

2016 ACBA Finalist *The Silk Initiative* Continues Smooth Run in China

THE SILK INITIATIVE is a finalist for the Business Excellence Award for Start-Up Enterprises at the 2016 AustCham Westpac Australia China Business Awards. Andrew Kuiler, Managing Director, caught up with AustCham Shanghai earlier this month.



Describe The Silk Initiative's success in China to date.

We have only been operating just over a year and so far some of the world's biggest brands such as Campbells and Pepsi have approached us to help them with their China marketing and brand strategies. We've been fortunate to establish very close working relationships with iconic Australian brands such as Arnott's Tim Tams and Bulla Dairy to help them develop brand propositions, names, product lines, packaging designs and advertising strategies for their launches in China.

What inspired you to enter the China market?

I have been working in China for a total of 11 years with a five year break in between working in New York with some of the world's largest brands. I have always been quite altruistic about taking my international experience and making a difference in the food industry in China – helping bring better brands and product experiences to the Chinese consumer, hence I set up The Silk Initiative.

How important is it for your company to be recognised as a Finalist for the ACBA 2016 Program?

Very important! We have a lot of inbound enquiries from brand owners in Australia. They know about the good work we do for the likes of Arnott's but being a finalist for the ACBAs means there is a bigger recognition from our peer group as one of the companies striving to strengthen business relationships between our two countries.

Why is it important that an event like the ACBA is held annually?

There are a lot of Australian companies working hard every day in China – both big and small. The range of industries and spaces being covered is also growing so I think it is important that this event is held annually to give an opportunity for all these companies to put their name forward.

What is special about being in China during Australia Week?

Being in China gives those on the ground the chance to share experiences with those companies less familiar with the Chinese landscape who need trustworthy advice. If participants can go back to Australia better informed by the people they meet and places they visit during Australia Week that is a great achievement. Australia week is a chance to build new friendships fast in a very organised format that aims to make China a less intimidating landscape for business operators.

What were some of the key contributors to your success in China?

Good old fashioned hard work, tenacity and never giving up. Believing my business concept and making people aware of our presence and services. We did a lot of roadshows and published a lot when we first set up as we thought our concept (food and beverage expert strategists) was unique for China and felt the world needed to know that we exist. We also spent a lot of time identifying trustworthy partners (locally and abroad) that would be a compelling part of our offering.

How important are people to people relations when it comes to doing business in China?

Getting good people onboard with the company in the early days was also very important – both our suppliers as well as the team members who joined along the way. Spending time with people to share in your success is paramount at all times but particularly important in getting traction with quick wins in your first year of business. You need to get as many people behind your brand as quickly as possible to build awareness and trust.

What advice, if any, would you have for a business looking to enter the Chinese market in 2016?

Do as much due diligence as possible. Speak to as many people as possible in and around your industry to really understand where the niche is. Don't sleep, work tirelessly and surround yourself with likeminded passionate people who can bring something unique to the table and represent your brand well at all times.