



Thoughts on a new Brand Strategy for Titan Wristwatches

By Geeta Sundaram



www.peripateticperch.com

Thoughts on Brand Strategy for Titan Wristwatches

Background

- Titan wristwatches launched in 1984 in India by the Tata Group to take on the smuggled/grey market for watches in the country at the time as well as international watches that Indian travellers would buy and bring back from their overseas trips
- Launched in India with the help of Ogilvy & Mather Advertising (now Ogilvy Advertising) who helped build the brand over several decades
- Titan wristwatches went on to become the leading brand of wristwatches in India in a matter of a few years, toppling the market leader then, HMT watches
- Current market share of Titan wristwatches in India stands at around 60%
- Watch market in India now very different, with most international brands of wristwatches available in the country legally
- International watch brands in higher-priced segments than Titan wristwatches, which means the upper end clientele of Titan watches would have traded up to international brands
- Implications for Titan is that they must make important strategic decisions and innovate at the premium end of the wristwatch market, which would be the more profitable segment
- From a book review that I read of a book on Titan written by a journalist with The Hindu, Vinay Kamath, in [Business Today](#), it appears that Titan had also made attempts to take the brand to international markets, albeit without much success

Business strategy at the time of launch

I have worked with Ogilvy Advertising in their Delhi office in two stints (1988-92 and 1993-1998) and am even the proud owner of a Titan Classique wristwatch gifted to Ogilvy employees on the occasion of O&M's 60th anniversary in India, but have never worked on the Titan brand myself. However, from all that I have read and observed of the Titan brand over the years, I have attempted to put down my thoughts on what I think was the strategy then for Titan and what I think it ought to be now.

My sense is that Titan's business strategy was to enter the relatively less-crowded industry of wristwatches in India and gain a significant market share by producing quartz wristwatches of the highest quality, both in functionality and style. An amazing fact about Titan is that it is a joint venture between the Tata Group and Tamil Nadu Industrial Development

Corporation, making it an unusual and successful experiment of collaboration between private and public sector corporations in India.

In my opinion,

- The significant market share came from targeting buyers of international watches in India, not HMT
- The product's superior functionality came from imported quartz movements (from Japan, I think), combined with precision manufacturing and craftsmanship in India
- The superior international styling was Titan's own sense of aesthetics and design

Marketing strategy for Titan wristwatches at the time of launch

Again, my sense here is that Titan's marketing strategy was underpinned by focusing on building distribution strength across India – first metros and then other cities and towns – to cater to the middle-class demand that was already latent and present for wristwatches of international style.

Product development too was critical since the Titan brand was to be positioned on the basis of international styling. I remember reading in business magazines in those days about the company sparing no effort in putting together its product design team, many of whom were hired from India's premier design institute, NID (National Institute of Design) in Ahmedabad.

Product performance was something that could only be tested and experienced on purchase, but it's clear that the Tata corporate brand worked to assure customers of reasonably good functional performance. I think the Tata corporate brand would have also helped them establish a solid distribution network quickly in the country.

In fact, one could argue that this excessive focus on product distribution has made even the company think of itself as a retail brand, when it is a maker of fine watches and other consumer lifestyle products – a problem I shall address separately later in this document.

Brand strategy for Titan wristwatches then

I think the brand strategy was to position Titan wristwatches as the best wristwatches money can buy – international styling at reasonable prices – in India.

Titan's brand strategy had to make Indian buyers consider and prefer Titan wristwatches to international brands, which it managed to achieve quite successfully. Over the next couple of decades, Titan changed Indians' attitude towards watches, when they began to be seen more as

accessories in addition to being accurate timekeeping devices. Ownership of multiple watches was encouraged and people began to buy and wear different Titan watches on different occasions.

Titan and Ogilvy also promoted the idea of gifting Titan watches in a big way, both at an individual level and at the corporate level. This was done through mass-media advertising as well as direct response – then a completely new communication discipline in the Indian advertising industry, and one built by Ogilvy & Mather. The gifting dimension to the Titan brand helped reinforce its reliability and its premium brand image.

The need for change in Titan's business and brand strategy now

Almost four decades later, it is time to revisit Titan's business and brand strategy because the market situation has changed considerably since.

- The market for wristwatches in India is estimated to grow from US\$ 4.62 billion in 2026 to US\$ 7.52 billion in 2031 according to [Mordor Intelligence](#)
- Most international watch brands are available in India now legally and are doing well, which means that the upper end of the Titan watch buying segment has, in all probability, already traded up to international wristwatches
- Titan the company has itself grown into a much larger and more diversified consumer lifestyle products company, operating in wristwatches, jewellery, eyewear, fashion accessories and also sarees and Indian ethnic wear
- The company and the wristwatch brand share the brand name, Titan, though, and this is important to keep in mind
- Titan wristwatches, therefore, needs to arm itself with a new business and brand strategy to grow over the next couple of decades at least

Important strategic decisions to consider

I think Titan is at a crucial juncture and needs to make some very important decisions regarding its wristwatch business.

- The company could decide that it is a much larger and diversified consumer lifestyle products company today, with some divisions such as jewellery contributing more to revenue and to profits, and therefore it doesn't make sense to invest more in the wristwatches business
- Alternatively, it could decide that international watch brands are not worth competing with in the Indian market and could remain content

with being a mid-market watch brand in India for India's middle-class

- The danger with the first option is that the company could be foreclosing growth options it hasn't even considered seriously and could even be harming the corporate brand Titan, as the company and watches share their name from birth
- The problem with the second option again is that the company could be limiting its own growth prospects as well as its international ambitions. Besides, the mid-market position too could become difficult to sustain and defend in the face of international competition.

Both these are defensive strategy options, when there is a third alternative strategy possible and an offense one at that.

- Invest in greater product innovation in wristwatches, raising Titan wristwatches to world-class standards both for domestic and international markets
- This would arm Titan with a product range, with intellectual property and brand assets, as well as a long-term strategy with which to succeed both in India and overseas because it takes innovation and competition right to the competitors' markets
- It is important to remember that Titan wristwatches and Tanishq jewellery are the two brands and divisions from the company that are best suited to go global and develop international markets for themselves.

Titan wristwatches financial performance

- Titan as a company has been doing exceedingly well in India, but this has been largely led by the jewellery segment, under the Tanishq brand
- Just to give you an idea of how much Tanishq dominates Titan's financial performance, it generates 10 times the revenue and the profit that the watches division does under the Titan brand
- This is a real pity, and more attention needs to be paid to the watches segment
- Titan watches segment revenue in 2024-25 was Rs 45.76 billion as compared to Rs 39.04 billion the previous year registering a growth of 17.2%
- Titan watches segment profit in 2024-25 was Rs 5.53 billion as compared to Rs 3.97 billion the previous year, growing at 39.3%
- However, from what I noticed in the [last annual report](#) on the company's website, the EBIT margin and the EBITDA margin for the

watches segment was declining from 2023 onwards suggesting that there's room for operational improvement

- Titan's international business does not account for more than 10% of their operations currently, as they say in their annual report, and what I discovered is that the company had acquired the Swiss watch brand, Favre Leuba, in 2011, only to sell it in 2023
- I didn't know about this acquisition as it wasn't reported in The Economic Times or on CNBC, nor do I know the reasons for selling Favre Leuba, but I think that inorganic growth via a couple of more such acquisitions is what Titan needs to be able to quickly grow its international distribution and operations.

What Titan wristwatches has in its armoury now

From the little that I have seen of sporadic advertising in newspapers in Goa, and on Titan's own website, it appears that while the company has been silent on communicating with its audiences, it hasn't been idle.

I noticed a few very significant product innovations that the company seems to have made and if true, these are the new weapons that Titan has in its armoury to take on international watch brands.

- Titan now makes its own watch movements and this is a significant step forward
- They also make premium mechanical and self-winding watches as well as automatic ones which is important to be able to compete with international watch brands
- Titan also recently manufactured India's first flying tourbillon, regarded as a great achievement in the international watch industry

These and more, are the new innovations and the new standards the company is setting for itself and the Indian watch industry in order to be able to compete better.

Therefore, it is time for Titan wristwatches to go beyond mere international styling in its brand positioning and what it stands for.

New recommended business strategy for Titan wristwatches

Titan should now grow market leadership position in India by innovating and producing a range of truly world-class wristwatches for discerning buyers of international watches. It should move up the wristwatch market to the premium and luxury end and address those who buy and wear international watches in India.

I am aware that Titan has also been manufacturing and selling smartwatches in India in recent years, but I think this is not worth

pursuing. Smartwatches and digital watch technology is not where the company's forté lies and they should exit this market and focus on premium analog and mechanical watches. As a consumer lifestyle products company too, Titan's strengths and differentiation are in design and craftsmanship, both in watches as well as in jewellery. In smartwatches they would find it difficult to create and build any meaningful differentiation.

Additionally, perhaps over the next few years, Titan should plan for its international expansion and take its finest wristwatches in the premium and luxury range to select markets first where it is likely to find acceptance more easily, i.e. countries with a large Indian diaspora where the brand Titan might at least be familiar and have positive connotations.

New marketing strategy for Titan wristwatches

- Pursue product innovation and development with a laser-sharp focus to create a range of wristwatches that are world-class in every sense of the word, not merely in styling
- That said, styling is still important as a driver of customer interest, and Titan should also hire international watch designers as part of its team in order to keep styles and designs on trend
- Focus on market segmentation in terms of types of watches for men and women: executive wear watches, specialized high-performance watches and jewellery/dress watches, for example
- Titan watches, including at the premium and luxury end, ought to be priced competitively with international watch brands identified as key competitors
- In distribution, convert some of the large Titan world showrooms – one in each Metro to start with – into Titan innovation experience centres, where customers can browse the latest designs, view and understand the innovations behind them, almost as if they were at an international watch exhibition such as Basel Watch Fair!
- Critical to selling watches of the international kind is to ensure that after-sales service too is of the highest standard. Here, Titan have to make huge improvements in the repair and after-sales service of their watches at their stores
- Titan should also start retailing at duty-free shopping centres at international airports in select markets, based on their international expansion strategy. There ought to be a plan for this, which we shall discuss a little later.

Competition for Titan to consider

Based on what I think are the popular international watch brands in India, I have compiled a list of foreign brands that Titan can consider competition for its premium and luxury range of watches:

- Tissot, priced between Rs 30,000 and Rs 1,00,000
- Longines, priced between Rs 75,000 and Rs 3,50,000
- Rado, priced between Rs 1,00,000 and Rs. 5,50,000
- Omega Constellation, priced between Rs 3,50,000 and Rs 8,00,000
- Tag Heuer, priced between Rs 3,00,000 and Rs 26,00,000

Target audience for Titan wristwatches

- Male and female wearers of premium wristwatches in India, including international watches
- People who are affluent, at the top of their professional lives and who travel overseas frequently
- They think international watch brands are better than Titan wristwatches in India and wouldn't mind paying a hefty premium to buy Swiss wristwatches here in India
- They might buy Tanishq jewellery, but for wristwatches they would probably prefer Swiss wristwatches now that they are easily available in India
- They would be owners of several watches and would wear them depending upon the occasion and their preference
- They view premium and luxury wristwatches as important accessories even as they consider a watch's functionality and performance to be necessary
- In addition to hectic professional lives, they also lead busy social lives, and therefore watches are an important part of their accoutrement
- They also probably give and receive wristwatches as presents, especially among close family
- Their attitude to time is characterized by how much they value it, and the respect they have for other people's time

New recommended brand strategy for Titan wristwatches

If the new business strategy for Titan wristwatches is to move up the wristwatch market to more premium and luxury wristwatches for both Indian and international markets, Titan's marketing team will have to raise their sights and their product design and innovation to compete with the world's finest.

The competitive framework would now include some well-known and popular international watch brands that are in India and against whom Titan can price their premium range competitively.

The bigger battle is the one for the customer's heart and mind and convincing him or her that Titan wristwatches are among the world's finest. Therefore, brand differentiation will be critical for Titan's success.

In the wristwatch product category, differentiation can be along three dimensions:

- a) Rational - product's functionality, features and performance
- b) Sensory – product's design and styling
- c) Emotional – brand benefit that packages all dimensions into a single differentiating position that customers can easily identify with

Most wristwatches in the international market operate at the first two levels of differentiation. Indeed, people would always want a good and expensive wristwatch to be able to tell the time accurately no matter what or where, but the functional aspect can only be judged after purchase and usage. The sensory appeal of a watch's styling and design is what draws the customer's attention first, and is also extremely critical to being considered for purchase.

Very few international brands of watches have even ventured into the emotional area of differentiation. I can only think of a few wristwatch brands that have tried:

- Patek Phillipe – the treasured family heirloom
- Longines that speaks of elegance being an attitude
- Rolex as the reward that high achievers deserve
- Tag Heuer for not cracking under pressure

Therefore, while the first two levels of differentiation are important for Titan wristwatches, I would strongly urge the company to consider positioning it along the third level of differentiation that is emotional and imagery-led. These differentiations are the hardest to imitate or emulate and lend themselves to longer-term brand-building across markets.

I have attempted differentiating the Titan watch brand by making customers think of time itself in a new and different way, and this could be the new brand strategy for Titan in both domestic as well as international markets. My thought process is as follows:

Every society has its own way of viewing time and managing it. If we could take a particularly eastern conception of time, and a very Indian one at that, to differentiate the Titan brand and make it stand for something unique and relevant to customers, we would have succeeded in giving Titan wristwatches a differentiated and enduring brand benefit.

In India we view time in “ages”, not just chronologically. We also have the concept of *karma*, by which I mean the actions and deeds we perform in our lifetime, based on which our next life is determined. I thought we could interpret this as all the opportunities we have of making the best use of our time.

In India, we also have a well-known saying urging us to avoid procrastination: What you can do tomorrow, do today; what you can do today, do now.

Therefore, Titan wristwatches can be positioned as the brand for a particular kind of person: those who make the best use of their time. It is a benefit most customers would relate to immediately, since we are always trying to make good use of our time.

New brand positioning for Titan wristwatches

Titan wristwatches are for those who value their time and make the most of it.

The creative expression of this as strapline for the Titan watches brand is:

Titan

Fine timepieces

Earn your tomorrows

Brand benefit

Titan wristwatches are exquisitely designed timepieces that help you make the most of your time and achieve better work-life balance.

Tone and manner

- Premium and international
- Elegant and tasteful
- Well-balanced understanding of time and what it means in our day-to-day lives

Company must rethink Titan from within

Earlier in this document I had mentioned Titan’s wristwatch distribution being one of its strong focus areas and how this might have led to many in the company to think of their business as retail. Titan company needs to rethink this and start seeing itself as makers of fine watches, jewellery and other lifestyle products.

This must start with the company’s own employees, from the senior management team all the way to the factory worker. Titan must reorient

itself as an organisation internally to stop thinking of itself as a retailer, and instead think of themselves as makers of fine lifestyle products. Some of the following steps might help:

- An even more obsessive focus on attention to detail, to product design and innovation through internal communication, workshops, attending international watch fairs, etc
- Incentivising internal teams to aim even higher in product design and manufacturing through annual rewards and prizes for their efforts
- Titan wristwatches associating itself with important sporting events and occasions as official timekeeper, which keeps the focus squarely on product quality
- Titan undertaking a few grand and ambitious projects that help to showcase Titan's strengths as fine watchmakers. For example,
 - a) Titan's team can design and produce music-boxes with exquisitely designed and produced automatons along with specially composed music that combines Indian and Western music traditions. These would be outside Titan's watch range, but help to highlight Titan's strengths as fine designers and precision engineers. They would also make lovely luxury presents, if done well.
 - b) Titan can undertake to make giant clocks for new public buildings that are being built in India's cities. These can be custom-designed to suit the particular building and the city it is meant for.

Projects such as these are more than vanity projects; they help Titan to be seen as fine watchmakers, designers and engineers and they keep the focus on product excellence and their making.

This retail mindset perhaps pervades all of Titan's product categories, but it's important that at least in products designed and made by the company itself such as wristwatches and jewellery, Titan drops the retailer tag and adopts the fine maker tag instead.

Titan wristwatches' international expansion

I am not aware when Titan wristwatches tried to expand into international markets, nor indeed how they expanded. I think a brand like Titan has the best chances of succeeding in international markets if it first forays into countries that have a large Indian diaspora and where the brand Titan already stands for excellent product quality.

- United Kingdom
- Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong

- Dubai, UAE and Qatar
- United States of America

Another important consideration would be to first choose markets in the East such as Middle-East and South-east Asia, especially with the new brand strategy for Titan wristwatches. These would also be relatively easier to manage at the start, before venturing to UK and US.

I think that Titan should have a presence at duty-free shopping centres in international airports in the Middle-East and South-east Asia for at least a couple of years before fully launching in these markets with large Titan World showrooms.

What is also important is that Titan understands these markets well in terms of their tastes, design preferences and pricing, before expanding overseas. This is why I suggest that Titan start hiring a few international watch designers; this would help Titan watches compete better with international brands even in India. And as I mentioned earlier in the document, a few international acquisitions would help Titan grow inorganically in international markets.

In conclusion

- Titan wristwatches need to update and revise their business and brand strategies for the next couple of decades
- Titan must design and create a premium and luxury range of watches to compete with international brands
- Titan must stop seeing itself as retailer and start thinking of itself as maker of fine watches
- Titan needs to expand into international markets in a planned manner, focusing first on markets in Asia
- Titan needs to carefully study international watch markets, design trends and customer preferences before launching overseas
- Titan needs to make a few international watch brand acquisitions, as an inorganic route to overseas growth would be easier and smoother

This brand strategy document and the ideas it contains has been conceived and written by Geeta Sundaram, advertising professional and blogger at <https://www.peripateticperch.com> who can be reached at

geetasundaram08@mail.com and via <https://www.linkedin.com/in/geeta-sundaram-aka-wise-owl>