



British Chamber// Interview Questions for Wai Sithu International – MD Charles Sithu

Date_ Wednesday March 28, 2017 Anticipated time _ 2:00 pm-2:45 pm

Objective of this interview: To feature in the British Chamber exclusive quarterly newsletter, a Myanmar Company who has a partnership with a UK company / an organization, or open to opportunities from UK business.

Anticipated questions

- Could you please tell me about your company, number of staff, turnover per annum, and your sector of business that you operate in?

We are a diversified business company operating in the Mining, Industrial Chemicals manufacturing & distribution, and in the Engineering sectors. We have recently diversified into the Lifestyle sector as the sole distributor for Global apparels ESPRIT in Myanmar. Entry into a new industry and as both Companies had the purpose to enter into life-long partnerships, the discussion and market analysis process with Esprit took more than one year before proceeding with the actual groundwork. This has formed a thorough understanding between each other and a strong foundation for the success of the brand in Myanmar. Currently the Lifestyle arm of Wai Sithu International is expanding rapidly for Esprit and three further brands that are already confirmed to open in Myanmar. These brands include famous Japanese bag brand, Anello together with a partnership with a Thai conglomerate, further partnership with a successful regional women's wear brand and lately with British based Savile Row.

Wai Sithu International's retail arm has a total of 60 staff with plans to reach 200 by the end of 2019. On average, each store's turnover is one million USD with confirmed plans to open six stores by next year.

- Three key considerations you have encountered or facing when you work with international partners? (specific to your business)
 1. Do your research, both sides have to study each other ahead of meeting. For me, I usually look at the brand status, the quality and the price range. Is it a reasonable price?
 2. Allow time for discussion on details in order to make a decision. For that, we have to do a lot of research as well and study the background of the company before going into partnership with them. Therefore, a certain period of time and discussion is needed to study each other carefully and go into details in order to make a decision on partnership.



3. Consider the differences in culture and business practices of Myanmar and abroad. We have experiences working with international partners such as Asian or European partners. There should be understanding towards the culture here and we, as the local Partner should also explain the necessary culture norms for them to understand, create mutual understanding towards each other and understanding of the culture in working together. One thing I found from working with International companies is that most of them, are systematic and standardised in the way they do their work.
- In the future, Wai Sithu International will enter into a partnership with one of the UK clients that we provided a service to Savile Row, How did you find communicating and working with UK companies?

First of all, we would like to thank the British Chamber for introducing us to Savile Row. One thing that made the discussion with Savile Row run smoothly is that both Parties' representatives are key decision makers, we deal directly with the owner of Savile Row where we could ask questions and raise concerns immediately. We have very active communications between each other and they are also interested in the Myanmar market where they see a potential too. We visited London to look at their products, observe their management style and visited their office. After studying Savile Row, we discussed internally to decide if this brand has a chance of success in Myanmar. The approach Savile Row adopted is very flexible and understanding towards our culture as well. In addition, Savile Row has a presence in other Asia markets, and has a good understanding on how certain markets work at their own pace.

- Could you please tell us on a couple of key points of advice to give towards local companies on working with British Companies?
 1. You have to do your research well and inform openly to interested Companies. For example, what the industry/sector is the British Company operating in, the study of what is the background organization/company is, do the products match with what the local companies are already providing in the market? Like product status, quality and price range.
 2. Another key point is to discuss openly about financial requirements. What is your current financial status, do you have the capacity to work on another product with a new partner, how much is the new partner going to invest in the market in the short and long term.



- Any key advice would you give for British companies who are interested in working with local companies?

It is one thing to look at the size of the company and another to check compatibility between one another. Regardless of the size of the local company, one should assess the interest and support of the local company and whether they have the passion to work on their product's success in the Myanmar market. Local businesses also need to be competent and be knowledgeable on the British company and understand in-depth about which market/product that is targeted, with entrusted forecasts about the feasibility of the project.

Business related statistical information is hard to find and the UK companies should carry out their own due diligence and background checks ahead of their entry into the local market. Local partners are important to assist in this step and Chamber of Commerce such as the British Chamber of Commerce can provide support.

- What is your opinion on the retail market in Myanmar? Would you like to give a brief overview of your perspective on the growth of the retail market in Myanmar? Challenges and opportunities for this particular sector.

The future of retail in Myanmar is bright and similar to the untapped potential for undeveloped businesses across all sectors. Retail has the potential to expand into different segments. If you look into established regional countries such as China and Thailand, Myanmar is behind but therein lies the opportunities for the market to develop in along with those regional countries. For the retail sector, there is a lot to consider. Things to consider - the grade or status of the retail sector you are looking to get into, the pricing, the quality of the product and the value added and competitiveness compared to products/services here. Myanmar is slowly overcoming challenges faced by markets before an opening up globally, and the retail sector can be seen as a strong sector with potential to grow as the country develops.