

Overseas success is a battle – so know your territory

Be clear about local regulations and tastes before you jump into doing business in other countries

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British firms pursuing expansion overseas face numerous challenges – from understanding differences in local culture and customs, to managing communication between remote offices, and adapting to local regulations, consumer tastes and demands.

The leaders of the highly entrepreneurial businesses featured on this year's

International Track 200 league table have tackled these issues head on – each in their own distinctive way.

Take Rabinder Buttar, founder, chief executive and chairman of Clintec (No 84). The Glasgow-based clinical research firm develops medicines for seven of the ten largest pharmaceutical companies in the world. It also works with biotech and medical device firms in oncology, rare diseases and other areas.

Almost all of its sales in 2017 were international, and the company now operates in more than 50 developed and emerging markets.

Buttar's business is distinct in many ways. While 60 of this year's league table companies have gained access to new markets, products and services through acquisitions – an increase of 30% compared with last year – Clintec has

taken a different path. Instead, it has consciously focused on organic growth directed by the needs of its clients.

As with many expanding companies, the challenges faced by the business have changed as it has grown.

Earlier in its international journey, as a relatively unknown brand, it had to work hard to build trust and recognition from medical device and pharmaceutical companies, but once this trust had been established, the company grew, and quickly.

However, the “growing pains” of becoming a much bigger company meant that it had to plough more energy into finding the best managers, with both the industry knowledge and the local expertise to successfully run new sites in different parts of the world.

Clintec is also part of a

welcome increase in the number of companies on the table that have a woman founder, chief executive, chairwoman or managing director. In 2017, such companies numbered 28 – this year, there are 37.

The jewellery business Monica Vinader (No 48) is another company that has expanded in its own particular way.

Founded by sisters Monica and Gabriela Vinader, it established demand for its “affordable luxury” brand in the UK during the 2008 recession, funding the business by taking out a loan against the family home in Norfolk.

The gamble thankfully paid off, and it now has 15 international boutiques, as well as four in London, and an ecommerce operation.

Piper Private Equity and Winona Capital invested £20m in 2016, helping to



MURDOCH FERGUSON

Leading the way: Rabinder Buttar, founder of Clintec (No 84)

fund its expansion drive in America.

In 2015, the company noticed a significant increase in the number of US-based customers buying its jewellery online and in its British stores, so decided demand was strong enough

to launch in America. The company initially sold its jewellery through retail partners, including Nordstrom and Saks Fifth Avenue, but it was clear that in order for the business to offer US customers the full brand experience they would

have to open a boutique of their own. Monica says: “It was just a matter of finding the right location and making sure we had the right team in place to support and represent the brand in a new market.”

The range in its New York boutique is the same as in the UK and on its website. The interior of the Manhattan store reflects the brand's design philosophy of using high-quality materials and craftsmanship, while also referencing the industrial heritage of its SoHo location.

Monica says she has learnt a lot from her international journey so far. Flagship stores provide a focal point, but the company has also been expanding with department store chain Nordstrom into new areas, such as Vancouver in Canada and California's San Jose.

To make this successful it

has been exploring ways to raise awareness of its brand. “The most important thing to get right is to understand the customer in each market, and that takes time,” she says. When asked for one recommendation for new exporters, her response is: “Pace yourself. We are very responsible about the way we manage our cashflow, and resource constraints can stop you opening more stores.”

“We opened in Hong Kong in 2014 only once we felt we had a strong base in the UK, our home market, and we had a strong team to support the expansion.”

Sound advice. We're proud to count these companies as customers, and we look forward to celebrating the successes of all this year's International Track 200 companies.

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