

JWT 15 years old… 15 years ahead…



Left to right — Lalith Blok, Director of Strategic Planning; Mrs. Shereen Wijesinghe, Finance Director; Ranil de Silva, International Vice President and Managing Director; Mrs. Nayantara Munas, Director of Client Servicing; Lucien Rajakarunanayake, Associate Creative Director; Mrs. Deepthi Senanayake, Media Director; Craig Scrivener, Creative Director

Sri Lanka’s leading advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson (JWT) recently celebrated 15 fabulous years of advertising. In an economy that has been

spiralling downwards, one would expect the advertising agencies to reflect this trend, how- ever JWT's motto for the anniversary could not have been more positive _ "We are 15 years old… and thus we are 15 years ahead." JWT's growth runs almost parallel to that of the advertising industry in Sri Lanka. The phenomenal growth experienced in the last 15 years within the advertising industry is reflected in JWT's performance as well. The open market economy caused a wave of foreign brands to sweep over the local consumers. The advertising agencies were quick to pick up on this, and it soon became a very competitive environment.

The media too expanded to include multiple TV and Radio channels, introducing local consumers to new ideas and concepts, even new life-styles. It was a challenge to sell brands to the newly discerning consumer, and the advertising industry met this challenge head on. The value of the industry in 1995 was 1.3 billion rupees, in comparison with 185 mil- lion rupees in 1985, a growth of 170%. There was also a significant change in the use of different media. The use of Press decreased from 55% in 1985 to 40% in 1995, the use of TV increased from 9% in 1985 to 43% in 1995 and a slightly slower increase in Radio, from 14% in 1985 to 17% in 1995. Thus, it is evident that the focus of communication in Sri Lanka shifted from press to TV.

Further, a more diverse group of advertisers have emerged, from a conventional group which comprised mostly of Banks, Insurance Companies and Lotteries. Today, companies dealing in food, beverages and mobile phones are among the top spenders in advertising.

There has also been a global shift away from multi-media to more personal media, known also as Interactive media or 'one-on- one marketing.'

J. Walter Thompson has evolved with each individual change faced by the industry, they have had the gift of foreknowledge, entering the world of information technology much earlier than many of the agencies in Sri Lanka. J. Walter Thompson was launched in Sri Lanka in 1981 and is now wholly owned by the WPP group of companies. JWT Colombo has the unique advantage of belonging to JWT International, with a very strong network of 216 offices in more than 129 cities. They also claim We have sold more goods to people in more countries than any other agency in our 130 years of operation. J. Walter Thompson is the 4th largest advertising agency in the world, with an annual gross billing of over US$ 7 billion.

The client portfolio of the WPP group is impressive, including more than 300 of the

Fortune 500 companies. It also. ranks as the leading agency in the USA and UK, and can be considered as the No.1 agency in the field of communications.

The advantages of such a strong backing network are numerous, and clients of JWT Colombo have access to an unparalleled pool of world-wide talent. Most of the WPP offices have also been inter-connected electronically and are able to share vast resources of information and experience, across several continents.

JWT is also one of the strongest agencies in the Asia Pacific region, with a network of 48 offices in 26 cities. JWT Asia Pacific received the coveted Media Magazine award for the years 1993 and 1994. And in 1995 JWT Colombo was selected JWT Asia Pacific's Agency of the Year.



Deepthi and Ranil, who have been with JWT since its inception are seen here in conversation

In 1981, when JWT first began operations in Sri Lanka, it recorded billings of Rs. 12

billion. In 1995 they recorded billings of Rs. 502 billion. In 1981 they serviced 7 clients and 14 brands, while today they extend their services to 47 clients and 76 brands.

A team of four Indian advertising experts together with six Sri Lankans provided clients with advertising counsel at the time of launching. However, today they have the services of 120 talented advertising professionals, who provide clients with Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), services, financial services as well as corporate and social marketing.

A firm believer in the value of training, JWT Colombo is probably the largest investor in training programmes and workshops for its personnel, in the advertising industry in Sri Lanka. There are regular in-house training programmes held weekly, as well as regular training opportunities overseas. Off-site workshops, usually held over a weekend, have proven **to** be invaluable, allowing opportunities for performance evaluation and assessment. Another pioneering concept was that of having joint workshops with clients. This proved immensely successful, creating a better understanding of roles and also helping to build a strong partnership between the client and the agency.

Indeed, the talented and dynamic personnel at JWT have made the company what it is today 15 years ahead. At the helm is Ranil De Silva, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who

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has literally grown with JWT, having stepped into the industry at the inception of JWT. His achievements and contribution to the advertising industry in Sri Lanka as well as his input to the JWT network have been recognized; he is an International Vice President of JWT International, the first Sri Lankan to receive such an honour. Their Operations team, including personnel from areas as diverse as Creative and Media Research, are constantly learning and developing individually as well as a team.

JWT was quick in its ascension to the pinnacle of advertising in Sri Lanka, attaining the coveted position of leadership in the industry a little over five years from its inception, a remarkable feat in any industry. This leadership has been successfully retained since 1985. Nayantara Munas, Director Client Service further added that

JWT “is undoubtedly Sri Lanka’s No.1 advertising agency and we believe we are 30 to 40% larger than our nearest competitor.” She also explained that ‘above the line support’, TV, Press and Radio advertising was the form of advertising required in the 1980s. However, “today JWT offers its clients total communications solutions. We involve ourselves in promotions, direct marketing, events and other below the line activities.”

JWT Colombo introduced many concepts to the advertising industry in Sri Lanka, revolutionizing the industry from its inception. They introduced the concept of structured teams, a concept now followed and developed by the industry at large. However, JWT has strived to enhance this concept, as they firmly believe it to be essential to their drive towards excellence. “That is why we are seen by our clients as a strategic partner, we receive a brief from a client, we input our knowledge and experience and formulate a strategy upon which the advertising is created” explained Ms. Munas.

Looking towards the future, JWT has “recognized the role that computerization can play in our business, and we have invested very heavily in computerization, and this is a key area for future investments also” said Ranil De Silva. JWT can also claim to be one of the only two agencies in Sri Lanka to have a completely computerized art studio.

15 years old… 15 years ahead. JWT took the advertising industry by storm 15 years ago, and it looks like they will continue to lead the industry into the vibrant 21st century.