

# CALIFORNIA,



# HERE WE ARE

*With a new office in Los Angeles, its sixth location across four continents, Brandinc continues to establish itself as a bona fide global branding partner.*

*By Sara Lavenduski*

**W**hen one of the most successful franchises in history decided to create a traveling exhibit, no detail could be left to chance. Harry Potter: The Exhibition came to Sydney, Australia in 2012, putting on display a collection of costumes and props used in the eight highly lucrative Warner Bros. films. At the end of the tour, visitors had the opportunity to shop for souvenirs in the official merchandise store, stocked with product offerings developed by Brandinc (asi/145212). The branding consultancy successfully designed and created more than 50 new product lines for the event, all of which went through a rigorous approval process. Over 400,000 people visited the exhibition in Sydney, resulting in more than \$12 million in revenue and winning Brandinc Gold and Bronze awards at the 2012 APPA Awards for Promotional Excellence.

Now, Brandinc brings that same award-winning expertise to the West Coast of the United States, with a new location in Los Angeles, headed by Tad Webster, president & managing director of the U.S. division. Webster started in the industry in 1984, cutting his teeth in a variety of positions at several different companies before opening his own agency in Los Angeles. Then, in 2013, he partnered with Sydney-based Adrian Ferrand, CEO and partner at Brandinc, and London-based Danny Oakes, director, to begin Brandinc operations in sunny California.

"Over the years I've gotten to know a lot of different salespeople," says Webster, "and many have been reaching out since we opened the North American locations, first

in New York in 2012 and then in Los Angeles last year. We have a vision and strategic growth plan they're interested in."

## Global Reach

The brainchild of Ferrand, an ambitious Brit with degrees in Management Sciences and Business Studies, Brandinc started in London in 1998 with a focus on licenses for music merchandise. Over the next 15 years, the team expanded into several locations across the globe, and Ferrand eventually became the board director of the British Promotional Merchandise Association. While the music merchandise licensing division of the company still exists in London, currently managing over 300 online stores, Brandinc now focuses mainly on corporate branded merchandise at its offices in Hong Kong, Singapore, Sydney, New York and now Los Angeles. The team has also moved into entertainment licensing, including work for the Batman, Scooby Doo and Bugs Bunny franchises, and Ferrand currently manages the company's licenses for theatrical exhibits, such as the Harry Potter project.

There's no limit to the size and creative demands that Brandinc will take on for a client. "We do anything and everything," says Ferrand. "We work in all sectors, with

a focus on larger agencies, corporate or direct-to-market with the entertainment industry. We specialize in custom products and uniforms, and we work closely with designers and factories to offer the best solutions, whether that be fabric or functionality." And the company shows no sign of slowing down, particularly at the Los Angeles location. "We've added five account executives in California in just seven months," says Webster, "and we've been working frequently with high-end corporate, medical and automotive clients."

## It's a Small World

In addition to building an increasingly diverse portfolio, Webster has a distinctive vision for the kind of sales team he wants to head in California. "We don't want to be top- or management-heavy," he explains. "We want independent salespeople who are highly driven, motivated and extremely focused, and who don't require a lot of hand-holding. We're successfully building a team that works in all business segments, and we now have true global coverage with our clients because of our multiple locations."

Certainly, the offices across four continents help the company to diversify, particularly now that North America is



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TAD WEBSTER, BRANDINC



Brandinc developed the official merchandise offerings, including mugs, posters, plush owls, apparel and more, for Harry Potter: The Exhibition traveling show when it came to Sydney, Australia.

covered coast-to-coast. "Our locations allow us to cross-pollinate and grow strategically," says Webster. "Entertainment licenses in particular build connections for us and open doors." In addition, Brandinc has used its international offices for sourcing unique items not always available to a company with a single location. For example, the team in Sydney found an Australian supplier of high-end, locally made apparel for an application in Southern California. "We can find special items all over the world, like an Italian leather journal for high-end hospitality clients," says Webster. "That's possible because of our growing presence and relationships with vendors."

As the team grows its operations, the differences among the promotional markets have become increasingly apparent, particularly between the United Kingdom, where Brandinc was first established, and the United States, the location of its new-

est office. "These two markets are similar in that the product range is comparable, larger clients still require Web stores and service is key," says Ferrand. "The real difference is the scale and size of the marketplace. The U.S. is much larger than the UK."

Webster says the biggest difference he's seen is in the number of doors open to promotional partners clamoring to bid for a piece of the pie. "The UK's much smaller market contains lots of contractual clients who offer exclusivity," he explains. "There isn't a lot of opportunity for one-offs for events, like trade shows, company picnics or the fourth-quarter season. In the U.S., there aren't as many contracts, and there's definitely more opportunity for one-offs."

### Come Together

While Ferrand and Webster pride themselves on leading creative teams who bring the ultimate in uniquely sourced and branded goods for clients, they're also the first to state that their current success has depended in large part on supplier partners and solid relationships that took time and patience to establish. "We have to be able to rely on our vendors," says Ferrand. "It's not all about price. I'd rather pay more for better service. We're only as good as our suppliers, so after product quality, customer service is a close second."

A common misconception, says Webster, is that the largest suppliers always provide the best service. "Regardless of size, it's the personal attention they offer and the strength of their sales force," he explains. "The supplier network is so important. I wouldn't be where I am today without them, and it's important to develop personal relationships. You don't get that in

other industries."

The reliability of good suppliers means Brandinc can always be confident in its ability to design, source and deliver exceptional promotional campaigns. "I love the creativity we're able to offer clients," says Ferrand. "Sure, we can offer a mug or a pen, but what I like is coming up with new, innovative, creative ideas that increase brand awareness and the company profile with which we're working."

### Sink or Swim

While budgets worldwide continue to recover to pre-2008 recession levels, says Ferrand, survival will ultimately come down to companies' willingness and ability to adapt to a changing industry beyond just branded products, though those still play an important role in marketing. "It's all about taking a look at our go-to business model," Webster adds. "Everyone's had to reinvent and rethink theirs. Now, branding companies are offering social media, direct mail and fulfillment services to survive. They've had to become more innovative and diversify because it's a changing landscape. It's all about better serving clients. I see there being a lot of consolidation over the next several years. A lot of smaller companies who haven't innovated will go away or get eaten up."

Undoubtedly, the opening of Brandinc's new Los Angeles location is part of the company's plan to meet shifting industry demands, by offering the best in creative promotions and a range of services with a truly global, diverse presence. "We're investing heavily in the U.S.," says Ferrand. "We feel we can offer a global footprint and most large corporations want to align themselves with other global companies. We see this as a massive growth opportunity."

A massive growth opportunity indeed, given that the Los Angeles team is already predicting revenue in the multi-millions next year. "I once heard, 'businesses are built on profit,' and I've never forgotten that," says Webster. "We want to be lean and efficient, while still being able to handle the growth." ☀

**Sara Lavenduski** is assistant editor of *Supplier Global Resource* magazine.



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