

Repositioning Brand Image

Search Firm Alexander Hughes is building a unique branding to enhance growth

By Pankaj DUTT, Interview and article by Ritwik MUKHERJEE Kolkata

For Paris-headquartered Alexander Hughes, Europe's oldest and the world's largest executive firm, building strong and unique brand is essential to survive and grow unlike many peers. The 60-year-old French brand is focusing on its deep domain knowledge and wide global reach to build and position its brand in India, which in turn is fast emerging as a major catalyst for its expansion in South East Asia.

"A strong and unique brand is essential to survive for any professional services firm including an executive search firm like us. While brands of different executive firms convey different aspects relating to their global reach, reputation, sectorial or functional experience, we are gearing up position our brand as synonymous with deep domain expertise and a formidable global reach. Within the first year of our launch in India, we were executing several global assignments for a leading Indian business house and that has helped us in building our brand amongst family owned/ promoter managed business groups", said Pankaj Dutt, managing partner India and South Asia, Alexander Hughes founded in 1957 has its footprint across 40 countries with 53 offices strategically located across 4 continents.



Explaining how brand building helps, Dutt said that high repeat business is a clear reflection of right positioning of the brand. "We are possibly the only boutique search firm worldwide which generates over 85 per cent of total revenue from executive search vis-à-vis other top firms who get less than 50 per cent revenue from executive search. We have been able to grow year on year without digressing our services due to immense confidence our clients have in us which results

into most if 75 per cent of repeat business," said Dutt. Although the firm was active in Asia for past several years through strategic alliances, our direct entry in India took place in 2012, along with launch of new offices in China and Australia.

Admitting that India is a key market for them, Dutt said that they are posed even more strongly to leverage prospects of India market due to rapidly growing trade between India and France. India has been one of the few emerging markets for us which has generated a very high volume of cross-border business. Going forward, India would also act as a catalyst for its expansion in South East Asia, he said.

Although its first point of entry in SE Asia happened to be Malaysia, a key market in the ASEAN trade block and an emerging destination for global companies for setting up Asian headquarters and at present, its SE Asia operations are focusing on Malaysia, Indonesia and Bangladesh, the Indian operations prominently function as some kind of hub for its south East Asian operations and that's another reason for building a strong and effective brand in India.



"India has been a great market for us. We are growing at CAGR of 30-35 per cent and we continue to stay highly profitable, which is positioning us for steady growth and expansion in India. We are working with most of the renowned business houses in India along with our several global clients. In India, we would like to more or less replicate our global sectoral presence and grow our footprint in other sectors such as IT, consumer / FMCG and defense, where globally we hold a strong position in the industry. So far, most of our work has come from industrial, automotive pharma and banking sectors with almost 45 per cent of all mandates being cross-border in nature. Board advisory is another area where we are now actively engaging with Indian companies to appraise them about the kind of work we have done with some of the most reputed and global companies.

We believe that here is a lot that can be done to make Indian boards effective, rather than focusing too much on compliance or independence of board," said Dutt.

Last but not least, another reason why an executive search firms needs a proper brand positioning is that in India there are a large number of family owned / run business houses and firms like Alexander Hughes has to deal with complicated legacy and succession issues. "The process of succession planning or professionalizing management team is more complex in India than other countries. Promoters often are indecisive on timing of initiating succession, while executives do everything to hang-on well beyond their boards failing clearly in imparting their independent role in ensuring timely succession planning," said Dutt.



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