BI The Last Impression

A GLOBAL opportunity

It is the right time to create a uniquely Indian house of luxury goods with a global vision and design sensibility

Luxury isn't new to India. For much of its history, the country enjoyed about a third of the world's Gross Domestic Product. In recent times, the country's erstwhile Maharajas formed a crucial part of the global luxury market, as testified by the large collection of classic Rolls-Royce cars that still exist on India's roads.

Things seem to have reached a full circle in the past few years with the re-emergence of India and its larger neighbour, China, as economic powerhouses and emerging markets for luxury brands. India is adding about 16,000 millionaires every year to the existing base of over 100,000 millionaires. This underscores the opportunity for luxury brands — both existing and emerging. Still, indigenous luxe labels are yet to make their mark in a big way, on a global level.

India has the potential and all the pieces of the jigsaw to succeed — the design talent, a craft provenance that is over thousands of years old, an evolving supply chain, global stars to endorse and promote a unique luxury goods brand and growing numbers of indigenous customers of luxury. In addition, there is availability of capital and a strong government driving the concept, 'Make in India'.

To be sure, creating a luxury brand from scratch is a challenge and industry leaders cite a range of reasons why they think listening to consumers is not helpful when building successful luxury brands. This is why for decades, the golden rule in the luxury business was: "Don't ask consumers what they want; tell them what they should have." This notion is changing quickly with the emergence of millennials, consumers who expect highly personalised products and services to meet ever evolving emotional states.

Nevertheless, confidence, marketing and an exquisite feel for trends propels luxury brands in a way that most consumer businesses cannot fathom. Selling an 'It bag' for thousands of dollars because the right star has been seen with it at a party for one night only demonstrates the nuance of the luxury goods marketing game. Provenance, authenticity and a track record of tens or hundreds of years of activity also supports the nearly mythic nature of the 'Old World' great luxury 'houses' — many of them resolutely European. Inventing and validating this kind of authenticity 'overnight' is a challenge that can only be overcome with big investment in product and marketing.

Despite a number of very high quality companies in the Indian fashion and jewellery market, they remain niche players from a global perspective. There is no real tradition of diversified luxury goods players — selling everything from accessories to jewellery, shoes to bespoke luggage under one integrated

India is yet to develop global luxury super conglomerates like LVMH



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St. James Court, a Taj Hotel, in London was rebranded to retain its iconic status as a heritage hotel with relevance to contemporary business and leisure travellers

brand and with the backing to go global. Perhaps, there has just never been the need or the priority. Until very recently, no appetite or broad enough customer base for the 'unnecessary indulgence' that is the hallmark of luxury goods and experiences existed in India. That, it seems, is changing rapidly.

Regardless of a lack of individual luxury goods brand reputation, as a country, design is embedded in the ethos of India and for centuries it has showcased this through ingenuity in architecture, art and other cultural manifestations. Critically, the capability in fine jewellery, fabrics, leather work and painstakingly handmade goods is aligned to some of the most valuable luxury goods categories globally. Considering the fact that India has such a strong tradition of design, craft and more or less one off goods, the country still lacks global luxury brands like Gucci, Hermès or super conglomerates like LVMH.

India is emerging as one of the most prominent consumer markets in the world. There is an increasing awareness of design and the value it adds to any brand and business. With several multinationals setting up shop in the luxury space (even specialists like Christian Louboutin have a beautiful store in Mumbai), their design philosophy has been transferred to the brands they have launched in India. Today, design not only helps them stand out in a cluttered market but consumers are willing to pay a premium for a well-designed brand in a market like India, that remains price and value sensitive even among the well-heeled.



Nick Talbot
Global Design Head, Tata Elxsi, a leading design company that helps clients develop winning brands

A luxury product without great design is difficult to imagine. If the design is not perfect, the exacting standards that luxury product creation demands cannot be achieved. As luxury brands stretch beyond their original areas of expertise and categories, the importance of using brand design to communicate a cohesive message has never been as important. It is great design, brand presence and superlative marketing that have the potential to build brands into more than just products, so that they become a celebration of the aesthetic, revolutionising the look and feel of our personal worlds. Ultimately, they promise to positively change the way we feel about ourselves, and this is their enduring power.

For instance, the Taj Hotels Resorts & Palaces wanted to rebrand the existing Crown Plaza hotel as St. James Court, a Taj Hotel, in London. The purpose of the rebranding was to retain the iconic status of the heritage hotel but with relevance to contemporary business and leisure travellers, positioning it as a contemporary brand and creating a proposition that stands out against competition, while retaining the distinctive feeling of Taj.

Drawing inspiration from the hotel's classic English heritage, coupled with a long legacy in service excellence of the group, we helped design and articulate the brand strategy, identity, signage and wayfinding design for the brand. We also designed and developed over 100 collaterals to be used across various consumer touch points for the luxurious hotel. The designs feature key elements from the hotel's unique and original Shakespearean frieze and other architectural details. Bespoke illustrations along with a distinctive colour palette and a modern and witty body copy were used across collaterals and signages and communicating it was a sophisticated yet warm and contemporary brand.

Yes, it takes years to build a brand that can compete and benefit from the multi-billion dollar global luxury business, but perhaps now is the time to look inwards to draw out the confidence, vision and design sensibility to create a uniquely Indian 'House' of luxury goods. •