

CRICKET LEGEND JOINS WINERY TO LAUNCH LABEL IN INDIA & SRI LANKA

EXPORT CASE STUDY | AUGUST 2020

For Australia's food and beverage exporters, India is fast becoming a strategic alternative to China. In 2019, winery Scotchman's Hill teamed with cricketing legend, Dennis Lillee, to launch a new Australian wine label in India and Sri Lanka. Importers were bowled over and deliveries begin in 2020.

Scotchman's Hill in Victoria is one of Australia's signature vineyards. Since 1982, the cool, maritime-climate wines have captured the attention of connoisseurs and critics, and the label currently ranks in writer James Halliday's top 100. Today, the vineyard produces a full range of individualistic wines – red, white, rose and sparkling – across multiple labels from its base on the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria.

When veteran wine industry professional, Peter Yeoman, joined the company as chief executive officer in April 2018, the board at Scotchman's Hill asked for a 100-day plan.

'Scotchman's Hill built brand equity in Australia by slow and steady growth, and I wanted to replicate that steady growth pattern in overseas markets,' says Yeoman. 'To date we had only made a few moves overseas, but we faced a challenge common to many small companies: we wanted to explore overseas markets, but we had limited resources'.

India's growing middle class

During the following three months, Yeoman began to formulate an export strategy. And while China was the obvious first step, Yeoman wanted to explore alternatives. In particular, India's fast-growing middle-class appeared a perfect target market – despite duties and excise of up to 155 per cent. To find out more, a wine-industry friend suggested he contact Austrade in Victoria.



Peter Yeoman and Dennis Lillee, sampling the new label with Austrade advisors

'If you are a small business and new to exporting, then Austrade are a fantastic help. They will give you the vital market information you need to figure out if an overseas market has real potential.'

Peter Yeoman, CEO, Scotchman's Hill

'I arranged a meeting in Collins Street with an Austrade advisor, Chris Morley, and shared my ideas and strategy,' he says. 'Chris immediately gave me valuable information and data on India and China so we could assess the opportunity.'

After the initial contact, Morley consulted with trade experts in India to create a 15-page market-analysis brief. The document explained how the wine market was developing in India, how current exports were faring, which customer segments were receptive to imported wines, and who was consuming which wines – with respective price points.

'This market analysis was hugely valuable to us,' says Yeoman. 'It meant we could envisage India as a supplementary export market to China. Working with Austrade enabled us to move along the export path a lot quicker than if we had tried to research and analyse new markets from scratch.'

During the following months, Yeoman attended Austrade briefings and seminars on India with the

Austrade South Asia team based in New Delhi. As Yeoman's strategy crystallised, Austrade's India-based advisors prepared a detailed introduction. 'The Australian Trade Commissioner in New Delhi, Dr Mark Morley – alongside his team – gave me a two-hour briefing on how to enter the Indian market,' he says. 'I can say I was pleasantly surprised at the value delivered by a government department.'

A cricketing legend

At this point, sporting fame intervened. One of Yeoman's personal friends was the 70's and 80's fast-bowler legend, Dennis Lillee. After touring in India, Lillee had developed an affinity for the country – and in 1987, Lillee had helped establish a cricketing school in Chennai to train aspiring fast bowlers. In 2019, the two hatched a plan to blend Australian wine with India's passion for cricket.

'We decided to launch in India with a Dennis Lillee brand,' says Yeoman. 'We devised the *DK Lillee* wine label as a 50:50 joint venture, with two chardonnays and two shiraz. Dennis loved the idea and so did I.'

To launch, however, Scotchman's Hill needed a local distributor. This required a visit. In late 2019, one of Austrade's New Delhi-based trade advisors, Yaser Siddiqui, assembled a list of likely distributors and arranged a four-day itinerary for Yeoman.

'I had two days in New Delhi and two in Mumbai, and all the organisation on the ground was done by Yaser,' says Yeoman. 'During that time I met 30 people in India's wine business who were all aligned with our strategy. The visit was a great achievement, thanks to Austrade.'

Sri Lanka's US\$3.6bn tourism market

During one of the initial briefings in Victoria, Yeoman had met Austrade's Sri Lanka-based advisor, Shameel Javadh. Shameel pointed out that with a tourism industry worth US\$3.6 billion – and almost two million visitors per year – Sri Lanka was also a strong potential market for Australian wine

'At that stage we were focussed on India, but Shameel explained the market in Sri Lanka and the value of tourism,' says Yeoman. 'He kept me regularly updated in the following months, and to me it was a 'no-brainer'.'

Shameel had contacts with the Sri Lankan food services industry, and arranged a meeting in Melbourne with the managing director of a Sri Lankan-based hospitality company, Favourite International. Again, the concept of a cricketing wine label was a hit. Scotchman's Hill registered the *DK Lillee* label, signed up with Favourite International, and gained an indicative order for October.

Building foundations in the age of COVID

By February 2020, Scotchman's Hill had signed a contract with a distributor in India, and was all set to launch *DK Lillee* in India and Sri Lanka. Then COVID-19 ended international travel.

'We are holding off the launch until the COVID-19-related lockdowns are over, but we are now ready to go', says Yeoman. 'To me this is a great story. Even in the middle of the pandemic we are building the foundations of our future export business. Our distributors have confidence in us, and we have total confidence in the future of the wine market in India and Sri Lanka – and in the future of Sri Lanka's tourism industry.'

Austrade advisers

With a brand primed to go, Yeoman recommends Austrade services to small business who want to break into foreign markets like India and Sri Lanka.

'If you are a small business and new to exporting, then Austrade are a fantastic help because they will tell you what you need to know,' he says. 'They will give you the vital market information you need to figure out if an export idea has real potential.'

'Also, Austrade advisors know their markets: it's as if you have people who are working for you – who will help you grow to the point where you can create a full-time export role. When Dennis and I finally make it to India and Sri Lanka, I know Austrade will be lined up to support a fantastic launch.'

About Austrade

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