

# Always in Fashion

Roger Wade's company, Brands Incorporated, keeps its fingers on the pulse of today's fashion trends.

By Josephine Collins



Roger Wade founded UK fashion brand Boxfresh in 1989 and sold it to brand house Pentland Brands in 2005. He is now director of his own licensing consultancy, Brands Incorporated, specializing in licensing young fashion brands including One True Saxon, Burro, Religion, and Ringspun.

## What are the biggest challenges facing the international licensing industry today?

In my sector, the challenge is mainly that smaller fashion brands have not traditionally licensed product. So I spent lots of time helping brand owners to get their heads around licensing, to get them to think outside the box. They have to be convinced that their brand need not only be about garments, nor sold in one geographical area.

## How do you convince them?

If a brand owner wants to be successful in other categories, or countries or geographical regions, they have to get the help of experts. They cannot do it themselves. I convince them that it is better to take a royalty on a success than fail in a sector they do not know. I take ideas to the brand owners. I create concepts for brand extensions that are in keeping with the brand's ethos, and put the program together for them.

## What's happening with direct-to-retail deals?

DTR is the major buzzword at the moment, and I make sure that I am talking to the major players in each sector about the possibilities for the fashion names I represent. Brands are starting to think that they can avoid the wholesale channel by developing a licensing relationship with retailers, and more retailers are getting interested. And it's a win-win scenario for retailers—from a pricing perspective, they take a much greater margin, and they gain exclusive product.

## What is the key retail trend affecting the market?

The Internet. The successful retailer of tomorrow will

have a seamless integration between the retail and Internet business. There has been some reluctance so far from retailers, but they will see that their own names will work on the Internet. They have already proven themselves, so the Internet becomes another trustworthy vehicle that shoppers will want to buy from. The Internet also opens up other opportunities for retailers—they can offer different product, and they can operate in different geographic areas. And the clever brands have already embraced the Internet. In the future, the successful brands will have three approaches to the market—they will sell online, they will have their own stores, and they will use the traditional wholesale route.

## What's on the agenda for Brands Incorporated?

Because I specialize in fashion brands, mostly from the UK, my work is largely about generating income for brands through product extensions, or through taking the brand into new geographical regions. I'm working on an underwear license for Ringspun and toiletries for Religion. With Burro, we're collaborating with JD Sports on exclusive product. My emphasis is on the U.S. and Far East.

## What are the hot brands for licensing?

I'm very impressed by Crooked Tongues. It started as a blog for the sneaker community and has now developed into the last word on what's hot in the sneaker market. It's already had 1 million hits this year. The possibilities are incredible for brands that can get involved because the site already has the trust of its users. ©