

THE KEYWORD IS 'RELATE'

Levi Strauss India has been one of those international brands which have managed to create the 'wow!' effect through their retail store design. But how many times as an onlooker we realise the complexities of delivering that 'Wow' effect store. The credit goes to the back end team, the vendors, the workers, the project team and most of all the Project Head. VM & RD talks to Seema Sameith, Project Head, Levi Strauss India Pvt. Ltd. on what it takes to steer through and create the next amazing shopping destination.

Q. Apart from the budget what are the other criteria for zeroing on a vendor/ supplier?

A. We have a panel of suppliers who are evaluated on core features and are graded on their performance against an internal metrics that we use. The decision to choose a vendor is from the panel of contractors on project to project basis, solely based on their performance against the parameters set by us. It also depends on the detailed analysis of personnel skill sets, technology, quality control processes, inventory management along with macro factors like synergy in philosophies and willingness to adopt our standards and processes.

Q. What are the aspects for sourcing from international vendors?

A. Vendor evaluation is the key to offshore outsourcing, wherein the macro environment of the vendor country, synergy in goals with the vendor and their short term and medium term business philosophy all play an important role. A detailed analysis of personnel skill sets, quality control processes, confidentiality measurements and crisis management strategy and a clearly defined service level agreement and termination clause is integral to the process. Since cost is not the only

criteria, off shore sourcing is a viable option in many instances.

Q. How often is the option for international sourcing taken? What are the most typical supplies that you have to source internationally and why?

A. After identifying the fundamental and secondary activities, if the vendor is able to deliver the expected specifications then only the route is adopted. I would put international sourcing at 20% of the aggregate vendor sourcing. We intend outsourcing powder coating and other special finished accessories, as the processes followed in finishing are substandard in India.

Q. What is the level of involvement of the brand / marketing team in the build?

A. The brand team ensures that we bring alive the brand character through 3D tangible elements in store.

Q. In case of any last minute changes how accessible are you for the vendor and how its tackled by the vendors?

A. Vendors and I would have mutually agreed regarding the level of communication required to keep each other updated. A well defined standard reporting is already in place before the actual project execution. Last minute changes occur when the design is in the fluid stage wherein the brand is launching the new store concept or piloting one. The vendors today are well equipped to provide instant alternatives and turn around the same within reasonable time.

Q. What are the most common reasons for overshooting of deadlines?

A. Projects overshooting deadlines happen due to

1. Lack of complete information prior planning(especially for projects away)
2. Lack of buying from the franchisee/retailer

prior the project start, and hence the lost in doing so during the project

3. Fund may not flow as planned
4. New/pilot concepts which may a unexpected issues.

There is a saying "What we hope ever to do with ease, we must learn first to do with diligence." If you notice the entire list rise from the fact that with more time and care invested in planning the project and recognising potential for errors, these can be obliterated.

Q. Had you ever faced revision of budget so, for what reasons?

A. Yes I had to. This I would attribute to incomplete information especially on commercial stores in high street wherein the structural details were not available due to the age of the structure.

Q. Your comments on challenges faced coming up with good concept stores in India?

A. Design plays an increasingly important part in the competitive strategy of retailers. Retail design needs to be understood through examination of consumerism, but interpretation through design, cultural, historical and social influences on trends and consumer.

The key word is 'RELATE' and with almost all the brands focussing on the same, the need of the hour is to focus on "identity management" of every brand...yes those subtle experiential providers both tangible and non tangible which will linger on in the customers memory and will help differentiate the brands. This is not limited to the designers and the brand managers, but must percolate down to the agencies responsible for implementing the strategy at the field as well •

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